

Japanese Women's Rights at the Meiji Era

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I . Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the history of Japanese women's rights at the Meiji era. This movement prepared the history of Japanese women's rights. In this paper, I'd like to clarify it while tracing the genealogy of the main thought for woman liberation and the law enacted at that time.

The Meiji era is an age when the large reform was carried out one after another to catch up with Western Europe such as *Haihan chiken*, “*Dissolution of the domains and establishment of prefectures*”, *Fukoku kyōhei*, “*Rich country, strong army*”, *Chiso kaisei*, “the land tax revision”, and *Shokusan Kōgyō*, “the encouragement of new industry”.

On the other hand, modern Western European thoughts like the equality of sexes and the monogamy system have been brought for example “*The Subjection of Women*” written by John Stuart Mill was translated in those days.

How was the thought of female liberation at this Meiji era? Moreover, what development did it show?

As the summary of this paper, I'd like to investigate the process from theories of the equality of sexes and the monogamy system on which Fukuzawa Yukichi, who wrote *Gakumon no Susume* (especially Book Eight, 1874; tr. “*An Encouragement of Learning*”, 1969), and Fukuda Hideko, who worked for solving woman's problem, insisted to literary movement in the magazine “*Seitō*” edited by Hiratsuka Raichō, with basing on historical materials.¹

II . Coming of Modern Western European Thoughts

1 . Fukuzawa Yukichi, Ueki Emori, and Mori Arinori—Fukuzawa and others insisted the equality of sexes and the monogamy system with basing on Mill's thoughts

Now I'd like to consider about the coming of modern western European thoughts as “*the*

enlightenment” like the equality of sexes and the monogamy system. That’s thoughts were come to Japan at the Meiji era.

The thoughts of the respect to human freedom and right were introduced from the United States and other European countries at Meiji era. The thoughts of the equality of sexes and the monogamy system were brought for Japan as the part. It has been known as “*the enlightenment movement*”.

Fukuzawa Yukichi(1835-1901), the prominent educator and social critic, is often given the credit for being one of the first to speak out on women and their position in society.² Fukuzawa had very early advocated the importance of education for women and also the improvement of their position in society. He insisted the equality of sexes and the monogamy system in a book *Gakumon no Susume* “*An Encouragement of Learning*”, known by the first passage of “*The heaven did not make the person on the person, did not make the person under the person*”. In addition, Fukuzawa edited the scholarly journals as “*Meiroke Zashi*”. In the journal Fukuzawa criticized pre-modern patriarchy and the exclusion of foreigners. Fukuzawa met the thought of John Stuart Mill after writing those books. A translation of work by John Stuart Mill “*The Subjection of Women*” was published in 1877.³ Then Fukuzawa insisted on the woman’s independence and their liberation based on Mill’s thoughts.⁴

Likewise, later in the 1870’s, their books by Mill and Herbert Spencer inspired Doi Kōka and Ueki Emori (1847-1892) to start a campaign for the equality between men and women.⁵ On the other hand, Mori Arinori (1847-1889) wrote a report “*Saishō Ron*” (*The Mistress Theory*), on a scholarly journal as “*Meiroke Zashi*”. In the report, Mori also insisted the equality between men and women. In 1875, Mori got contract marriage with Hirose Otsune. Fukuzawa served as witness to the contract marriage between them. This contract marriage was a brave statement made by men and women who believed in a marriage on equal terms.

2 . Opposition to mistress by the foreigner missionaries and the Christians

American missionaries and the Christians tried to abolish the mistress law and custom. They also made an effort to abolish the patriarchy. The publication of “*Jogaku Zasshi*”(Women Magazine), Japanese first women’s magazine, in 1885 by Iwamoto Yoshiharu, who was Christian and believed in monogamy, the abolition of prostitution, education for women, and equality of men and women in the home, was the occasion for yet another campaign for women.⁶

The year after “*Jogaku Zasshi*” began publication, Tokyo Fujin Kyōfukai(Tokyo Women’s Temperance Society) was founded by Christian women. This society aimed to achieve monogamy

based on the equality between men and women, and abolish the prostitution abroad.⁷

3. The Participation at the Freedom and People's Rights Movement by Nakajima Toshiko and Fukuda Hideko—Preparation of women education

Moreover, Nakajima Toshiko (before having gotten marriage, her family name was Kishida, 1863-1901) and Fukuda Hideko (before having gotten marriage, her family name was Kageyama, 1865-1927) contributed at the equality of sexes and the monogamy system with the participation at the Freedom and People's Rights Movement.

Women's private school as "*Jōkō Gakusya*" was established by women's power in Kageyama's house in 1883. Those activities prepared the creation of the woman education. But the school was suddenly closed by Takasaki prefecture's order in 1884. After that, Fukuda Hideko was imprisoned for participating at the Freedom and People's Rights Movement. She talked about the desire to the equality of sexes in the book "*Prison recollection*" as follows.

If women's rights are enhanced and the equalities between sexes is achieved, all of the 37 million women will participate in politics, surely save the state, and removed wrong politics and law. Moreover, the women might come to love countries more if the women bring up the culture with men. So I determined to participate in the movement for liberation. I wished keenly like this. "Prison recollection" ⁸

III. The Beginning of Women's School Education

1. On school education

School education was started by the Meiji government's order while the equality of sexes and the monogamy system had been spread by the intellectuals gradually. Because the Meiji leaders thought that they had to educate people actively in order to promote the modernization in Japan. Therefore, the government enacted a Fundamental Code of Education in 1872. And the elementary school more than 20,000 schools were established in the whole country based on this code. Although the enrollment rate of the boy had reached 56% 5 years later, the girl's rate was 23% or less. The difference was great. The educational policy was based on the educational principle to make woman a good wife and a wise mother supporting "*Te*". "*Te*" is a Japanese family system.

2 . The Fundamental Code of Education in 1872

The Meiji government declared *“The Fundamental Code of Education”* in 1872 whose carried the enthusiasm of early Meiji reform in language that combined the respect for education of homilies used in commoner schools in Tokugawa years with denunciation of the old society: ⁹

Learning is the key to success in life, and no man can afford to neglect it.

It is ignorance that leads man astray, makes him destitute, disrupts his family, and in the end destroys his life. Centuries have elapsed since schools were first established, but man has gone astray through misguidance.

Because learning was viewed as the exclusive province of the samurai and his superiors, farmer, artisans, merchants, and women have neglected it altogether and do not even know its meaning. Even those few among the samurai and his superiors who did pursue learning were apt to claim it to be for the state, not knowing that it was the very foundation of success in life...

The Department of Education will soon establish an educational system and will revise the regulations relating thereto from time to time; wherefore there shall, in the future, be no community with an illiterate family, nor a family with an illiterate person...

Hereafter...every man shall, of his own accord, subordinate all other matters to the education of his children.¹⁰

In this code, inequality on the class in education is denied. Moreover, it ordered making the women use the school education whatever class she is. The important point is to be described *“Women”* as the targets of school education clearly here.

3 . Establishment of school for women

Schools for women were established one after another based on this order. For example Tokyo Joshi Shihan Gakkō (Tokyo Women's Normal School), that was the antecedent of present Ochanomizu University, was opened in 1875. And Meiji Jyogakkō (Meiji Women's College), that had generated many competent talents such as Motoko Hanii, was established in 1885.

According to Shibukawa Hisako's study, the Meiji government founded a national woman school called Tokyo Jyogakkō *“Tokyo Woman School”* in 1872 before enacting the Fundamental Code of Education. The students were from eight years old to fifteen years old. The educational term was six years, but in case of preparatory course it was only two years. They learned Japanese, sewing, English, and craft.¹¹

4 . Educational principle to make women “*Good wife and wise mother*”

An educational policy of those girls’ schools was the principle of Ryōsai Kenbo “*Good wife and wise mother*”.¹² It clearly appears to following words said by Kikuchi educational minister at that time.

*The thing is not managed in our country as the one called girl’s employment becomes independent. The one called an education of girls should aim to say it is suitable for this duty¹³ to it because saying as the marriage and becoming the good wife and wise mother will be the work of large majority when the future.*¹⁴

The principle of “*Good wife and wise mother*” had been the essence of Japanese women education until the end of World War II in 1945. This education for “*Good wife and wise mother*” aimed to train girls to have the thoughts that they regard nation state as family and to do her best for the family members. The premise was no an equal couple but a patriarchal family that a wife was more low position than a husband.

5 . Appearance of the institutions for woman private school education as place of study

On the other hand, the institutions for woman private school education as the place of study also appeared. Shimoda Utako founded Jissen Jogakkō “*Practice Women College*” in 1899. Furthermore Nihon Joshi Daigakkō “*The Japan Women’s College school*” opened by the founder Naruse Jinzō in 1901, where Hiratsuka Raichō, who is one of the woman liberation thinkers, had learnt.¹⁵

In those schools, the education of great individuality which didn’t necessarily follow the policy of woman high school law promulgated in 1899 was done. The woman high school law had a principle of “*Good wife and wise mother*”.

However, after the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, we can see the change from the Europeanization to the nationalism in Japan. So woman high school law was changed about the education of “*Good wife and wise mother*” more thorough in 1910. And the practical woman school only of the subjects concerning housekeeping was set up.

IV. Work and Women

1. Women supporting *Shokusan Kōgyō*

However most of women were not able to go to school. They had to work in the cotton factories. The most important industry at the Meiji era was cotton industry. There were 60% women in workers, especially 80% single women. They supported Japanese economy.¹⁶ In 1903, a comprehensive survey of factory workers, *Shokō jijō* (Conditions among factory workers), detailed practices and abuse. According to *Shokō jijō*, The number of female workers in the factories where more than 10 persons worked amounted to more hundred thousand than male workers in 1894. Likewise 90% workers in cotton factories were women in 1894.¹⁷

First, Samurai class women began to work in the national factories. The Meiji Restoration changed samurai's life greatly. For saving samurai class people, the Meiji government made samurai class women learn how to weave cloth and work in cotton industry.¹⁸

Kanei Maebashi Seishijō (National Maebashi Cotton Factory, 1870), Tomioka Seishijō (Tomioka Cotton Factory, 1872), and Aichi Bōsekijo (Aichi Spinning Factory, 1880) were founded. Cotton industry developed as Japanese important export industry after the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese.

Second, poor farmer's girls were collected in factories, since demand for women labor increased.

Female workers had worked until midnight and supported *Fukoku Kyōhei* "*Rich country, strong army*" and *Shokusan Kōgyō*, "*the encouragement of new industry*".

But by the reason of the hard labor conditions, tuberculosis, escape and prostitution didn't disappear. A Factory law enacted in 1911, and set safety standards for factories that employed twelve or more workers. Under its provisions workers were to be least twelve years old, and the workday for women and boys under fifteen was not to exceed twelve hours. However midnight work hours were not prohibited until 1929.¹⁹

2. Appearance of *Shokugyō Fujin*

On the other hand, *Shokugyō Fujin* "Lady worker", who occupied intellectual or skill occupation, increased from the Middle of Meiji. First, woman teachers appeared. And then, the midwives, the nurses appeared in answer to diversification people's interests. In 1900's, Nippon Bank, the telephone office and so on employed women as an assistant clerk and a telephone operator. But the majority of women worked in cotton industry.²⁰

V. Intensification of patriarchy

1. Toward establishment of the family system as patriarchy

By the way, the intensification of the patriarchy on a nationalism scale was done at the Meiji era. And the government aimed at the establishment of the family system that became the foundation of the policy for *Fukoku kyōhei*, “Rich country, strong army”.

Well, this education of “Good wife and wise mother” lead to the patriarchy. The Meiji government aimed to get the same power as Europe with the slogan of *Fukoku kyōhei*, “Rich country, strong army”. The government thought that the patriarchy was very important to the foundation of this policy. Then the government aimed at the establishment of the family system made this patriarchy the main axis.

The abortion penalty was set up in 1882. Moreover, it was provided a monogamy system and father’s parental authority by the law. But the mistress came to be approved as a consanguinity of the second degree in the new law outline in 1870. That is to say, the polygamy system and father’s only parental authority were permitted in the law. It contradicts Western sexual equality and monogamy system brought from Europe.

In addition, the householder right as “*Te*” and the patrimony inheritance right were provided in the 1898 Civil Code. Then it was provided that the person who succeeded to a house was an agnate eldest child, in addition that the husband was able to demand the divorce and punish the wife as the punishment of two years or less. However, the wife was not able to appeal for husband’s adultery crime. The code is unequal between male and female.

2. Intensification of the family system relating to “*Te*” since the Middle Ages in Japan

Now, this family system promoted by the Meiji government was intensified in connection with “*Te*” system and “*Te*” idea since the Middle Ages in Japan. What is “*Te*” system?

In Japan, the respect to the ancestors as folklore takes roots deeply in women who maintain the blood relations. Yanagita Kunio said that the feature of “*Te*” in Japan without seeing the West and China is as follows.

- (1) The housewife defends her home actively.
- (2) The members of family have the thought of maintaining the family history without deviation toward the future.

Moreover Yanagita represented that the master sacrifices his individual freedom for “*Te*” and woman as the mother became the big existence in “*Te*”.²¹

VI. Literature and Consciousness of Woman's Identity

1. The first creation activity by woman after the Meiji era began

By the way, the consciousness of woman's identity developed by not political campaign but literary movement among women at the Meiji era.

At the Meiji era the creation activity by woman developed for the first time. The novel *Yabu no Uguisu* "Bush warbler" written by Tanabe Kaho in 1888 is typical. This novel came up not as literature but as means that woman could be independent economically when there was no freedom of the woman's occupation.²²

2. Higuchi Ichiyō—The best female writer at the Meiji era

Higuchi Ichiyō (1872-1896) had studied in the "Haginoya" tanka poetry school established by Nakajima Utako as well as Tanabe Kaho. Higuchi came from lower class samurai. She wrote novels as means of subsistence.

She wrote many novels for example *Takekurabe* "The Stature Comparison", *Nigorie*, and *Jusany* "13 night", 13ya until dying of sickness when she was 25 years old. The feature of Higuchi is resignation.

3. Yosano Akiko —Two characters of respect to virginity like Western European and Japanese sentimentalism

Yosano Akiko (1878-1942) expressed up the consciousness of individuality and the liberating sensuality from a feudal and patriarchal system and morality in *Midaregami* "Untidy hair" in 1901.

Moreover Yosano criticized the Russo-Japanese war in *Otōto yo, Kimi Shini tamou koto nakare* "My younger brother, please not die" in 1904. She pointed out the irrationality of the death for the nation and wished her younger brother would come back without dying. There seems the Japanese sentimentalism.

On the other hands, there seems the Western Europe virgin worship in her other poems for example *Shiratama Otome* "The girl like a white gem". In "Shiratama Otome", woman's virginity is compared to a crystal gem without one dirt. Feelings of the woman who make a boast of virginity are symbolized in a crystal gem.

When I see an elegant appearance where crystal is purely transparent, My tears fall / Crystal

might exist divinely in this world while always drifting a good smell / Girl's crystal is divine among the crystal that exists in person's mind / However, girl's crystal is transiently and fragilely exhausted of pleasure and disappears after she dyes to one lover

By the way, Yosano sent a poetry to the magazine “*Seitō*” first edition requested by Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971).

“*Sozorogoto*” (Joke)

The day when the mountain began to move came / The person will not believe me even if I say so / However, the mountain was only asleep / All mountains had burnt to the fire and had moved in the old times / You need not believe me though it is true / Person, ah please only believe this fact / All the having been sleeping women begin to move awaking now²³

4. “*Seitō*” and new women

In 1911, the bluestocking magazine “*Seitō*” (1911.9-1916.2) was published by Hiratsuka Raichō for the first time. The contributors are Yosano Akiko, Okamoto Kanoko (1889-1939), Kunikida Haruko (1879-1962) who is wife of Kunikida Doppo, Naganuma Chieko (1886-1938) who is wife of Takamura Kōtarō, Itō Noe (1895-1923), Kamichika Ichiko (1888-1981) and so on. It was said to “*appearance of modern woman*”. Unification of written and spoken language was used in it. Consequently, the woman comes to talk about her inside frankly.²⁴

Hiratsuka said in “*starting word of Seitō*” as follows.

In the beginning, woman was the sun. An authentic person. Today, woman is the moon. Living through others. Reflecting the brilliance of others, such as the pale moon. We have to regain the sun in ourselves disappeared.

“Demonstrate your sun disappeared and your potential ability”. This is a constant yell toward in us, desire that isn't able to be stopped and disappeared, and the last instinct as total personality united various partial instincts.²⁵

Now, what mean is “*Sun*” she said? Etsuko Yamashita said about it as follows.

“Sun” meant the symbol of source for life in “Zen”, that is to say Daienkoutai. “Demonstrate your sun disappeared and your potential ability” means that she request all women recover her life

lost as arriving existence of ego, that is to say her creation power by find women's ego. And she inspire women to change her mind. ²⁶

Absolutely, I agree. Moreover I think that Hiratsuka would like to recover female's potential by female's raising her consciousness. Hiratsuka more respected inside change in woman's spirit than the political or social liberations. ²⁷

Moreover, Hiratsuka said as follows.

Free and liberation! We have heard the word was said "Free liberate of the woman" since the great antiquity. However was the meaning of free and liberation extremely misunderstood? Moreover, a lot of problems might have been included in that though it was only said the female liberation problem. However, I don't think it is our woman liberation even if women are able to run away from pressure and the restraint, to receive the higher education, to start in a general occupation, to get the vote, and to live independently liberated from the microcosm of family and the guardian like her parents and husband. I see, that might give the good circumstances and the chance to achieve real free and liberation. However, it is an expedient at all. It is the means. It is not a purpose. It is not an ideal.

So, what is the true free liberation that I wish? It is just to make the genius hidden and potentiality demonstrated.

If I separate from me, I will be able to show the genius lurked in ourselves.

We have to sacrifice ourselves for our genius. It is necessary to become a so-called selflessness.

We don't yearn for the miracle and the mystery in the far other place. We will clarify my nature secret and become the miracle and the mystery with my effort.

Please pray ardently and continue a mental concentration ceaselessly. Please do so thoroughly until the day when hidden genius is born and the concealed sun shines.

On the day we will obtain all world and all things. ²⁸

5. *Seitō's* Significance for Today—From a feminism perspective

By the way, Feminism movement consists on two waves; first, Woman Suffrage Movement between the middle of 19's and the beginning of 20's, secondly, Women's Liberation Movement from 1960's. Two waves broke out all over the world. It has said that the first feminism were women's activities over "*Seitō*" at the Meiji era, Woman Suffrage Movement, and

Woman Labor Movement at the Taishō era in Japan.²⁹

I also think that *Seitō* was a great opportunity toward Woman Suffrage Movement. When *Seitō* was published at the first time, Hiratsuka Raichō hoped that women raising her consciousness with literature. It seems that Hiratsuka would like women's freedom and liberty by this activities. This Hiratsuka's activity has criticized frequently because of disregard for the social problems. Exactly. However I think this Hiratsuka's activity is very important when we consider Taigyaku affair in the same 1911 and the historical background that women were not able to do of their own free will easily.

In addition, it also seems quite important that Hiratsuka and others had offered space to women for free expression. Various women over their positions or the areas became to propound the various questions. It is quite significant that women heightened their thoughts through discussion on *Seitō*.

The problems propounded to *Seitō* go to today for example free love, question to marriage system、chastity, abortion, and protection of motherhood.

The subject of the second feminism also said private field such as gender or reproduction. On the point, Iwabuchi pointed out that Hiratsuka Raichō's feminism movement was really near to the second feminism movement.³⁰ But, it is difficult to deny that Hiratsuka's thoughts was connected with eugenic thought since she was a pioneer of feminism. However, we should consider the factors and use to solve another problems.

VII. Conclusion

To sum up, the conclusions are as follows.

(1) Coming of modern Western European thought

Modern Western European thought was come to Japan. And then, it was spread by "*The enlightenment*" like and the equality of sexes and the monogamy system.

(2) The beginning of the woman's school education

The woman's school education began. And then, the women started to be gotten opportunity of education. But the principle of education proceed to the principle of "*Good wife and wise mother*".

(3) Work and Women

Most of women had worked in cotton industry and supported *Shokusan Kōgyō*. On the other hand, Shokugyō Fujin "Lady worker", who occupied intellectual or skill

occupation, appeared from the Middle of Meiji.

(4) Intensification of patriarchy

Patriarchy was intensified. And then, reorganization as binding to “*Te*” at the Middle Ages happened.

(5) Literature and consciousness of woman’s identity

There seemed consciousness of woman’s individuality in literature. Woman’s identity grown up in a ambivalent reality.

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- ¹ In addition, Fukuzawa criticized the modern former patriarchy and expulsion of foreigners in the magazine “*Meiroku magazine*” and so on. Besides this, there is “*Japanese woman theory*” written by Fukuzawa in 1885 and so on.
- ² Kiyooka, ed., 1988, p.vii and Condon, 1985, p.59.
- ³ The title of book was translated “*Danjo Dōken Ron*”. And a translation of work by Herbert Spencer “*Social Statics, or the Conditions Essential to Human Happiness*” was published in 1881. The book called “*Joken Shinron*” in Japan.
- ⁴ In addition, Fukuzawa published “*Nihon Fujin Ron*”(The Japan Women Theory, 1885), “*Danjyo Kōsai Ron*”(Companionship Theory between Men and Women, 1886), “*Onna Daigaku Hyōron*”(A Critique of the Greater Learning for Women, 1899), and “*Shin Onna Daigaku*”(The New Greater Learning for Women, 1899).
- ⁵ Kiyooka, ed., 1988, p.viii.
- ⁶ Kiyooka, ed., 1988, p.ix.
- ⁷ The founder of Tokyo Fujin Kyōfukai(Tokyo Women’s Temperance Society) was Yajima Kajiko. She founded it in 1886, and also established a magazine “*Fujin Kyōfu Zasshi*” in 1895.
- ⁸ For the lives of Nakajima Toshiko and Fukuda Hideko, refer to Itoya, 1975 and Fukuda, 1894.
- ⁹ Jansen, 2000, p.402.
- ¹⁰ For English translations, see Herbert, 1965, pp.210-211. And for the Japanese text, see Mitsui, ed., 1976.
- ¹¹ Shibukawa, 1970, pp. 10-3. About the contents of junior and high school education, refer to All woman historical study association, ed., 2000, pp.142-144.
- ¹² Hopper, 1996, pp.8-16.
- ¹³ That’s principle is “*Good wife and wise mother*”.
- ¹⁴ Mitsui, ed., 1976.
- ¹⁵ According to Japan Women’s University’s guide, Naruse Jinzo studied abroad at Andover Theological Seminary and Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and became a pioneer in the field of higher education for women in Japan. He founded Japan Women’s College as a non-sectarian institution, stressing independence and freedom of thought. When the college started, the departments were Home Economics, Japanese, English, and Preparatory Course of English Literature. Three Education Principles are “*True Conviction*”, “*Cooperation and Service*”, and “*Creativity*”.
- ¹⁶ All woman historical study association, ed., 1993, p.172.
- ¹⁷ All woman historical study association, ed., 2000, pp.148-9.
- ¹⁸ Nakata et al, 1995, pp.117-9.
- ¹⁹ Jansen, 2000, p.557. Nakata and Sugimoto, 1995, p.119.
- ²⁰ Yamaguchi and Yamate, eds., 1987, pp.72-3.
- ²¹ Yanagita Kunio pointed out that in a book of “*Motherhood of Japan*”.
- ²² Tanabe made the heroine Namiko say that woman must not answer back if she has studied and should work to the extent not damaged at home. Refer to Yamashita, 1988, pp.70-84.

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- ²³ Hiratsuka, ed., 1911, pp. 1-9.
- ²⁴ Refer to Mowry, 1983, pp.58-61 and Sievers, 1998, pp.276-295, moreover Yoneda, and Ikeda ed., 1999.
- ²⁵ Hiratsuka, ed., 1911, pp. 37-52.
- ²⁶ Yamashita, 1988, pp.89-90.
- ²⁷ Hiratsuka Raichō said that “*Seitō*” movement was looked like Woman liberation. But we had not been insisted on trying political and social woman liberation but consciousness of her identity. I thought that if we don’t start to change our mind revolution it is wrong. So I had no idea of like Woman rights theory in the West in those days.
- ²⁸ Hiratsuka , ed., 1911, pp. 37-52.
- ²⁹ Komatsu, ed., 2003, p.4. Nakata and others, 1995, pp130-9.
- ³⁰ Iwabuchi, 2002, pp. 446-57.

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