

"Saisho-ron"

(Discourse on Wives and Mistresses)

by Arinori Mori

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1. The position of "Saisho-ron" in modern Japanese history

This paper will focus on "Saisho-ron" by Arinori Mori to think about the issues around women and children. The author Mori later became the first Minister of Education in Meiji Japan. "Saisho-ron" was first published in the *Meiroke-zasshi* magazine in the form of serial articles from March 1874 (the 7th year of Meiji era) to February 1875. It provoked a debate over the idea of equal rights for men and women in the magazine, and is considered to be one of the most important works on women in the Meiji "Enlightenment" period. While there have been affirmative evaluations of "Saisho-ron" as a "great work on women's enlightenment" by those who emphasize its pioneering role in the discussions around women in modern Japan⁽¹⁾, others have criticized it as a typical case of arguments on women not by women but by enlightening "male" intellectuals⁽²⁾.

2. Mori's points in "Saisho-ron"

Then, what opinions did Mori express in "Saisho-ron"? This paper was published serially in five parts. In "Saisho-ron(I)," Mori pointed out "The relationship between husband and wife is the fountainhead of all morality(jinrin). It is the basis of virtuous conduct. And virtuous conduct is the starting point of national strength and stability.... When one looks at the present marriage customs of our country, one sees that wives are entirely given to the service of their husbands without any attention being paid to their own wishes, and that our laws have permitted the husband to divorce his wife as he like.... The foundation of morality has yet to be established in this country." In "Saisho-ron(II)", Mori criticized the systems of *mekake*(mistress, a partner maintained in addition to the "wife": *mekake*'s sons could be chosen to continue the family line or *kakei*) and *mukoyousi* (adoptive son-in-law). He thought that these were disturbing the *kettou*(actual bloodline). "Saisho-ron(III)" attacked the contemporary connubial relationship. Mori described Japanese husband and wife as "master" and "slave," and remarked that the wife was treated as "lifeless creature" or "subhuman animal." He thought that it was "barbaric" and should be punished by "the sanctions appropriate to premeditated murder." In "Saisho-ron(IV)", he argued the role of a mother. "The child reflects its mother as a mirror reflects its own surroundings. If the mother is of pure character, so will be the child." The mother must be honest, impartial, healthy, and intelligent in order to teach and educate the child. "Saisho-ron(V)" contained some proposals for a new marriage code(*ko'nin-rituan*). According to his proposals, marriage should require mutual consent, inbreeding and bigamy should be prohibited, and infidelity or gross

misconduct of either party should constitute grounds for divorce.⁽³⁾

3. Mori's view of women in "Saisho-ron"

Then what characterized Mori's view of women? It was, in short, an argument for equality of the sexes presupposing gender. Mori explained that rights and duties in marriage were the basis of a reciprocal relationship, but he also wrote, "...husband has a right to get the service of his wife, and has a duty of supporting his wife. Wife has a right to be supported by her husband and a duty to give the service to her husband."⁽⁴⁾ His discussion reflected the ambivalence of the modern society---: trying to sublimate the difference between the sexes by the concept of "human" on the one hand, being bound by the "obviousness" of the gender difference on the other. Mori's view involved an attempt to understand the relationship between the field of "private life" and the field of "public life." Here we can see a perspective that tries to place the issues around sex and family in the intertwinement and interminglement of the personal context and the social context.

4. The ambivalence of Mori's argument on women

Mori's argument for equality between the sexes presupposing gender on the one hand tended to emphasize the similarities between men and women, but also stressed the differences between men and women on the other. When emphasizing the former, his discussion is an unequivocal criticism of the pre-modern views of womanhood. He criticizes the predominance of men over women, such as the practice of treating women as inferiors to men, men's violence against their wives in the home, or sexual intercourse outside of the marriage. He proposed *kon'in-rituan* as an attempt to realize equality between men and women before the law. This argument by Mori (apart from how many women actually read "Saisho-ron") had an epoch-making meaning. It made clear that the relationship between a man and a woman was defined not only by personal factors, but also by the social context, and thus uncovered the relation of the ruler and the ruled between men and women. It paved the way for discussing the miserable situations of women as a social issue. For example, before then a woman unhappy with a tyrant husband or jealousy against her husband's mistress could only grieve over her misery that stemmed from her marrying such a virtueless man. But Mori made it clear that the husband's wrongdoing should not be attributed solely to his character but represented the structure of sexual discrimination built into the society, and that the shameless husband was a "social product." At the same time, as long as it presupposed gender while calling for equality between the sexes, Mori's view affirmed the sex roles and emphasized "motherhood." It meant to force women to serve their husbands and to be good mothers. Mori thought that women are entrusted with the task of educating their children. The state cannot afford to remain indifferent to their physical status, because the size and quality of the population directly affects the strength of the nation: so the state must be intent on the management of the physical functions of women. As an enlightenment thinker and nationalist, Mori thought that it was necessary to produce good mothers all around the country, equipped with a stout body and a capacity to exert influence on her children intelligently and morally.

That is why Mori always stressed the importance of the education of women.⁽⁵⁾

5. Mori's idea of a family: the meaning of monogamy to Mori

Then, what kind of ideas did Mori have about a family? In "Saisho-ron", he criticized polygamy and advocated institutionalized monogamy. Monogamy as an institution involves two aspects: legal regulation of marriage and sexual morality. In Mori's view, a problem in the sexual morality of individuals is also a social problem. He had this perception already in his youth, when he was staying in Russia as a student. In his diary, he criticized that in Russia so many unmarried couples have babies and just abandon them. While noting the difficulty of controlling one's sexual appetite, he declares that the morals between men and women are the foundation of *jinrin* (humanity) and they should be held fast. What he advances by using his magic word *jinrin* is a sexual morality which equates sex, love and marriage (sex=love=marriage). In this morality, sex is the central element of personality and human progress, the most valuable thing of all, is in the control of nature (sexual desires) by reason. For Mori, the correct marriage that meets *jinrin* means "to love each other, to respect each other and to keep promises of wedlock" as shown in the *kon'in-keiyaku* ("contract of marriage")⁽⁶⁾ he signed with his first wife Tsune Hirose. He thought that the correct marriage based on monogamy should be the foundation of reproduction and child caring by a good mother. Mori's idea of a family is that of a modern family composed of a man and a woman and their children, in which the father earns money by working outside home and the woman does the housework and cares for her husband and children as wife and mother, while children are brought up as the future members of the labor force. It should be filled with love, and at the same time, should be the base where good people to take charge of the nation ("the bearers of the nation") are produced and developed. We should note that underlying this image of a family was Mori's vision for the creation of Japanese *shinmin* (subjects) or the improvement of Japanese people.⁽⁷⁾

6. What we need to reconsider from the analysis of Mori's discussion

Heretofore we have examined Mori's arguments on women, marriage and family. Now we can pick up three points for reconsideration from our analysis of Mori's thought. The first point is the relation between the ideology of "motherhood" and the modern nation state. As Minister of Education, Mori traveled around the country for official inspections, and made speeches expressing his views. He said, "The chief aim of the education of women is to cultivate girls' talent to make good mothers and good wives. This is to make the foundation that makes the human being. Until succeeding in making this foundation (the education of women), the whole education of the state does not become a firm one. The base of a strong and wealthy nation is good education, and the base of good education is good woman education. If the education of women does not progress, I am unable to expect the safety of the nation."⁽⁸⁾ "For woman education, it is extremely important to bring up the mind of loving the state. To teach girls the spirits of love for the state, we must put up several wall charts in the classroom, that show, how the mother brings up her child, how the mother teaches her child, how the

child bids farewell to his mother when he joins the army, how the child summons up courage to fight in a national crisis, how the mother receives the news of her child's death in battle.⁽⁹⁾ His thoughts expressed in his speeches as Minister of Education were consistent with the ideas he expressed in "Saisho-ron", in respect of the relationship between women and the state. We must reconsider how women, living their private life, became the members of "the nation" that makes up the state. The "motherhood" ideology was not imposed on each woman by the authoritarian power of the state. It was done by a message presuming it to be an instinct coming from the inside of a woman. Here is a pattern in which women were made into the members of a nation state, in the process of becoming aware of their "motherhood" and seeking their identity as a good mother. It is important that we should be sensitive to the differences among women (for example by social stratum, region, ethnicity, etc.), even while applying the pattern of "male versus female"⁽¹⁰⁾. At the same time, we should pay attention to the fact that the emphasis on "motherhood" worked to reduce or level out "the differences within women" (by integrating all together into "the nation"). The message that both women of the *samurai* class and women of the *heimin* (common people) class, or both women in urban and rural areas, must become good mothers of good *shinmin* (subjects) compelled them to have an identity as "the Japanese woman." This identity is never separable from the question of the responsibility of women for the wars brought on by Japan, which was nothing but an imperialist or colonialist nation. Apart from the pattern "men of the empire versus women of the colony", we need the perspective "men and women of the empire versus men and woman of the colony." As for the relation between Mori's view on children and his view on women, he pointed out the importance of the education of women, presuming gender to be obvious. In Mori's view, children were not "children in general," but boys were to be the future "bearers of the nation", and girls were to be the future mothers of the "bearers of the nation." He had no idea of the rights of children themselves outside their relationship with the state. Neither had he an idea of women's rights (such as social advance) outside their "motherhood." The purpose of education was centered on producing the bearers of the nation of the next generation. In the period of the building of a modern nation, Mori looked at children and women, conscious of the challenge of constructing a nation state. Mori thought that the duty of a woman was to become a mother with a robust body and profound wisdom and affection for her children. For Mori, the relationship between children and women was perfectly harmonious, but never contradictory.

The second point is whether "motherhood" is the essence of the identity of a woman. Mori said that the duty of a woman was to become a good mother as "the foundation that makes the human being." Indeed woman is the sex of reproduction, capable of conceiving a baby in her body. But is the ability to be a mother the only uniqueness of woman? It seems, though some people deplore "the collapse of motherhood," many still think that the happiness of a woman is to have a happy family, to be a happy wife and mother. The message that we must protect "motherhood" and respect life, or the argument that emphasizes the continuity of life and symbiotic relations between mother and child, is easy to rally support and sympathy. But they also bring on such malaise as those excessive expectations of women or people

around them for their becoming a "mother," invisible social pressures on women who don't wish to be a mother, the uneasiness of the women who cannot to be a mother and resort to new medical technologies (such as gene therapy or gene manipulation), and the sense of guilt of women who had an abortion. And the concept of "mother" is being shaken by reproductive technologies such as childbirth by a surrogate mother or artificial insemination. They will also threaten the solidity of the concept of a family advocated by Mori, consisting of husband and wife and children based on the "bloodline." As for the relations between women's rights and children's rights, they will give rise to the question of the intricate relations between the rights of "more than one mother" and those of the child. Now we must ask again the meaning and substance of "motherhood."

The third point is the meaning of sex roles. On the one level, it is explained by the phrase "man is outside, and woman is inside (of the home)." This is a phenomenon characteristic to a modern family, and Mori's idea of woman *ryousai-kenbo* (good wife and good mother)⁽¹¹⁾ is a typical case in point. On the other level, it is explained by the phrase "men should be manly, and women should be womanly." This means that there are unsymmetrical standards or norms applied separately to each of the two sexes. Things such as "womanly" or "manly" vocabulary, way of speaking, gesture, and behavior are essential for us to get along in our society without inviting troubles or frictions. At the same time, they influence deeply the formation of our self-images that are conscious of the eyes of others.⁽¹²⁾ Of course, it is necessary to have the viewpoint that finds a relationship of discrimination in sex roles. Especially, we should pay attention to the fact that even those who have critical consciousness of sexual discrimination already live a "womanly" or "manly" life on day to day basis. We will need careful discussions as to what the formation of one's sexual identity means in the formation of one's identity, as well as about the difference between the problems the discourse about sexual difference causes in the social context, and the problems unique to sexual love in the personal context. When we think about these points, we can see that although Mori's argument on women was certainly defined by the historical context of early Meiji, it means to us something more than a discussion of the past.

Notes

- (1) See for instance, Takaaki Inuzuka, *Mori Arinori* (Tokyo:Yoshikawakobunkan, 1986), p.176.
- (2) For example, see Aiko Ohgoshi, *Kindai Nihon no Jendaa*, (Tokyo: San-ichi Shobou ,1997), p.27.
- (3) Arinori Mori, "Saisho-ron" in *Shinsyu Mori Arionori ZensyuII*, p.13.
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) For example, in his speech Mori said that "You must remember that the purpose of the education of women is to make *ryosai-kenbo*. ...a present girl will be a mother of children in the future. Future students will be brought up by present girls. The education of women is very important for our state. One who love our state must discuss fully and carry out the way of the education of women". ("Kyusyu junkaichu gunkucho ni taisuru enzetsu" in *Shinsyu Mori Arionori ZensyuII*, p.368.

- (6) Arinori Mori, "Koro kiko" in *Shinsyu Mori Arionori Zensyu*II, p.23.
- (7) "Kon-in keiyaku" in *Shinsyu Mori Arionori Zensyu*III, p.26.
- (8) "Wakayama ken jinjo shihan gakkou ni oite gunkucho jotiin oyobi gakkochō ni taisuru enzetsu" in *Shinsyu Mori Arionori Zensyu*II, p.449.
- (9) "Gihu kencho ni oite guncho oyobi kenkai jochiin ni taisuru enzetsu" in *Shinsyu Mori Arionori Zensyu*II, p.462.
- (10) As a study that has such a viewpoint ,see Yoko Watanabe ,*Kindai Nihon Joshi Syakai Kyoiku Seiritushi——Shojokai no Zenkokusoshikika to Shido Shiso* (Tokyo, Akashi Syoten, 1998)
- (11) As for the conception of "Ryosai-kenbo" and its historical change, see Shizuko Koyama, *Ryosai-kenbo to iu Kihan* (Tokyo: Keiso Syobo, 1991).
- (12) On this subject, see NatsukoYoshizawa, *Feminizumu no Kon'nan* (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 1993), and Natsuko Yoshizawa, *Onna de arukoto no Kibo* (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 1997).