# The Modernist Self in Early-Twentieth-Century Japanese Literature: *Shishōsetsu* (the "I-novel") and the Writings of Shiga Naoya

by

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## Abstract

Shiga Naoya 志賀直哉 (1883-1971) is widely recognized as a defining writer of *shishōsetsu* 私小説 (literally "I-novel," the novel of the self), a literary genre prospering in Japan from the 1900s to the 1930s. A general assumption about *shishōsetsu* is that they are a faithful account of the author's personal experiences, and that they serve as a medium for the author's unreserved self-expression while paying little attention to the outside world. For some readers, Shiga's *shishōsetsu* are disappointing owing to their limited social dimension. However, *shishōsetsu* in fact reflect and respond to social reality. This research aims to gain insights into the reasons for *shishōsetsu*'s emergence and wide acceptance, and how Shiga's *shishōsetsu* embody important social aspects of modernizing Japan despite their supposed solipsism. Moreover, there has been a view that some of Shiga's writings do not fit the category of *shishōsetsu* in that they deviate from factual reality. To examine the validity of this view, this research also looks at the perplexing definition of *shishōsetsu*.

Chapter I resituates *shishōsetsu* in the historical context that gave birth to it. A basic sketch of the sociocultural and political conditions of early-twentieth-century Japan is provided to assess the formation and rise of *shishōsetsu*. In addition, Chapter I examines the definition of *shishōsetsu*, with a focus on the notion of "reality" (*jitsu* 実) as well as the relationship between the *shishōsetsu* reader and writer. With the goal of better illustrating how Shiga's *shishōsetsu* are projections of the social reality of his day,

Chapter II deals with one of the central themes of Shiga's life and literature – the modern Japanese man's struggle between modernity and tradition, using Shiga's representative *shishōsetsu Reconciliation* (*Wakai* 和解, 1917) as a major example. This is followed by an extension of previous studies on Shiga's treatment of modernity and Japanese culture and nature in his magnum opus *A Dark Night's Passing* (*An'ya kōro* 暗夜行路, 1921-1937).

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# Introduction

Shiga Naoya 志賀直哉 (1883-1971), known as Japan's "god of the novel" (*shōsetsu no kamisama* 小説の神様), has been widely appreciated for his exceptional ability to grasp details of everyday life and express inner moods. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介 (1892-1927), for example, regarded Shiga as "the purest writer" of his time owing to Shiga's sincere stance towards life and his mastery of realism.[1] Despite his immense influence, however, Shiga was hardly a prolific writer: he wrote only one full-length novel, three novellas, and about one hundred and twenty short stories. The majority of his works were written from the 1910s to the 1930s, during which the literary genre of *shishōsetsu* 私小説, or *watakushi shōsetsu* (literally "I-novel," the novel of the self), reached the peak of its development.[2] "*Shi*" 私, the first part of the term *shishōsetsu*, means "personal" or "private." The second part "*shōsetsu*" 小説 literally means "small talk," but has been developed as a counterpart to the Western notion of the "novel" since the nineteenth century. However, while *shōsetsu* is usually translated as "novel," the two terms convey subtly different meanings. Firstly, *shōsetsu* can refer to a piece of fiction of any length. Secondly, *shōsetsu* can refer to texts "that

[1] Anri Yasuda, "Endeavors of Representation: Writing and Painting in Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's Literary Aesthetics," *Japanese Language and Literature* 50, no. 2 (2016): 291.

[2] *Shishōsetsu* and *watakushi shōsetsu* are often used interchangeably. This thesis will use the former throughout.

westerners ordinarily do not think of as fiction," such as "essays, sketches, memoirs, and other discursive and reflective pieces."[3]

As the literal meaning of the term indicates, a key feature of *shishōsetsu* is that it revolves around the protagonist or the narrator's lived experience from a personal perspective. In most cases, the protagonist is believed to be the author himself or herself, and the autobiographical integrity of the text is assumed. However, these assumptions do not always hold; hence, the precise definition of *shishōsetsu* has remained debatable.

While the term *shishōsetsu* was not coined until 1920, the first work of the genre is generally said to be *The Quilt* (*Futon* 蒲団), a novel written by the naturalist (*shizenshugi* 自然主義) author Tayama Katai 田山花袋 (1872-1930) and published in 1907. The *shishōsetsu* form had become so popular since the publication of *The Quilt* that one critic claimed, "there are really no contemporary writers who have not written *shishōsetsu*."[4] Like many of his contemporaries, Shiga engaged in this literary trend, and eventually made his name as a *shishōsetsu* writer par excellence with the publication of *A Dark Night's Passing* (*An'ya kōro* 暗夜行路, 1921-1937). Aside from *A Dark Night's Passing*, many of his other works are also recognized as model examples of *shishōsetsu*.

[3] Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth-century Japanese Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 4, 22-24. Also see Janet Walker, "The Uniqueness of the Japanese Novel and Its Contribution to the Theory of the Novel," *Japanstudien* 14, no. 1 (2003): 298.

[4] Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals of Self-Revelation: Shishōsetsu as Literary Genre and Socio-Cultural Phenomenon* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1996), 2.

These works include, but are not limited to, “The Death of My Mother and a New Mother” (*Haha no shi to atarashii haha* 母の死と新しい母, 1912), *Ōtsu Junkichi* (*Ōtsu Junkichi* 大津順吉, 1912), “At Kinosaki” (*Kinosaki nite* 城の崎にて, 1917), *Reconciliation* (*Wakai* 和解, 1917), *A Certain Man and the Death of His Sister* (*Aru otoko sono ane no shi* 或る男、其姉の死, 1920), “The House by the Moat” (*Horibata no sumai* 濠端の住まい, 1924), and “Grey Moon” (*Haiiro no tsuki* 灰色の月, 1946). Thus, to study Shiga, it is important to study his *shishōsetsu*. Yet there is a problem here: since the definition of the genre is elusive, there is no clear consensus on whether or not some of Shiga’s works should be categorized as *shishōsetsu*.

As one scholar has pointed out, Shiga’s narratives are nowhere near as autobiographical as prototypical *shishōsetsu*.[5] Let us take Shiga’s most influential work and his only full-length novel, *A Dark Night’s Passing*, as an example. Not only is this novel considered by many to be the apex of *shishōsetsu*, but it was also the first work of Shiga’s to be translated into English. Nevertheless, Edwin McClellan, the translator of the novel, points out that it is questionable whether the novel should be read as a *shishōsetsu*, since it contains more fabrication and imagination than typical examples of the genre.[6] Indeed, the life of the protagonist Kensaku is by no means a close parallel to

[5] Dennis C. Washburn, *The Dilemma of the Modern in Japanese Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 215.
[6] Edwin McClellan, introduction to *A Dark Night’s Passing* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1976), 10-11.

Shiga's own life. To give a few examples: Kensaku is the incestuous son of his mother and his grandfather, and he has an elder brother who is very close to him. But in reality, there is no doubt Shiga was born legitimately. Moreover, Shiga venerated his grandfather greatly, and he had never met his elder brother who died young. In this case, there is no apparent unity between the author and the protagonist.

Parallel to McClellan's view, Roy Starrs considers *A Dark Night's Passing* a "fictional autobiography," and Edward Fowler refers to the novel as a "'fictional' *shishōsetsu*."[7] Fowler states that *A Dark Night's Passing* is a *shishōsetsu* given that the protagonist and Shiga are virtually a unity, yet the large gap between the story and the author's real life makes it fictional.[8] Implicit in these discussions is the proposition that the truthfulness of both the story and the protagonist is a prerequisite for a text to be readily accepted as a *shishōsetsu*. However, this proposition requires further elaboration of the notion of "truthfulness" (let alone the question of whether it is possible to write completely faithfully). The disagreement on the categorization of Shiga's works leads to one of the major topics of this thesis: the definition of *shishōsetsu*, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter I.

Before we delve deeper into the definition of *shishōsetsu*, two common misperceptions about the genre should be noted here. First, while *shishōsetsu* is widely

[7] Roy Starrs, *An Artless Art: The Zen Aesthetic of Shiga Naoya: A Critical Study with Selected Translations* (Richmond: Japan Library, 1998), 81; Fowler, *The Rhetoric*, 225.
[8] Fowler, *The Rhetoric*, 225.

translated as "I-novel," a *shishōsetsu* does not have to be written in the first-person perspective. Second, *shishōsetsu* often contain a great deal of autobiographical material, but it is imprecise to equate *shishōsetsu* with autobiography. Rather than providing a balanced overview of the author's life, a *shishōsetsu* often revolves around a few, or in some cases, only one incident that occurs over a certain period of time.[9] Also, it is not unusual for a writer to produce several pieces of *shishōsetsu* centering on one single event from different angles.[10]

It is also pertinent here to note the difference between "autobiography" and autobiographical fiction," since both terms are frequently mentioned when discussing *shishōsetsu*. Although the relationship between the two forms is intricate, a useful way to distinguish them is that in an autobiography, the identification between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist is often explicitly indicated in the text.[11] In comparison, in an autobiographical fiction, the reader presumes such an identification based on autobiographical elements and certain signals.[12] In this regard, *shishōsetsu* resembles autobiographical fiction, as will be examined in section 7 of Chapter I. *Shishōsetsu*,

[9] Kinya Tsuruta, "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and I-Novelists," *Monumenta Nipponica* 25, no. 1/2 (1970): 15.
[10] Sharalyn Orbaugh, "Naturalism and the Emergence of the *Shishōsetsu* (Personal Novel)," in *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 138.
[11] Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact," in *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul. J. Eakin, trans. Katherine M. Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1989), 3-30.
[12] Lut Missinne, "Autobiographical Novel," in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 464-67.

however, should not be simply equated with Western autobiographical fiction due to the abovementioned difference between *shōsetsu* and novels, and due to the fact that *shishōsetsu* typically put a heavy focus on personal experiences and feelings rather than on plot and characterization.

Despite Shiga's important position in Japanese literary history, many of his works have received lukewarm receptions. One important reason is that Shiga's *shishōsetsu*, if not the genre as a whole, have long been seen as overly inward-looking. Indeed, *shishōsetsu* generally focus on the protagonist's private world while lacking a positive social commitment. Shiga's *shishōsetsu*, too, show limited concern about the social milieu. Even momentous events such as the two World Wars are barely touched on in his works, not to mention Japan's nationalist and social movements. Also, Shiga demonstrated limited interest in placing his personal concerns within the broader social context. However, by tracing the development of the genre, this thesis points out that the characteristics, including "drawbacks," of *shishōsetsu* are revealing as to the intellectual life and political environment of early-twentieth-century Japan. Furthermore, Shiga's *shishōsetsu* represent a particular social reality. A central theme of Shiga's *shishōsetsu* is the tension between a man's desire for individual freedom on the one hand, and his desire for harmony with others (including his feudal, authoritarian father) on the other hand. This conflict between the commitment to individualism and the longing for group

inclusion represents a spiritual crisis commonly seen in rapidly modernizing Japan. In this sense, there is social significance in these writings.

Western scholarship did not pay much attention to Shiga until the 1970s. During this period, the three earliest English-language studies on Shiga were conducted, namely Stephen Kohl's *Shiga Naoya: A Critical Biography* (1974), Francis Mathy's *Shiga Naoya* (1975), and William Sibley's *The Shiga Hero* (1979). Biographical in nature, Kohl's study carefully examines Shiga's life experiences and thoughts, revealing Shiga's struggles with his egotism. It also includes a number of translations of Shiga's diary entries, letters, and essays. Both Mathy and Sibley's studies focus on Shiga's role as a *shishōsetsu* writer, seeking to link Shiga's life with close readings of his literature. However, both studies express a distaste for *shishōsetsu* owing to its disparities from traditional Western novels. Both studies contend that Shiga's fictional works have more value than his *shishōsetsu*, which lack complex plot and social dimensions. Yet, as I intend to show, Shiga's adoption of *shishōsetsu* was in line with the trend of the time: a time that gave rise to new understandings of the "self," language, literature, and truth.

To treat Shiga as a writer of *shishōsetsu* and contextualize his narratives, we cannot let him "die" as Roland Barthes suggested.[13] Shiga was born in 1883 in Ishinomaki, where he stayed for only the first three years of his life. The Shigas were samurai

[13] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Contributions in Philosophy* 83 (2001): 3-8.

retainers of the Sōma clan until the Meiji Restoration (1868).[14] However, Shiga's grandfather Naomichi 直道, a righteous man Shiga respected deeply, remained loyal to the Sōma family and continued to work for them as an administrator. Unlike the old-school grandfather, Shiga's father, Naoharu 直温, was more ambitious. In 1883 Naoharu decided to move to Tokyo to spread his wings, and shortly afterwards the rest of the family also relocated to the metropolis. In Tokyo, Naoharu eventually proved himself to be a successful businessman, thereby allowing the family to live a life free from financial worry.[15]

Although the family's wealth guaranteed Shiga's economic well-being, his early life was not as happy as it might appear to be. Since Shiga's mother was blamed for his elder brother's death and his father indulged his passion for work, Shiga lived mostly with his grandparents while being alienated from his parents. That said, Shiga developed a very deep attachment to his mother, who died when Shiga was only eleven years old. At the same time, Shiga had a good relationship with his stepmother. Shiga's father, who often appeared in his works as a patriarchal tyrant, was the only family member with whom Shiga could not get along.[16]

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[14] Fowler, *The Rhetoric*, 19.
[15] Shiga Naoya, *Shiga Naoya shū* (Tokyo: Kaizōsha, 1928), 487; Starrs, *An Artless Art*, 11-13; Stephen W. Kohl, *Shiga Naoya: A Critical Biography* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1974), 8-10.
[16] Ibid.

Growing up in late Meiji-early Taishō-period Japan, Shiga had been profoundly influenced by Western values of individualism. Thus, he rebelled against his father's hopes and plans for him. To be more precise, in 1853 the United States Navy forcefully "opened" Japan to the West, which eventually inaugurated the 1868 Meiji Restoration.[17] Since then, Japan had moved dramatically toward modernization and industrialization by launching a series of political, educational, economic, and social reforms modelled on the West. Consequently, feudalism was abolished, and traditional moral and ethical values were shaken by imported ones such as individualism. In resistance to feudal patriarchy, Shiga became a writer and had a free-choice marriage, disregarding his father's objections. Shiga's tempestuous relationship with his father lasted about twenty years until they achieved reconciliation in 1917; hence, intergenerational conflict is a recurring theme in Shiga's literature. The father-son relationship is best depicted in Shiga's novella *Reconciliation*, where the protagonist Junkichi goes through a long, bitter process of dealing with his disagreement with his father and gaining new understandings of family bonds.

Notwithstanding Shiga's estrangement with his father, growing up in a rich family meant that Shiga was able to go to the most prestigious schools and university. At the Peer's School (Gakushūin 学習院), Shiga met a group of young men who shared his

[17] Aviad E. Raz, *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 57.

enthusiasm for literature and art. Then, during his years studying at Tokyo Imperial University, Shiga, Mushanokōji Saneatsu 武者小路実篤 (1885-1976), and a few others formed the literary coterie, the White Birch School (Shirakabaha 白樺派). It is hard to find a unified style in the members' writings; however, all members were from bourgeois or even aristocratic families, and they were bound together by a common commitment to Western liberal values. Their privileged social backgrounds and optimistic attitudes toward life were key characteristics that distinguished them from Japanese naturalism – the foil against the White Birch School.[18]

Despite his distaste for Japanese naturalism, Shiga was considerably influenced by the realistic approach and introspective perspective that Japanese naturalists advocated for. More specifically, Japanese naturalism differed distinctively from its European counterparts in that it brought individualism to an extreme and placed an exaggerated emphasis on truthfulness, whereas social-critical elements were often discarded. The most renowned work of Japanese naturalism is the abovementioned *The Quilt*, often credited as the first *shishōsetsu*. In the novel, the protagonist, who can be easily identified with the author Tayama Katai, revealed his secret love for a young female student in a pessimistic tone. *The Quilt* inaugurated a massive literary trend of "subjectivism" from

[18] Stephen W. Kohl, Yoko Matsuoka McClain, and Ryoko Toyama McClellan, *The White Birch School (Shirakabaha) of Japanese Literature: Some Sketches and Commentary* (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1975), 16.

which most Japanese writers were not immune.[19] Of course, this autobiographical trend did not emerge in a vacuum. This thesis will contextualize the rise of Japanese naturalism and *shishōsetsu* within a larger sociocultural and political setting.

As reflected in Shiga's *shishōsetsu*, essays, and diary entries, he had been struck by a sense of alienation since his modern individualism was often incompatible with his father's authority and his longing for harmony. To seek inner peace, Shiga went through a long process of negotiation with his family and moved away from Tokyo several times. It was in less-modernized areas such as Mt. Akagi and Kyoto that he had some of his most serene times. In the view of the eminent critic Kobayashi Hideo 小林秀雄 (1902-1983), the modern metropolis of Tokyo "blocked the emotional investment required to create a sentiment of home."[20] In comparison, getting back to nature allowed Shiga to mitigate his modern ego. Concurrent with the emergence of a nostalgia for native and natural landscapes in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s, Shiga developed a passion for nature. His insights into nature are well-represented in *shishōsetsu* like "At Kinosaki," "Bonfire" (*Takibi* 焚火, 1920), and *A Dark Night's Passing*. Through the interaction with nature, both Shiga and his protagonists learned how to find a balance between the self and the other. At the same time, Shiga' attainment of inner peace was followed by his silence as a

[19] Howard Hibbett, "Introspective Techniques in Modern Japanese Fiction," in *Search for Identity: Modern Literature and the Creative Arts in Asia*, ed. A.R. Davis (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974), 2.
[20] Seiji M. Lippit, *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 32.

writer: he wrote little after completing *A Dark Night's Passing*, and the majority of his later works were devoted to plants, animals, and joyful family life. Despite his reduced productivity, however, Shiga did not stop creating *shishōsetsu* during his late years. For instance, "Grey Moon," one of Shiga's most widely discussed *shishōsetsu*, was written in 1946. It seems that no matter what life stage Shiga was in, his feelings often found expression in *shishōsetsu*, which is why this thesis commences with a discussion of the genre.

This thesis is divided into two chapters. Chapter I examines the origin and history of the genre of *shishōsetsu* to show how it became a pervasive trend in early-twentieth-century Japan. Also, although *shishōsetsu* writers have long been accused of turning their backs on society, I point out that it was the social, political, and cultural context of Japan's modernization that shaped the characteristics of *shishōsetsu*. In this chapter I also look at the definition of *shishōsetsu*. In order to reveal why there is a disagreement over the categorization of Shiga's works and why fictitious elements do not exclude those works from *shishōsetsu*, I compare and contrast various scholars' definitions with a focus on Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit's framework of "reality" and Tomi Suzuki's theory of the mode of reading.

Using Shiga's *shishōsetsu Reconciliation* as an example, Chapter II examines a central theme of Shiga's literature: the conflict between modern individualism and conventional norms. I also make reference to a few of Shiga's diary entries and essays to

better illustrate his faith in individuality, his apolitical orientation, and his humanistic ideas. To explore the sociocultural circumstances that Shiga was in, this chapter also examines the White Birch School members' roles as enthusiastic supporters of humanist values and cosmopolitanism, their shared indifference towards politics, as well as their identity problems. My intention is to show that behind the inwardness of Shiga's *shishōsetsu* is a painful search for the modern self, which is often in conflict with patriarchal, collectivist norms and the desire for family inclusion. Last but not least, in an attempt to better demonstrate the social significance of Shiga's *shishōsetsu*, this chapter builds on and expands previous studies on Shiga's treatment of modernity and native Japanese culture and landscapes in *A Dark Night's Passing*.

In response to the view that Shiga's *shishōsetsu* and the genre as a whole are insufficiently social, this thesis, by contextualizing *shishōsetsu* within Japan's modernization, points out that the emergence and characteristics of *shishōsetsu* reflect the zeitgeist of early-twentieth-century Japan and that Shiga's *shishōsetsu* are literary manifestations of the particular sociocultural climate of his day. Moreover, the analysis of the definition of *shishōsetsu* helps to eliminate the misapprehension that fictitious elements in Shiga's writings exclude them from the category of *shishōsetsu*.

I hope this thesis will contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of modern Japanese literature. In particular, I hope it will generate more interest in Shiga Naoya – a master of the genre of *shishōsetsu*, a leading figure of the humanist coterie the White

Birch School, and a once-angry man whose experiences and writings shed light on the struggle between modernity and tradition in early-twentieth-century Japan.

## Chapter I: Shiga Naoya and the Phenomenon of *Shishōsetsu*

Shiga Naoya's life and works have been studied by scholars through various approaches and frameworks. Given that a considerable number of Shiga's works are recognized as the finest *shishōsetsu*, it is no accident that both criticism and praise for Shiga's works often center on his *shishōsetsu*. Thus, a discussion of Shiga would be incomplete without looking into this genre.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the definition of *shishōsetsu* is rather unclear. While a large body of studies have suggested that the essence of *shishōsetsu* rests on its truthfulness and its self-referential nature, "truthfulness" or "reality," too, is an elusive concept open to manifold interpretations, as we will see in section 6. Furthermore, it would be oversimplified to define *shishōsetsu* as an autobiographical narrative where the hero, the narrator and the author are identical, and counterexamples can be found easily. In this regard, to study Shiga, it is crucial to address the fundamental issue of *shishōsetsu*: what is it?

Another important reason to examine the genre of *shishōsetsu* lies in the fact that it is a significant avenue through which to study early-twentieth-century Japan. The genre, which occupied a prominent position in Japanese literature from the early 1900s till the 1930s, was so widely practiced that the prestigious literary critic Nakamura Mitsuo 中村光夫 (1911-1988) made the bold claim that most of the great novels of the Taishō period (1912-1926) were written in *shishōsetsu* style regardless of the literary school the author

belonged to.[21] Although many have criticized *shishōsetsu* for its insufficient engagement with the external world, the world of the *shishōsetsu* hero – as Kobayashi Hideo has pointed out – is "a microcosm of the whole society" since individual lives mirror social reality.[22]

By tracing the origin of *shishōsetsu*, this chapter shows that the rise of the genre is closely related to the social changes taking place in rapidly modernizing Japan. In this way, it explains why the genre became so ubiquitous and demonstrates its social relevance. This chapter then examines the definition of *shishōsetsu* to reveal that fabrications do not exclude Shiga's autobiographical works from the genre.

## 1. *The Quilt* (1907): The First *Shishōsetsu*

Tayama Katai's novel *The Quilt* is commonly regarded as the prototype of *shishōsetsu*.[23] In this story, the protagonist Tokio, a middle-aged writer who has been stuck in his unsatisfying job and dull family life, finds himself obsessed with his young female live-in student Yoshiko. However, he soon finds out that Yoshiko is secretly in love with a university student. Overwhelmed with jealousy, Tokio reveals the

[21] Francis Mathy, *Shiga Naoya* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), 35.
[22] See William F. Sibley, "Naturalism in Japanese Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 28 (1968): 165.
[23] Not all scholars agree on *The Quilt*'s status as the earliest *shishōsetsu*. This kind of disagreement is emblematic of the lack of a clear definition of *shishōsetsu*, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

relationship to Yoshiko's father, who then forces Yoshiko to go back to her hometown. In the last and the most famous scene of the novel, Tokio buries his face in the quilt Yoshiko left, taking a sniff of it to catch her scent. The novel aroused keen attention with its autobiographical quality: it was well known among Tayama's contemporary writers that the protagonist Tokio was "a thinly disguised version of" Tayama, who had fallen in love with a female student boarding in his home.[24] Celebrating sincerity and the cultivation of self-expression, *The Quilt*, scandalous as it was, increased Tayama's reputation and inaugurated a new trend of subjectivity in which writers wrote candidly about their own experiences and thoughts.

Since Japanese naturalists were the earliest and most earnest practitioners of *shishōsetsu*, it is widely said to be rooted in naturalism. As Ivan Morris puts it, "The main legacy of naturalism in Japan has been the belief of many writers that the only worthwhile and 'sincere' form of literature is that which takes its material directly from the facts of the author's physical and spiritual life. This trend affected several writers who were in other respects strongly opposed to the naturalists."[25]

[24] Sharalyn Orbaugh, "The Problem of the Modern Subject," in *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 31.
[25] Ivan Morris, introduction to *Modern Japanese Stories: An Anthology*, ed. Ivan Morris, trans. Edward Seidensticker, George Saitō, and Geoffrey Sargent (Rutland, VT: C.E. Tuttle), 15.

Although bearing the same name, Japanese naturalism differed distinctively from Western naturalism owing to its indifference to plot and character development, its gloomy tone and, most controversially, its exaggerated emphasis on truthfulness and self-revelation. However, these features were by no means inherent in the Japanese naturalist movement. On the contrary, there was another possible direction of Japanese naturalism, a direction that was closer to its Western prototype: a year before the publication of *The Quilt*, the naturalist writer Shimazaki Tōson 島崎藤村 (1872-1943) wrote his first novel *The Broken Commandment* (*Hakai* 破戒, 1906). This novel concerns a young school teacher, Ushimatsu, who struggles between the desire to reveal his outcast (*burakumin* 部落民, literally "village people") background and the fear of doing so.[26] On the one hand, the protagonist wishes to openly fight for social equality, establishing an unencumbered self whose value is not determined by the feudal social order. On the other hand, knowing clearly what kind of discrimination the outcast group is facing, he has promised his father to hide his identity. At the climax of the story, Ushimatsu, inspired by an outcast activist, confesses his origin to his students, after which he moves to the United States to start a new life.

[26] *Burakumin* is a Japanese minority group at the bottom of the feudal status stratification. Although the feudal caste system was repudiated after the Meiji reforms, *burakumin* have continued to face widespread discrimination. See Nobuo Shimahara, "Toward the Equality of a Japanese Minority: The Case of Burakumin," *Comparative Education* 20, no. 3 (1984): 339-53.

With its strong social consciousness, *The Broken Commandment* makes a sharp contrast with *The Quilt* which focuses exclusively on the protagonist's private world. Indeed, although *The Broken Commandment* and *The Quilt* were written in the same period and both deal with the modern intellectual's inner conflict, *The Quilt* is often attacked for its narrowness. Nonetheless, after the publication of *The Quilt*, the objective approach, as manifested in *The Broken Commandment*, was largely abandoned by Japanese naturalists. Even Shimazaki himself later shifted his focus to personal experience and produced several *shishōsetsu*. To reveal why *The Quilt* triumphed over *The Broken Commandment*, this chapter now investigates the historical background and the sociocultural context that gave rise to *shishōsetsu*.

## 2. The Preparation for the Arrival of *Shishōsetsu*: Japan's Modernization

Japan's social systems had long been defined by a hierarchical class structure and traditional norms that expected individuals to suppress their desires, obey their parents, and prioritize the good of the family and community.[27] After the Meiji Restoration, however, the feudal system collapsed while Western culture poured into Japan. As part of its effort to accelerate modernization, the Meiji state encouraged the formation of a more

[27] Sharon Hamilton Nolte, "Individualism in Taishō Japan," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 43, no. 4 (1984): 671; Irena Powell, *Writers and Society in Modern Japan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), 19.

creative, educated citizenry and treated ideological aspects of Western modernity as the necessary complement to technological change.[28] In the following years, career and geographic mobility improved, and the Western-derived compulsory education system was introduced.[29] The newly compiled textbook for primary schools, which opened with the sentence "Heaven did not create man above another nor under another," was emblematic of changes in society.[30]

Individualism reached a new peak in Japan in the early twentieth century. This period witnessed Japan's rise to power, as manifested by its victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). In his famous speech "My Individualism" (*Watakushi no Kojinshugi* 私の個人主義, 1914), Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867-1916) articulated the relationship between a country's strength and its people's awareness of individualism: "when the country is strong and the risk of war small, when there is no threat of being attacked from without, then nationalism ought to diminish accordingly and individualism enter to fill the vacuum."[31] Although Japan's swift progress did not prevent it from

[28] It should be noted that it was "statist individualism" that the Meiji government encouraged. Thus, the spread of individualism was accompanied by indoctrination and censorship, and popular rights movements like the Movement for Freedom and People's Rights encountered considerable government hostility. For more discussion see Nolte, "Individualism," 671.
[29] Tomi Suzuki, "Introduction: Nation Building, Literary Culture, and Language," in *The Cambridge History of Japanese Literature*, ed. Haruo Shirane, Tomi Suzuki, and David Lurie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 554.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Natsume Sōseki, "My Individualism *Watakushi no Kojinshugi*," trans. Jay Rubin, *Monumenta Nipponica* 34, no. 1 (1979): 45.

becoming involved in wars as Sōseki suggested, it was after Japan had emerged as a major world power and therefore was, for the time being, no longer endangered by external attack, that *shishōsetsu* started to proliferate. Enlightenment ideals and liberal values continued into the Taishō period (1912-1926), during which intellectuals collaborated with the bourgeois class in the Taishō Democracy to promote further individualism and political liberalism.[32]

Literature was not immune to the pervasive political-ideological change. As Japan's cultural isolation ended with the Meiji transformation, Japanese literati were now permitted to be exposed to Western literature. In addition, the emergence of modern transportation systems and large publishers facilitated the development of readership.[33] The spread of new ideas predisposed Japanese literati to rethink the nature of the individual and to gain new understandings of literature.

A critical work that played a pivotal role in the development of modern Japanese literature is *The Essence of the Novel* (*Shōsetsu shinzui* 小説神髄), written by Tsubouchi Shōyō 坪内逍遥 (1859-1935) from 1885 to 1886. As the first Japanese scholar to systematically discuss the notion of the novel, Tsubouchi extolled Western realism,

[32] Fang-quei Quo, "*Jiyushugi*: Japanese Liberalism," *The Review of Politics* 28, no. 4 (1966): 482-84. There are, of course, many other contributing factors that promoted the new understanding of the "self", such as German sentimentalism, Christian humanitarianism, and so forth. They are not discussed here due to the limited length of this thesis.

[33] Hideo Kamei and Kyoko Kurita, "Literary Marketplace, Politics, and History: 1900s–1940s," in *The Cambridge History of Japanese Literature*, ed. Haruo Shirane, Tomi Suzuki, and David Lurie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 648-49.

designating the novel as a work of art rather than a political or didactic medium.[34] Declaring psychological realism to be the principal characteristic and purpose of the modern novel, Tsubouchi wrote, "The main business of the novel is human nature. Social conditions and behavior rank second."[35] To reproduce human nature, Tsubouchi contended that the novelist should not "abhor the ugly side of man's nature or the wickedness of his passions, but should be single-minded in describing them"; otherwise how can the novelist "come to grips with the reality of human nature"?[36]

The significance of *The Essence of the Novel* largely lies in the fact that it marked the beginning of modern Japanese literature. Furthermore, it enhanced the social position of the novel and paved the way for it to serve as a vehicle for depicting the reality of the human condition instead of serving moral and didactic purposes. As Janet Walker has observed, it was during the Meiji era (1868-1912) that Japanese writers for the first time shifted their literary focus to themselves. By doing so, they succeeded in producing a new type of hero, namely the individual "who is interesting not because of his virtues or heroic exploits in the world but because of his inner uniqueness and the quality of his everyday existence."[37]

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[34] Oscar Benl, "Naturalism in Japanese Literature," *Monumenta Nipponica* 9, no. 1/2 (1953): 1.
[35] Tsubouchi Shōyō, *The Essence of the Novel*, trans. Nanette Twine (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 1983), chap. 3, https://archive.nyu.edu/html/2451/14945/shoyo.htm.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Janet Walker, *The Japanese Novel of the Meiji Period and the Ideal of Individualism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 3.

In addition, *The Essence of the Novel* also contributed to the spread of the unification of the spoken and written language (*genbun itchi* 言文一致) movement.[38] In his discussion of written styles, Tsubouchi suggested that colloquial expressions were ideal for expressing human nature and social life, yet regretfully they had not been used in writing.[39] He thereby called for writers to polish the colloquial style, making it suitable for writing. In response to Tsubouchi's request, Futabatei Shimei 二葉亭四迷 (pseud. of Hasegawa Tatsunosuke 長谷川辰之助, 1864-1909) published *The Drifting Cloud* (*Ukigumo* 浮雲, 1887-1889), the "first masterpiece of modern Japanese realism" written in the colloquial style.[40] Gradually, the colloquial written language came to be practiced by an increasing number of writers; in particular, it was actively promoted by naturalists, who saw it as a more appropriate way of writing.[41] In this sense, the unification of the spoken and written language movement laid the linguistic foundation for the birth of *shishōsetsu*. In Karatani Kōjin's view, this movement, by establishing a direct connection between speech and writing, provided the basis for Japanese writers'

[38] Traditionally, the spoken and written forms of Japanese were distinctly different, and there were four written styles, including the Sino-Japanese writing style (*kanbun* 漢文), Japanese epistolary style (*sōrōbun* 候文), classical Japanese writing style (*wabun* 和文), and Japanese-Chinese hybrid style (*wakan konkōbun* 和漢混淆文). However, no single style could be understood by all. See Nanette Twine, "The *Genbunitchi* Movement. Its Origin, Development, and Conclusion," *Monumenta Nipponica* 33, no. 3 (1978): 350.
[39] Tsubouchi, *The Essence*, chap 2.
[40] Benl, "Naturalism," 2.
[41] Suzuki, "Introduction," 571.

"discovery of the self."[42] Approaching this matter from the other way around, this thesis suggests that it was the longing for self-expression that motivated writers to adopt and to experiment with the new writing style.

### 3. Japanese Naturalism, the Ideal of Truthfulness, and the Literary Circle

The Meiji period also witnessed the flowering of naturalism in Japanese literature. As early as 1889, naturalism theory was introduced to Japan, and works of Zola, Maupassant, and other Western naturalists soon became available in translation.[43] While this thesis will not get into the problematic concept of naturalism, it is pertinent to note that in Japan, "naturalism" was at first used interchangeably with "realism."[44] Also, under the influence of German naturalism, Japanese naturalism contained typical elements of romanticism, such as self-assertion, subjectivity, the resistance of tradition, and an emphasis on nature.[45] In fact, leading naturalist writers like Tayama, Shimazaki, and Kunikida Doppo 国木田獨歩 (1871-1908) all started their literary careers as romantic writers. However, in the light of drastic social changes, they abandoned "the

[42] Karatani Kōjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, ed. and trans. Brett de Bary (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 61.
[43] Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 21.
[44] Sibley, "Naturalism," 159.
[45] Ken Henshall, "The Puzzling Perception of Japanese Naturalism," *Japan Forum*, vol. 22, no. 3-4 (2010): 331.

empty romanticism," turning their focus to real-to-life works.[46] In other words, they turned to naturalism because it answered their needs.

In theory, Japanese naturalism, like its Western namesake, aimed at portraying reality with a scientific, accurate analysis. Yet why did Japanese naturalism end up placing an exaggerated emphasis on inwardness and unmediated truth, thus diverging from its Western model?

In the first place, Japanese naturalists' interpretation of "nature" (*shizen* 自然) was affected by a deep sense of self-awareness. Resonating with Tsubouchi's theories, Japanese naturalists saw human nature as a crucial part of nature, and they believed that an individual was representative of nature. For example, Tayama declared that nature existed "both on the outside and the inside."[47] Like Tayama, Shimazaki understood nature as "the life of an individual as it is, with no attempt to conceal unflattering details."[48] Accordingly, they equated writing naturally with writing faithfully about the individual's life.

Another significant contributing factor to Japanese naturalism's inwardness is Japanese literati's general withdrawal from political engagement. As mentioned earlier, individualism boomed in Japan after the Russo-Japan War. At the same time, as Thomas

[46] Benl, "Naturalism," 5.
[47] Tayama Katai, *Tayama Katai Zenshū*, vol. 15, (Tokyo: Bunseidō Shuten, 1974), 201, quoted in Shu Kuge, "Between Sight and Rhythm: Aspects of Modernity in Tayama Katai's 'Flat Depiction'," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 14 (2002): 31.
[48] Walker, *The Japanese Novel*, 99.

Rimer has attested, the statism that brought Japan victories also led to increasing state control, due to which the civil and individualist ideals developed earlier were suppressed.[49] Consequently, writers distanced themselves from the political realm, adopting the "sense of interiority" as the "mandatory first step" in understanding the relationship between the individual and the rapidly changing society.[50] One illustration of this apolitical trend is the Great Treason Incident (1910-1911), where twelve socialists were sentenced to death for allegedly plotting to assassinate Emperor Meiji; however, almost all literary figures remained silent about this incident.[51] In short, the tension between the upsurge in individualism and the state's ascending censorship and the fact that important changes were always state-led rather than "as a result of popular effort" led to a deep gulf between individuals and politics.[52] This discouraged literati from touching on political or social issues. Paradoxically, I shall argue that by excluding sociopolitical concerns from their writings, Japanese literati in fact revealed their discontent with social reality and politicized their literary production.

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[49] Thomas Rimer, *Culture and Identity: Japanese Intellectuals During the Interwar Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 4.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Stephen Dodd, *Writing Home: Representations of the Native Place in Modern Japanese Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 187. A more specific example of Japanese intellectuals' diminishing interest in politics is provided by Natsume Sōseki, who explicitly expressed his disillusion with the state and gradually turned his attention from social criticism towards individualism. See Powell, *Writers*, 69-72.

[52] Morris, introduction to *Modern Japanese Stories*, 16.

As for naturalists' insistence on unmediated truth, such insistence was greatly reinforced by the spiritual crisis of modernity. In Japan, as in other parts of the world, the exaltation of the new modern life was accompanied by the disruption of native culture, by ceaseless social and technical changes, and by the loosening of traditional community ties, just to name a few. In many cases, the sense of crisis came in the form of a plea for "truth," which is evident in the article "Art in the Age of Disillusionment" (*Genmetsu jidai no geijutsu* 幻滅時代の芸術, 1906) written by the naturalist writer Hasegawa Tenkei 長谷川天渓 (1876-1940). According to Hasegawa, modern man's illusions were broken by science (the theory of evolution for example); thus, he made a plea for an "unadorned art" that portrays truth.[53] Nakamura Mitsuo made a more explicit comment on the relationship between modernity and the pursuit of truth: with the arrival of modern science, writers, particularly naturalist writers, saw imaginative writing as anachronistic, and they assumed that literature "should ultimately be grounded in fact, should only depict what the author had seen or heard, should only sing of what the author had experienced."[54] In their insistence on factuality, those writers found writing about themselves effective and convenient.

[53] See Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 30.
[54] Nakamura Mitsuo, *Nakamura Mitsuo Zenshū*, vol. 7 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1972), 564, quoted in Fraleigh, Matthew, "Terms of Understanding: The *Shōsetsu* According to Tayama Katai," *Monumenta Nipponica* 58, no. 1 (2003): 49.

Such emphasis on truthfulness was not limited to naturalists. For example, it is also well documented in an essay Futabatei wrote in 1908, one year after the publication of his last novel *Mediocrity* (*Heibon* 平凡, 1907). Having determined to give up writing novels, Futabatei's statement reads as follows: "No matter how good one's techniques, one cannot write the truth. One may know the truth, but it inevitably becomes distorted when one speaks or writes of it….When it comes to fiction [*shōsetsu*] I can write nothing but lies; and because I so believe, I simply cannot be serious about it."[55] What makes this quotation notable is that, in addition to pointing out that absolute truth is unattainable, it demonstrates the overriding position of "truth" in Japanese literature. This faith in truth laid the groundwork for the emergence of *shishōsetsu* as well as its wide acceptance.

As Japan's modernization progressed, truthfulness came to embody a new moral value. Stimulated by a growing sense of individuality, many educated Japanese no longer honored the old morality that emphasized discretion. For them, to write bluntly and truthfully was to rebel against those conventions and to free the self. As Hijiya-Kirschnereit's study has revealed, there was a widely held view among modern Japanese writers that a novel can have moral worth if it is a genuine self-revelation, wherein the author discloses his privacy and sacrifices his dignity out of "a passionate love of

[55] Futabatei Shimei, "Watakushi wa kaigiha da," in *Futabatei Shimei shū* (Tokyo: Kaizōsha, 1928), 469, quoted in Fowler, *The Rhetoric*, 24.

truth."[56] In a sense, a synthesis of faith in individual merit and in truthfulness was established, which further stimulated the practice of self-referential writing.

This synthesis is palpable in an essay by Tayama Katai. Tayama concluded that a distinctive feature of Japanese naturalism is "a strong sense of self-awareness which tries to establish individuality and to touch upon truths of human life, destroying old morality and conventions."[57] To add a further example, in his book "How to Write Novels" (*Shōsetsu sahō* 小説作法, 1909), Tayama, commenting on the ugly facts in *The Quilt*, stated:

> If the reader reads them and finds them unpleasant, or feels disgust, or searches among them for the Exalted Author's Mind, or receives some lesson from them – all of that is irrelevant to me. Or if the reader in his curiosity takes them and forces them to fit into my experience, evaluating my personality, responsibility, or thought, that doesn't matter. My only concern is the extent to which I have been able to depict those discovered facts and to how close my writing has been able to approach the truth.[58]

At the basis of Tayama's view is the idea of self-assertion: the author himself is the ultimate authority, and his goal is to fulfill his faith in producing a truehearted representation of the self regardless of outside opinions.

In fact, by the time Tsubouchi introduced realism to Japan, the yearning for reality, which would later become a conspicuous feature of *shishōsetsu*, was already firmly

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[56] Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 274-78.
[57] Tayama Katai, "Unnamed Article," *Shinchō* (1908): 14, quoted in Henshall, "The Puzzling Perception," 346.
[58] Tayama Katai, *Teihon Katai Zenshū* (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 1995), 228, quoted in Fraleigh, "Terms of Understanding," 51.

established in Japanese literature. Traditionally, forms of popular literature such as novels, humorous stories, and romantic stories were seen by Japanese intellectuals as low-brow.[59] This phenomenon is, to a certain extent, rooted in Confucian virtues which appreciate facts while disdaining fiction.[60] Indeed, conventional forms like diaries (*nikki* 日記), Japanese poetry (*waka* 和歌), and miscellany literature (*zuihitsu* 随筆) assign high value to sincerity while rejecting artificiality.[61] Focusing on the historical bias against the novel, Edward Fowler further observes that fictional narratives and literature (*bungaku* 文学) had been two distinct concepts until the Meiji period. Literature, characterized as refined, serious writings, were considered to be superior to novels, which were vulgar.[62] This distaste for fabrication, whether a byproduct of modern science or conventional doctrines, or of the two combined, contributed greatly to Japanese writers' vigorous pursuit of truth.

[59] Howard Hibbett, "The Portrait of the Artist in Japanese Fiction," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1955): 349. The disdain for fictional writing is also palpable in *The Essence of the Novel*, where Tsubouchi places the Western realistic novel in contradistinction to playful writings (*gesaku* 戯作), a style that flourished in the Tokugawa (1603-1868) and the early Meiji periods. Conventional playful writings are often entertaining and frivolous, which is believed to partly explain the low status of narrative literature in Japan. For more details, see Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 13-20 and 131-46.

[60] Sadami Suzuki, "What is *Bungaku*? The Reformulation of the Concept of 'Literature' in Early Twentieth-Century Japan," in *Japanese Hermeneutics: Current Debates on Aesthetics and Interpretation*, ed. Marra, Michael F. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 183.

[61] Haruo Shirane, "Lyricism and Intertextuality: An Approach to Shunzei's Poetics," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 50, no. 1 (1990): 82-85. Also see Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 298-99.

[62] Fowler, *The Rhetoric*, 23.

Yet to explain why it was naturalism that eventually conflated realistic writing and self-revelation, we need to take a closer look at naturalists' plight at the time. As mentioned earlier, aiming at the modernization of Japan, the Meiji government lavished great effort in promoting education across the country, including agricultural areas. But, at the same time, the government was still relying on the feudal farming system and endeavouring to preserve it; hence, the progress towards modernization was rather slow in villages.[63] This was the social environment in which early naturalist writers grew up. More specifically, most Japanese naturalist writers grew up in poverty in rural areas.[64] Also, many of them, including Tayama, were from samurai families, whose status declined significantly after the Meiji transformation. Having received progressive education, those young men could not find suitable jobs in villages so most of them moved to cities. Nonetheless, their predicament did not improve in the city: they could not find their place in a society whose "major aim was to develop industrial capitalism and strengthen the hegemony of the nation."[65] In this regard, naturalists obtained a first-hand, deep understanding of the crisis of modernity.

The marginal status of naturalists helps to explain the generally pessimistic tone of their writings and explains why Hasegawa asserted that it was naturalist literature that

[63] Noriko Thunman, "The Autobiographical Novel/Short Story *Watakushishōsetsu* in Japanese Literature," in *Literary History: Towards a Global Perspective*, ed. Anders Pettersson et al. (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2006), 30.
[64] Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 27.
[65] Thunman, "The Autobiographical Novel," 32.

best expressed his generation's painful experience of losing philosophical and religious stability.[66] More importantly, the typically outcast status of the naturalists restricted them from widening their social networks and finding sufficient objects for observation despite their fervent faith in investigating the human condition. Because of this limited scope, their own lives became the most suitable or perhaps the only area that they could explore extensively. In other words, naturalists turned to self-referential writing not only because they regarded it as an effective way to ensure veracity but also because they might have no better options.

After *The Quilt*'s success, *shishōsetsu* penetrated Japanese literature within a rather short time, yet in the early phase, the readership of *shishōsetsu* was mainly restricted to the literary circle (*bundan* 文壇), another important condition for the rise of *shishōsetsu*. The meaning of the "literary circle" is twofold. In the wide scope, it refers to everyone involved in literary activities, and in the narrow level, it refers to the small community of writers practicing pure literature (*junbungaku* 純文学).[67] The control of the narrow literary circle, which played a significant role in the development of *shishōsetsu*, passed into the hands of naturalists in the beginning of the twentieth century.[68]

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[66] Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 30.
[67] Powell, *Writers*, xi. *Junbungaku* is an elusive term that roughly indicates literary works that exclude political issues and mass culture. It is often used in opposition to popular literature. Also see Lippit, *Topographies*, 27.
[68] Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era*, vol. 1, *Fiction* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984), 547.

While the literary circle was based in Tokyo, it was largely isolated from society because literature was still regarded as having no utilitarian value to the nation, and because many of its members were themselves socially marginalized. Therefore, the readership of the members' works was rather limited.[69] Meeting regularly to read and review each other's works, members of the literary circle formed close relationships with one another.[70] Such closeness made it convenient for them to examine the accuracy of each other's works and therefore reinforced the practice of writing "facts," especially after factuality was raised to an unprecedented height with the publication of *The Quilt*. In addition, as a small community, the literary circle fueled the split between literature and society, which underpinned *shishōsetsu*'s lack of direct and active engagement with the outside world.

## 4. *Shishōsetsu* as a Modern Japanese Phenomenon

The development of *shishōsetsu* was predicated upon a variety of conditions. It is inseparable from, among other things, the spread of individualism and Western culture after the Meiji Restoration. Other contributing factors to the rise of the genre include the modernization of the Japanese language, the apolitical trend among literati, the spiritual

[69] Thunman, "The Autobiographical Novel," 30-33. About the social environment of the literary circle, also see Powell, *Writers*, 33-37.
[70] Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 177-78.

crisis of modernity, as well as the growing appreciation of truth. Meanwhile, the social marginalization of newly educated writers (especially naturalists) and the concomitant cultural phenomenon of the literary circle also served as the catalyst for the popularity of *shishōsetsu*. The basis, at any rate, is Japan's modernization. In this regard, the emergence, development, and characteristics of *shishōsetsu* carry important social relevance.

The above discussion on *shishōsetsu* and naturalism also informs much of Shiga's works and thinking. Although Shiga had the background that endowed him with more social and intellectual freedom, he nonetheless shared naturalists' intentions to write truthfully and naturally, to express the self, and to rebel against the feudal past.[71] Accordingly, Shiga embraced *shishōsetsu*, producing a number of works preoccupied with his own experiences and thoughts. In the words of Kobayashi Hideo, "Not since Katai learned from Maupassant the literary value of mundane life, has anyone so intensely and splendidly rendered aesthetic his own life as has Shiga Naoya. No writer has with such scrupulous single-mindedness followed the path of *watakushi shōsetsu*."[72] Although Shiga wrote, in the onset of his writing career, several short stories that bear a resemblance to Western novels, he is most renowned for his *shishōsetsu*.

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[71] Shiga's individualism, anti-feudal consciousness, and apolitical orientation will be discussed in Chapter II.

[72] Kobayashi Hideo, *Literature of the Lost Home: Kobayashi Hideo – Literary Criticism*, 1924-1939, ed. and trans. Paul Anderer (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 74.

Whilst Shiga has been widely admired for his *shishōsetsu*, he has received no less criticism than praise. Criticisms of Shiga's *shishōsetsu* often focus on their monopolistic narrative perspective which leads to the absence of authorial distance, inadequate background information about the characters, and, most disputably, a lack of social commitment, all of which have been seen by critics as defects of the genre. One of the harshest criticisms of Shiga came from the famous novelist Dazai Osamu 太宰治 (1909-1938), who asserted that *A Dark Night's Passing* was but a joke, that Shiga's works could never be called serious since he cared only about himself.[73] Similar views can be easily found in other critical works. Along with Ikuta Chōkō 生田長江 (1882-1936), Hirotsu Kazuo 広津和郎 (1891-1968) and other critics, Stephen Dodd, for example, points out that Shiga "did not seem at all moved to a wider social concern with the evils of capitalist pollution, inequality between the classes, or, more generally, the struggle against an overbearing patriarchal society."[74] The embedded suggestion in this remark is that Shiga's *shishōsetsu*, like other works of this genre, prioritize privatism over social responsibility.

In fact, few writers of *shishōsetsu* have escaped the criticism that their works lack social dimensions. In his essay "Discourse on Fiction of the Self" (*Watakushi shōsetsu ron* 私小説論, 1935), perhaps the most often cited study on *shishōsetsu*, Kobayashi

[73] Dazai Osamu, *Dazai Osamu Zenshū*, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1967), 321.
[74] Washburn, *The Dilemma*, 220; Francis, *Shiga*, 137; Dodd, *Writing Home*, 186.

Hideo argued that the self in *shishōsetsu* was not fully socialized when compared to the self in Western literature.[75] Going even further, Itō Sei 伊藤整 (1905-1969) addressed writers of the decline oriented *shishōsetsu* (*hametsugata shishōsetsu* 破滅型私小説), namely naturalist writers who were isolated from society and concentrated on writing about their own miserable experiences, as "escaping slaves" (*tōbō dorei* 逃亡奴隷).[76] Also, Ivan Morris wrote, based on a Western perspective, "In their efforts at faithful reproduction, many modern Japanese writers tended to forget the demands of fiction and of literary style. Furthermore, the confessional type of literature implies a dangerous form of conceit, based on the idea that there is something intrinsically interesting in an honest account of one's inner life."[77]

From one perspective, critics are correct to point out that writers of *shishōsetsu* often ignored the tie between themselves and the social world: they wrote exclusively about their private experiences without objectifying them, and the scientific analysis of social environments, historical events, and international affairs was largely missed.

From another perspective, Japanese writers' "conceit" and their forgetting of the so-called "demands of fiction and of literary style" did not come from a void: the position of

[75] Kobayashi, *Literature*, 69. Kobayashi argued that when studying the concept of "the self" and techniques of Western naturalism, Japanese writers neglected the fact that their social and scientific backgrounds were distinctly different from their Western model.
[76] Ito Sei, *Shōsetsu no hōhō* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō, 1956), 87; Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 102. The notion of "the decline oriented *shishōsetsu*" will also be discussed in section 5 of this chapter.
[77] Morris, introduction to *Modern Japanese Stories*, 16.

subjectivity embodied in *shishōsetsu* is itself a reflection and product of social reality. As Kobayashi has pointed out, *shishōsetsu* would never have been born without the rise of a sense of the self.[78] Following Kobayashi's argument, it can also be suggested that the rise of *shishōsetsu* presents a social context where self-awareness was coming to light. That is to say, *shishōsetsu* writers' preoccupation with the self attests to the growing concern with individual values in early-twentieth-century Japan, to the increasing demands for truth, and to the individual's endeavors to emancipate themselves from the old restrictions that discouraged public self-expression. By the same token, *shishōsetsu*'s detachment from socio-political issues is a manifestation of the general apolitical attitudes prevailing among Japanese intellectuals at the time.

Furthermore, the accounts of the *shishōsetsu* protagonist's experiences and "sensation," to borrow the expression of John Locke (1632-1704), also reflect social reality.[79] To give a few examples, *Nobuko* (*Nobuko* 伸子, 1924) by Miyamoto Yuriko 宮本百合子 (1899-1951) is not merely an account of the female author's unhappy marriage but a portrait of gender issues and the development of feminist ideas in modern Japan. *The Family* (*Ie* 家, 1910-1911) by Shimazaki Tōson not only records the author's frustrating family life but also discloses how the traditional collectivist family system

[78] Kobayashi, *Literature*, 67.
[79] In Locke's theory, sensation signifies "the perceptual process that creates ideas of external objects." See Kevin Scharp, "Locke's Theory of Reflection," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (2008): 25-63.

struggled in the modernizing society. The same can be said of Shiga's *Ōtsu Junkichi* (1912), which is more than a revelation of how his romantic relationships were obstructed by the older generation but also a bold expression of human desire, a declaration of modern man's rejection of authority, and a depiction of generational conflict. As Francis Mathy's words suggest, *Ōtsu Junkichi* "had a special appeal in an age that was painfully aware of the lack of self-expression."[80] This same reasoning can also be applied to Shiga's other *shishōsetsu*. While Shiga rarely objectified or analyzed his personal experiences, his *shishōsetsu* are replete with common concerns shared by his contemporaries, and the "drawbacks" of his *shishōsetsu* are revealing as to the ethos of the time.

## 5. The Perplexing Concept of *Shishōsetsu*

The last issue this chapter addresses is the definition of *shishōsetsu*. If we are to study Shiga as a leading writer of *shishōsetsu*, it is necessary to clarify what this term means.

Since the early twentieth century, a great deal of effort has gone into defining *shishōsetsu*. Despite the fact that those definitions are divergent, it is possible to extract some common threads from the discourse. The earliest critical debate over *shishōsetsu*

[80] Mathy, *Shiga*, 53.

can be traced back to the 1920s. Since that time, the unity between the protagonist, the narrator, and the author has been regarded as a cardinal feature of *shishōsetsu*. As early as 1920, Uno Kōji 宇野浩二 (1891-1961) contended that the hero of *shishōsetsu* is obviously the author himself.[81] Carrying on with the discussion, Nakamura Murao 中村武羅夫 (1886-1949) wrote that the state-of-mind novel (*shinkyō shōsetsu* 心境小説) is a literary form where "the author appears directly in the work" and where "the author speaks directly in the text."[82] A year later, however, Kume Masao 久米正雄 (1891-1952) published an article to praise *shishōsetsu*'s emancipation from superfluous fictional elements and to define the genre as a way of writing that allows the author to express himself directly and sincerely.[83] The high degree of identification between the protagonist, the narrator, and the author has also been noted in more recent studies of *shishōsetsu*. For example, Hisaaki Yamanouchi observes that the hero in the *shishōsetsu* is "none than other the author himself."[84]

[81] Ibid., 14.
[82] Nakamura Murao, "Honkaku shōsetsu to shinkyō shōsetsu to," in *Kindai bungaku hyōron taike*, ed. Miyoshi Yukio and Sofue Shōji (Tokyo: Tadokawa Shoten, 1973), 11-14, quoted in Fraleigh, "Terms of Understanding," 45. While Nakamura used *shinkyō shōsetsu* instead of *shishōsetsu*, his article inaugurated the earliest critical debate over *shishōsetsu*. Since then, many scholars have used *shinkyō shōsetsu* as either an alternative or a subgroup of *shishōsetsu*. See the next paragraph.
[83] Thunman, "The Autobiographical Novel," 25.
[84] Hisaaki Yamanouchi, *The Search for Authenticity in Modern Japanese Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 107. For similar views, see Fowler, *Rhetoric*, xvi; Sibley, "Naturalism," 160.

The following quote from Janet Walker's article is an apt summary of the general characteristics of *shishōsetsu*:

> *Shishōsetsu* revolve around events in their authors' lives, and/or express their authors' feelings, sensations, perceptions, and ideas. Whether written in the first or the third person, the *shishōsetsu* is narrated from the viewpoint of the author, avoids a well-defined plot in favor of a portrayal of occasions of emotional intensity, and depicts only the social world of the author and his family and/or associates.[85]

Underlying this summary is the idea that *shishōsetsu* is a single-voiced, truthful expression of the author.

A few more words should be said about "the state-of-mind novel," because Shiga's works are sometimes placed into this category. Kume Masao made the earliest attempt to discuss the state-of-mind novel in detail, regarding it as a subtype of *shishōsetsu*. The most salient characteristic of the state-of-mind novel, Kume argued, is its moral serenity, which can only be created in a cultivated, meditative state of mind, whereas *shishōsetsu* is filled with suffering and struggles.[86] Building on Kume's discussion, Hirano Ken 平野謙 (1907-1978) concluded that the state-of-mind novel, as one of the two currents in *shishōsetsu*, is a literature of salvation that seeks to resolve the sense of crisis and to achieve harmony between the self and the world, and it is rooted in the White Birch School, the literary school to which Shiga belonged.[87] In comparison, the decline-oriented *shishōsetsu* of the socially inferior naturalists is a literature of destruction.[88]

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[85] Walker, "The Uniqueness of the Japanese Novel," 293.
[86] Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 90.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

While Hirano's division of *shishōsetsu* runs the risk of oversimplification since it is largely based on the authors' social backgrounds, it highlights some general qualities of the state-of-mind novel and has been widely adopted by scholars. In Hirano's essay, Shiga is identified as a representative writer of the state-of-mind novel. Adhering to Hirano's view, Cecilia S. Seigle suggests that *Reconciliation* is more of a state-of-mind novel than *shishōsetsu* in that it deals with "Shiga's emotional reactions during each step toward reconciliation."[89] Koyano Atsushi goes one step further to argue that Shiga's *shishōsetsu* as a whole should be better categorized as the state-of-mind novel, because the essence of those stories is never misery.[90] While this thesis does not attempt to draw a clear line between *shishōsetsu* and the state-of-mind novel, the discourse on the latter provides a useful way to examine Shiga's writing. Moreover, it reveals that the longing for harmony is embedded in many of Shiga's *shishōsetsu*, as will be discussed in Chapter II.

Now we return to the definition of *shishōsetsu*. Admittedly, in many cases the protagonist in *shishōsetsu* shows a striking resemblance to the author, and the plot on the whole corresponds to the author's lived experience. Tayama's *The Quilt*, Iwano Hōmei's 岩野泡鳴 (1873-1920) *Self-indulgence* (*Tandeki* 耽溺, 1909), and Shiga's

[89] Cecilia S. Seigle, "Shiga Naoya (20 February 1883-21 October 1971)," in *Japanese Fiction Writers, 1868-1945*, ed. Van C. Gessel (Detroit, MI: Gale, 1997), 190.
[90] Nanyan Guo, *Refining Nature in Modern Japanese Literature: The Life and Art of Shiga Naoya* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 6.

*Reconciliation* are all solid examples: the protagonist or the narrator, albeit bearing a different name from the author, shares a very similar social background and some demographic characteristics (such as age, sex, and career) with the author. It is also easy to find the real-life counterparts of subordinate characters. For example, in *The Quilt*, the female character Yoshiko simply bears the same name as Tayama's live-in student in reality. It is therefore not surprising that many readers of *shishōsetsu* assume there is "a direct correspondence between what is portrayed and actual reality."[91]

However, this assumption is not always valid. As already stated in the Introduction, *A Dark Night's Passing* stands as a masterpiece of *shishōsetsu*, but it contains a notable amount of fictitious elements. The matter is further complicated by the fact that Shiga, like many of his contemporary writers, had an abiding faith in truthfulness. In a diary entry from January 1911, Shiga wrote, "I think honesty is the most important thing in art."[92] It is therefore not surprising that he devoted considerable effort to elucidating the extent of factuality of his works. For instance, of *Ōtsu Junkichi*, *Reconciliation*, and *A Certain Man and the Death of His Sister*,[93] Shiga stated that "*Ōtsu Junkichi* and *Reconciliation* are faithful to facts, while *A Certain Man and the Death of His Sister* is a

[91] Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 176.
[92] Shiga Naoya, *Shiga Naoya Zenshū*, XII (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1955-1956), 161. My translation.
[93] These three novellas were published as a trilogy that portrays Shiga and his father's relationship. The former two works are narrated by the son/Shiga, while *A Certain Man and the Death of His Sister* is narrated through the critical eye of the younger brother of the son and contains more fictional portions.

mixture of facts and fabrication."[94] Furthermore, although *A Certain Man and the Death of His Sister* contains fictional elements, it depicts "as accurately as possible the psychology of my father and myself in our disagreement."[95] When criticizing other's works, Shiga also used truthfulness as a criterion of evaluation: he admired a novel for carrying no sense of fabrication while disfavoring another that seemed constructed.[96] But if Shiga had such a strong belief in truthfulness, why did he include elements of fictionality in his autobiographical writings so frequently? And, why are these works widely classified as *shishōsetsu* if truthfulness is the touchstone of the genre?

## 6. Reality and Fiction

The answer lies in the perplexing nature of "truthfulness," or "reality." What concerned Shiga most was the subjective, inner truth rather than the objective truth. To Shiga, fabrications were acceptable as long as they came to him naturally. Based on this principle, Shiga made the following comment on his short story "To Kugenuma" (*Kugenuma iki* 鵠沼行, 1912): "I wrote down all the facts faithfully, but in one place I naturally wrote what was opposite to the fact. Since it appeared in my mind clearly, I

94 Shiga, *Shiga Naoya shū*, 486. My translation.
95 Francis, *Shiga*, 66-67.
96 See Tsuruta, "Akutagawa," 30.

wrote it that way deliberately."[97] What Shiga was implying here was that he would treat fiction the same way he treated facts as long as the fiction was in accordance with his spiritual state. His confidence in natural, unaffected fiction was further strengthened when his younger sister told him that she remembered that fictional scene clearly.[98]

Following this logic, of "The Kidnapping" (*Ko o nusumu hanashi* 児を盗む話, 1914), a story concerning how a frustrated young writer kidnapped a little girl, Shiga told us he wrote the story "as if it had become fact" because while the kidnapping was imaged, this imagining was in tune with his mental state and played an important part of his life at the moment.[99] The same logic is also pursued in Shiga's comment on *A Dark Night's Passing*. According to Shiga, Kensaku, the protagonist of the novel, is more or less himself. His explanation goes as follows: "Kensaku's feelings represent what I myself would do if placed in similar circumstances, or what I would want to do, or what I have actually done."[100] He also stated that when he was younger, it occurred to him that he might be the illegitimate son of his grandfather.[101] To put it another way, Kensaku is an extension of Shiga's ego, so that his feelings are also Shiga's feelings. By this standard, Shiga believed he did not deviate from the truth.

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[97] Shiga, *Shiga Naoya Shū*, 482. My translation.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Shiga, *Zenshū*, X, 195-96. Translation from Mathy, *Shiga*, 57-58.
[100] Shiga, *Zenshū*, X, 185. Translation from Mathy, *Shiga*, 92.
[101] Ibid., *Zenshū*, X, 184.

To be sure, Shiga was not the only writer of his time to value inner reality over factual accuracy. A similar view was held by Tayama Katai, for instance. On the one hand, Tayama insisted on writing truthfully. On the other hand, for him, "reality" was more than a copy of lived experience. In defending the fictitious scene in his novel, Tayama contended that the fictional scene must have happened somewhere.[102] Elsewhere, Tayama separated "mere imagination" from "imagination premised on fact" and regarded the latter as essential.[103] Tayama made the point that he would not reject writing a fictional scene if he believed in its genuineness.

In addition to helping to explain why many critics identify Kensaku and Shiga as the same person despite their apparent discrepancies, the concept of "inner reality" also illustrates why there is an ongoing disagreement on *The Quilt*'s position as the first *shishōsetsu*. According to Francis Mathy, *The Broken Commandment* is the first step towards *shishōsetsu*. Although Shimazaki Tōson was not an outcast, Mathy argues that Shimazaki "poured himself so completely into the hero" that he eventually turned the protagonist into an expression of himself.[104] In a similar vein, Ivan Morris sees *The Dancing Girl* (*Maihime* 舞姫, 1890), a short story by Mori Ōgai 森鴎外 (1862-1922),

[102] Fraleigh, "Terms of Understanding," 57-58.
[103] Ibid., 54-55.
[104] Mathy, *Shiga*, 35. For very similar arguments, see Arima, *The Failure of Freedom*, 74; J.B. Power, "Shiga Naoya and the Shishōsetsu," in *Search for Identity: Modern Literature and the Creative Arts in Asia*, ed. A.R. Davis (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974), 20-21.

as one of the earliest *shishōsetsu* even though the story is in many aspects different from Ōgai's actual experience.[105]

Hijiya-Kirschnereit's study provides a helpful framework to explore the nebulous nature of the notion of "reality." According to Hijiya-Kirschnereit, the connotation of "reality" (*jitsu* 実) in Japanese literature is not fixed. Instead, there are at least three ways of interpreting it: as "a one-to-one relationship between literary and real-life events" where "some slight deviations from fact are acceptable"; as the "inner reality" of the hero; or as the impression a natural, unconstructed work creates on the reader.[106] The second and third types of "reality," which are more or less intermingled and echo with the subjective "autobiographical veracity" in Roy Pascal (1904-1980)'s sense,[107] are compatible with Shiga's understanding of truth: as long as the fictitious elements are true reflections of the author's spiritual world, the integrity of the work is assured; as long as the fictitious elements appear natural to the author, they might also appear to the reader as facts.

It is important to note that pertinent discussions of "reality" can be traced back to the premodern era. In *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語) by Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 (c. 973-c. 1020), Prince Genji makes the following remark concerning the novel: "among such make-believe things [the novels] there are some which, having

[105] See Morris, introduction to *Modern Japanese Stories*, 15.
[106] Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 162.
[107] Missinne, "Autobiographical Novel," 467.

truly convincing pathos, unfold themselves with natural smoothness. We know they are not real, but still we cannot help being moved when we read them."[108] That is to say, a fictitious novel can arouse the feeling of realness if it conveys human feelings in a natural, genuine way. Prince Genji's theory of the novel resonates with studies of other traditional Japanese literary genres. In light of the traditional criteria of literary valuation, the natural overflow of emotions and poetic language occupied more important positions than logic or structure.[109] Take Japanese poetry as an example. Notwithstanding the fact that artificiality is an unappreciated quality of poem composition, literary imagination is by no means unacceptable. To compose a good poem on a specific topic, the poet does not have to experience or see the topic in person as long as his poem is a sincere expression of the poetic emotions associated with the topic.[110] This means fabrication is not necessarily an indication of insincerity in Japanese literary consciousness.

## 7. *Shishōsetsu* as a Mode of Reading

The above discussion leads to one further question: how does the reader know if the "reality" in a *shishōsetsu* is "a one-to-one relationship between literary and real-life

[108] Translation from Makoto Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1991), 30.
[109] Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories*, 224-25.
[110] Shirane, "Lyricism," 77-78.

events" or the "inner reality" of the hero/the author? Underpinning Hijiya-Kirschnereit's framework of "reality" is the presumption that the reader of a *shishōsetsu* has some biographical knowledge of the author. In other words, the formation of *shishōsetsu*'s characteristics is not achieved by the author alone.

Many attempts at examining the role of the *shishōsetsu* reader look at Shiga's literature. Francis Mathy argues that the most useful clue to Shiga's works is his life, and by making reference to Shiga's short story "One Morning" (*Aru asa* 或る朝, 1908), William Sibley contends that the reader must have some "inside knowledge" of Shiga to complement the story.[111] These discussions are distant echoes of Nakamura Mitsuo's article written in 1966. As stated by Nakamura, Shiga's works are "comprehensible and meaningful only to those who had a biographical knowledge of him."[112] Given that many *shishōsetsu* are rather loosely constructed and focus on trivial events (Shiga's "One Morning" is one such example), it seems reasonable to stress the importance of obtaining biographical information of the author. It is also true that in the initial stage, the readership of *shishōsetsu* was mostly confined to members of the literary circle, so that early practitioners of the genre, with the assumption that the reader knew their backgrounds (and therefore their protagonists' backgrounds), often omitted elements such

[111] Mathy, *Shiga*, 19; Sibley, *The Shiga Hero*, 24. "One Morning" is a diary-like story told from the first-person perspective of a young man named Shintarō. It centers on a squabble between the narrator who has trouble getting up and his grandmother.
[112] Rebecca Suter, "Rewritings between East and West: Shiga Naoya's *Kurodiasu no nikki*," *Orientalistica*, A.I.O.N., no. 63/1, (2003): 177.

as character depiction and setting. The omission of these elements stands as a distinguishable feature of *shishōsetsu*, but it can also cause considerable confusion for the reader and thus motivates them to do research. Yet, if the construction of a *shishōsetsu* requires the reader's active engagement, it is questionable whether *shishōsetsu* should be defined as a mode of writing.

In the book *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*, Tomi Suzuki persuasively argues that *shishōsetsu* is a mode of reading that was retrospectively constructed by the critical *shishōsetsu* discourse. In Suzuki's view, any text can become a *shishōsetsu* when the reader follows the reading paradigm: the reader proposes a "hidden contract" in the text, regarding certain characters of the text, such as its "referential faithfulness" and a monopolistic narrative perspective, as the invitation to the *shishōsetsu* reading mode.[113] Suzuki is not the first to discuss this "hidden contract." Uno Kōji wrote in 1920 that the abrupt appearance of the narrator, whose single-consciousness narration "is not preceded by any discursive description," gives the reader – more precisely, the reader who has experience reading similar works – a signal to explore the resemblance between the author and the narrator, and thereafter, the reader assumes that this text corresponds to facts.[114]

[113] Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 3-7.
[114] Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 174-75. Whilst Suzuki argues that the historical continuity between *shishōsetsu* and traditional forms was retrospectively invented, it is noteworthy that since the Heian era (794-1185), knowledge of intertextual context,

It is not difficult to find such "signals" in Shiga's works. A great number of Shiga's writings are narrated in a narrowly focused perspective, and in many cases the characters have counterparts in the real world. Shiga also left many blanks for the reader to fill in. For example, in *Reconciliation*, a story concerning the first-person narrator's disagreement with his father, the causes of the deep-rooted father-son conflict are never explained. To gain a fuller picture of the text, the reader needs to read it as a *shishōsetsu*, linking the text to the author's personal life. In Shiga's case, another important signal of the *shishōsetsu* reading mode is certain recurring themes, namely father-son conflict and writer's block. Though under different names, Shiga's heroes often struggle with patriarchal authority and creative slowdown under similar circumstances; hence, when these themes are presented in Shiga's works, they become signals inviting the reader to switch to the *shishōsetsu* reading mode.

Scholars' efforts to associate some of Shiga's more fictional pieces with his personal experiences also lend credence to Suzuki's contention that any text can become a *shishōsetsu* if the reader reads it in the *shishōsetsu* reading mode.[115] Bearing in mind that Shiga is a writer of *shishōsetsu*, some scholars habitually assume "the single identity of the protagonist, the narrator," and Shiga.[116] For example, Sudo Matsuō sees Claudius,

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authorial intention, codes, and signs have played important roles in the understanding of literary texts. See Shirane, "Lyricism," 72-85.

[115] Suzuki, *Narrating the Self*, 6.

[116] Ibid.

the hero and the narrator of Shiga's Shakespeare-inspired short story "Claudius's Diary" (*Kurōdiasu no nikki* クローディアスの日記, 1912), as Shiga's literary persona in spite of the substantial discrepancies between them.[117] Likewise, in Lane Dunlop's view, "Seibei and His Gourds" (*Seibei to hyōtan* 清兵衛と瓢箪, 1912), a little tale of a twelve-year-old boy called Seibei and his collection of gourds, is more or less autobiographical in that it reflects the boy's confrontation with his authoritarian father.[118]

Suzuki's theory becomes even more convincing when we consider that it is precisely Shiga's retrospective discussions on his own writings that encourage a referential reading of his works. Shiga devoted several essays, such as "Digression on My Literary Working" (*Sōsaku yodan* 創作余談, 1928) and "Digression on My Literary Working: II" (*Zoku sōsaku yodan* 続創作余談, 1938), to demonstrate the degree of truthfulness of his writings. As mentioned in section 6, Shiga constantly emphasized the direct link between him and his protagonist even in the case where the protagonist's experiences differ markedly from his own. In doing so, Shiga invites the reader to read his works in the *shishōsetsu* reading mode.

It could be argued that by emphasizing the truthfulness of certain pieces (for example *Reconciliation*, which will be discussed in Chapter II), Shiga seemed to be attesting to the *shishōsetsu* writing mode. However, as Suzuki has explained, *shishōsetsu*

[117] Suter, "Rewritings," 184.
[118] Lane Dunlop, preface to *The Paper Door and Other Stories by Shiga Naoya* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1992), x.

as a whole cannot be defined by "certain referential, thematic, or formal characteristics."[119] This thesis agrees with Suzuki's view in that it is hard to delineate what defining formal characteristics those supposedly "truthful" *shishōsetsu* and more fictional ones share in common (considering how slippery the definition of "reality" or "truthfulness" is). Furthermore, Suzuki reminds us that Katai confirmed the confessional nature of *The Quilt* and accepted the critical view that there is no "critical distance" between him and his protagonist only when the art of self-expression was becoming mainstream.[120] She goes on to reveal that Shiga's commentary on the truthfulness of his writings appeared only after the *shishōsetsu* discourse had emerged, implying that Shiga's effort to retrospectively assess his works was influenced by, and also helped shape, the concept of *shishōsetsu*.[121] From this point of departure, *shishōsetsu* is not so much a self-contained mode of writing as a constructed reading and interpretative paradigm.

In fact, even if Shiga did write autobiographically, a reader who is unfamiliar with him can certainly read his *shishōsetsu* as regular fiction (though the reader might be surprised at its narrow narrative scope and undeveloped storyline). This is particularly true for stories with relatively fuller character development and greater complexity of events (for example *A Dark Night's Passing*) and stories that focus on philosophical

[119] Suzuki, *Narrating the Self*, 6.
[120] Ibid., 91-92.
[121] Ibid., 99.

ponderings (for example “At Kinosaki”). Ultimately, it is the reader who decides whether or not a text should be read as a *shishōsetsu*; hence, it is more appropriate to understand the genre as a mode of reading rather than a mode of writing.

It should be noted, however, that while Suzuki proposes that *The Quilt* was “retrospectively selected by critics” as the prototypical *shishōsetsu* and that it is too facile to see the genre as a product of the literary circle,[122] this thesis argues that the influence of Japanese naturalism and the literary circle cannot be ignored. As the previous sections of this chapter have attempted to show, Tayama and his peers from the literary circle triggered and reinforced the “hidden contract” between the reader and the author, albeit on a rather small scale. Also, they contributed greatly to the promotion of the descriptions of reality. This explains, at least partially, why autobiographical stories published prior to *The Quilt*, for instance Ozaki Kōyō 尾崎紅葉 (1868-1903)’s *Green Grapes* (*Aobudō* 青葡萄, 1896), are hardly ever regarded as *shishōsetsu*: they were published when autobiographical themes were not widely appreciated, and when the “hidden contract” had not been established.[123]

It is also important to point out that some critics, although familiar with the concept of *shishōsetsu*, question the classification of some *shishōsetsu* because of their fictitious aspects. The underlying premise of this proposition is that the *shishōsetsu* mode of

[122] Ibid., 48, 89.
[123] For more discussion about predecessors of *shishōsetsu*, see Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 131-38.

reading becomes effective only when the text portrays factual reality. Thus, to complement Suzuki's theory, it should be clarified that in the *shishōsetsu* discourse, the conventionally emphasized "reality" has a multilayered meaning as already discussed.

To conclude, *shishōsetsu* is better understood as a mode of reading rather than a mode of writing: the text itself does not define its nature, instead, a text becomes a *shishōsetsu* when the reader assumes an identification between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist and, thus, a close correspondence between the text and reality. This "reality," however, refers to not only factual reality but also the author's inner reality. We can now answer the question "How do we know that Shiga or any author is not 'lying'"? Edward Fowler poses this question in arguing that the sincerity of *shishōsetsu* is a myth.[124] After all, there is no guarantee that the writer is writing the truth. However, the truthfulness of *shishōsetsu* is not so much an issue of the author's ability to recount facts as the reader's expectation.

While Shiga's *shishōsetsu* and the genre as a whole have long been criticized for their insufficient social relevance, this chapter, by seeking some social explanations for the phenomenon of *shishōsetsu*, shows that the genre is emblematic of the zeitgeist of early-twentieth-century Japan. This chapter also probes into the concept of "reality" and the role of *shishōsetsu* reader to show that fictitious elements do not necessarily exclude

[124] Fowler, *Rhetoric*, 65-66.

Shiga's works from *shishōsetsu*. To further illustrate how Shiga's *shishōsetsu* are manifestations of the sociocultural climate of early-twentieth-century Japan, the next chapter will address the major theme of Shiga's writings: human beings' painful search for modern individuality as well as their vacillation between modernity and tradition.

## Chapter II: Shiga Naoya's *Reconciliation*: A Reconciliation with the Self

Shiga is often singled out by critics and readers as a staunch believer of individualism. In Hirotsu Kazuo's words, Shiga is a "horrifyingly selfish individual," and Kobayashi Hideo describes him as an "ultra-egotist."[125] These comments are not only based on Shiga's personal life but his works, because Shiga is treated as an exemplary *shishōsetsu* writer who transforms life into literature.

As briefly mentioned in the Introduction, Shiga had been in a tumultuous relationship with his overbearing father for decades; hence, the sense of individualism is particularly robust in his works concerning family relationships. These works, exemplified by "For Grandmother" (*Sōba no tame ni* 祖母の為に, 1912), *Ōtsu Junkichi* (1912), *Reconciliation* (1917), and *A Certain Man and the Death of His Sister* (1920), are widely read as *shishōsetsu*, and the heroes of these pieces are simultaneously viewed as an extension of Shiga's self. Based on the broad commonalities between these autobiographical heroes, many studies treat them as a consistent single character: the Shiga hero.[126]

[125] Suzuki, *Narrating the Self*, 93.

[126] The term "the Shiga hero" was coined by William Sibley in his study *The Shiga Hero* to designate Shiga's literary persona and the single character who appears throughout Shiga's opus. It is adopted in Edward Fowler's *The Rhetoric*, Roy Starrs's *An Artless Art*, and Tomi Suzuki's *Narrating the Self*, albeit sometimes with modifications to its connotation. A more detailed discussion of this concept is included in section 1 of this Chapter.

Due to his revolt against patriarchy and conservative norms, the Shiga hero is believed to embody modern liberal thought of the kind that prevailed in the Taishō period. However, the Shiga hero's belief in individuality should not be taken for granted. By treating the identity of Shiga's autobiographical hero (or of Shiga) as something linear and static, many studies overlook how the hero is influenced by traditional family values and how he seeks to negotiate a balance between his modern self and his stance in a society where old ways of thinking linger.

Using Shiga's *shishōsetsu Reconciliation* as an example, this chapter attempts to show that Shiga's autobiographical hero does not simply value the individual over family in an effortless way. Instead, he vacillates between the desire to establish a modern, autonomous self and the desire to preserve family unity, thus demonstrating the often overlooked identity crisis facing Shiga and his contemporaries. To discover Shiga's sociohistorical positioning, this chapter also discusses Shiga's attitude towards individualism and gives an introduction of the White Birch School, the literary coterie to which Shiga belonged. The final section of this chapter focuses on *A Dark Night's Passing* to provide an extended discussion of Shiga's treatment of modernity and tradition, thereby further associating Shiga's *shishōsetsu* with Japan's modernity.

## 1. Shiga and the Shiga Hero

As has been noted in past studies, Shiga possessed the traits that might qualify him as an individualist, or even an egoist. In 1912, the 25-year-old Shiga wrote in his diary the often-cited passage: "I have come to love myself with a deep love. I have come to feel that my face is really beautiful. I have come to believe that few people are as great as I am. I must spend my whole life in mining that in me which is lovable, beautiful, and great."[127] With a strong tendency to focus attention on the self, Shiga acted on his own inclinations time and time again. He distanced himself from Christianity when he found that the Christian teaching on chastity was rigid. Thereafter, he quit school to pursue a writing career although his family had expected him to become a businessman, and he cut ties with his father when the latter disapproved of his marriage with a widowed woman. Owing to his revulsion against militarism, Shiga also tried all methods to escape from military service, yet during the same period he lavished a good deal of effort to commemorate a European artist he appreciated.[128] In general, Shiga refused to be bound by "dogmatic religion, ethics, systems, and ways of thought."[129] Having brought this attitude to his writing career, Shiga wrote in a letter dated 1937 that a literary work

[127] Shiga, *Zenshū*, XII, 223-24. Translation from Mathy, *Shiga*, 26.
[128] Kohl, *Shiga*, 49.
[129] Shiga, *Zenshū*, VIII, 180. Translation from Kohl, McClain, and McClellan, *The White Birch School*, 35.

should never attempt to instruct the masses, otherwise the work would become impure and ineffective.[130]

As manifested in Shiga's individualist attitude and social movements like the Taishō Democracy, concepts such as self-culturalism (*kyōyō shugi* 教養主義) and individual freedom flourished in Japan from the late Meiji era to the Taishō era. Along with the spread of these liberal ideas, intergenerational conflict became a dominant literary theme during this period.[131] Shiga's literature is no exception. The conflict between individual freedom and family authority presents a central theme that runs through Shiga's oeuvre. In particular, this conflict is depicted in many of his important *shishōsetsu*.

When analyzing Shiga, some studies tend to treat his *shishōsetsu* as a coherent whole and his autobiographical heroes as a single character. It is therefore pertinent to mention the concept of "the Shiga hero." This concept was first developed by William Sibley. Relying on psychoanalytic theories, Sibley argues that there is a consistent character who appears in almost all of Shiga's works, including those more fictional ones.[132] Whilst it is questionable whether the connections among Shiga's heroes are entirely coherent, it is possible to identify a central character throughout Shiga's autobiographical works. In these works, the reader frequently meets a young man from a privileged family who is

[130] Shiga, *Zenshū*, XVI, 219-20.
[131] Cody Poulton, "Feather Returns," in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Drama*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer, Mitsuya Mori, and M. Cody Poulton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 48.
[132] Sibley, *The Shiga Hero*, 1-11.

interested in writing, who openly disobeys his authoritarian father, and who makes his own marriage arrangements. This young man's antagonism against his father is constantly coupled with his complicated relationships with other family members, namely his deceased mother, his stepmother, his grandparents, and his younger sisters. Junkichi, the hero of *Reconciliation* who will be discussed later in this chapter, is a typical Shiga hero.

Based on the Shiga hero's "deviance" from traditional social norms, he has been widely viewed as a typical individualist. Sibley argues that the Shiga hero places so much trust in the dictates of his innermost self that he disregards "all other sources of moral direction."[133] In an essay on Shiga's philosophy of life, Ueda Makoto points out that for Shiga, an ideal novel creates an impression of natural beauty by depicting a man who conducts himself honestly.[134] This man would not surrender to social convention, but only does what is in tune with his innermost feelings even if his actions would lead to explosive family problems.[135] Furthermore, putting her focus on the Taishō intellectual milieu, Angela Yiu observes that the resistance of patriarchy in Shiga and other White

[133] Ibid., 53.
[134] Ueda Makoto, *Modern Japanese Writers and the Nature of Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 99.
[135] Ibid.

Birch School members' writings indicates that they placed the individual over family and society.[136]

However, as we will see, the Shiga hero, who can be viewed as a literary embodiment not only of Shiga but of his generation, is not unaffected by moral norms such as filial piety and collective conscientiousness, and he succumbs to family interests from time to time. The same comment could be made about Shiga. According to a postscript, the biggest challenge Shiga confronted when writing *A Dark Night Passing* was how to avoid embarrassing his father.[137] Even when suffering greatly from a creative slowdown, Shiga was reluctant to disturb his family; hence, he gave up the idea of writing about his daughter's unfortunate marriage although it gave him great motivation to write.[138] Elsewhere, Shiga harshly criticized the naturalist writer Shimazaki Tōson, who placed his self-development over his family.[139] It is possible to conclude that although Shiga was profoundly influenced by ideas of modern selfhood and free will, his stance towards individualism was not uncompromising, which contradicts the oversimplified view that he "emphasized the individual over family."[140]

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[136] Angela Yiu, "Atarashikimura: The Intellectual and Literary Contexts of a Taishō Utopian Village," *Japan Review*, no. 20 (2008): 214.
[137] Mathy, *Shiga*, 91.
[138] Kohl, *Shiga*, 162.
[139] In the novel "Kuniko" (*Kuniko* 邦子, 1927), Shiga uses his protagonist's voice to express his anger towards Shimazaki, who retrenched his living expense in order to complete a novel and, in doing so, caused his daughters' starving to death. See Shiga, "Kuniko," in *The Paper Door and Other Stories by Shiga Naoya*, trans. Lane Dunlop (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1992), 154.
[140] Yiu, "Atarashikimura," 214.

## 2. Shiga and the White Birch School

To be sure, Shiga was not the only "individualist" or "egoist" among his contemporaries. He shared his belief in individuality with, foremost, members of the White Birch School. In light of the relatively liberal intellectual and cultural atmosphere of early-twentieth-century Japan, the White Birch School was considered one of the most characteristic literary groups of this period. In 1910, Shiga, Mushanokōji, Arishima Takeo 有島武郎 (1878-1923), and other progressive young men, all of whom were from well-established families, formed the White Birch School and started the magazine *White Birch* (*Shirakaba* 白樺).[141] In addition to introducing the latest trends of Western art and literature to Japan, *White Birch* was also given credit for promoting modern ideas such as humanism, liberalism, and individualism. Sharing the belief that the pursuit of the self was the ultimate goal of life, members of the White Birch School saw the purpose of art and literature as expressing one's self.[142] As the member Yanagi Sōetsu 柳宗悦 (1889-1961) proclaimed: "The ultimate form of art is art for the Self…. Without your

[141] The magazine appeared monthly for fourteen years until the Great Kantō Earthquake (1923) and the ensuing fire destroyed its printing facilities. See Kohl, McClain, and McClellan, *The White Birch School*, 1.

[142] Erin Schoneveld, *Shirakaba and Japanese Modernism: Art Magazines, Artistic Collectives, and the Early Avant-Garde* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 109; Suzuki, *Narrating the Self*, 94.

own life there is neither truth nor beauty."[143] A more unabashed celebration of individuality can be found in Arishima's essay "Love, the Ruthless Plunderer" (*Oshiminaku ai wa ubau* 惜しみなく愛は奪う, 1920), wherein Arishima asserted that when there was a conflict between individuality and society, it was society that needed to change.[144] Mushanokōji, who was identified by Uno Koji as a founder of *shishōsetsu*,[145] went so far to claim that "I only love my self. Everyone else…are enemies to my growing self."[146]

The White Birch School was also remarkable for its cosmopolitan outlook. According to Tomi Suzuki, the White Birch School's "absolute acceptance of Western discourse," such as universalism and individualism, was a reflection of the general intellectual milieu of the 1910s.[147] By the early 1910s, the Meiji project of modernization was mostly completed, and Japan had successfully adopted many aspects of Western civilization. In this context, it has been argued by Roy Starrs that the Taishō writers, who were influenced more by Western culture than by Sino-Japanese culture, suffered very little from the sense of "cultural conflict" that had permeated the Meiji writers' works.[148]

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143 Schoneveld, *Shirakaba*, 109.
144 Fuminobu Murakami, *Ideology and Narrative in Modern Japanese Literature* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1996), 26.
145 Lippit, *Topographies*, 29.
146 Rimer, *Culture and Identity*, 277.
147 Suzuki, *Narrating the Self*, 53.
148 Roy Starrs, "Writing the National Narrative: Changing Attitudes toward Nation-Building among Japanese Writers, 1900–1930," in *Japan's Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy, 1900-1930*, ed. Sharon Minichiello (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 215.

Indeed, the sense of identity crisis provoked by Japan's encounter with the West was never a central concern of the White Birch School. While Meiji writers like Natsume Sōseki bemoaned that his generation was caught between the oppression of the old Japan and the oppression of the new Occident,[149] Mushanokōji announced that he and his generation were "children of the world."[150]

Consistent with their cosmopolitan and individualist orientations, members of the White Birch School did not have much faith in fervent patriotism, nor did they actively participate in public matters. Commenting on General Nogi Maresuke's 乃木希典 (1849-1912) suicide upon the death of Emperor Meiji, Mushanokōji wrote on the newest issue of *White Birch* that "there is nothing in the death of Nogi which appeals to humanity, whereas the death of Van Gogh is a loss to humanity."[151] In a diary entry written during the same period, Shiga simply called the General "a fool."[152] Such an attitude made a sharp contrast with the older generation of writers such as Sōseki and Mori Ōgai who were deeply impressed with General Nogi's loyalty.[153] Nonetheless, while Shiga found General Nogi's ritualistic suicide unimpressive, he publicly lamented the death of his junior Kobayashi Takiji 小林多喜二 (1903-1933), a revolutionary

[149] Kikuchi Yuko, *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory: Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 78.
[150] Lippit, *Topographie*s, 12.
[151] Arima, *The Failure*, 108.
[152] Shiga, *Zenshū*, XII, 272.
[153] Arima, *The Failure*, 108.

proletarian writer who was murdered by the police. It can be said that Shiga and his peers adhered more to ethics of "ultimate end," a concept developed by Max Weber, than to ethics of responsibility.[154] In other words, they cared more about whether their actions were sincere than about the social and political consequences of the actions.

That said, it is important to bear in mind that Japan's modernization should not be equated with Westernization, and that Japan has never completely broken with its past, as evident in the deification of Emperor Meiji and the preservation of aristocratic institutions. As Arima Tatsuo has elucidated in his insightful study, modern Japanese intellectuals were caught in the historical paradox that "modern Japan was born not so much of the victory of the new forces over the old as of the skillful self-transformation of the old forces themselves."[155] Given this context, it is barely surprising that the White Birch School members' appreciation of Western civilization did not mean they had distanced themselves from native Japanese culture.[156] In the 1920s, the magazine *White Birch* shifted its focus from Western arts to Eastern arts, which was a direct reflection of the members' involvement with native culture.[157]

[154] Ibid., 112.
[155] Ibid., 214.
[156] Ibid., 121-24.
[157] Remarkably, although the White Birch School showed little interest in sociopolitical concerns, this shift was in tune with Japan's promotion of cultural nationalism at the time. More details will be provided in section 5.

Furthermore, by focusing too heavily on the influence of Western civilization on the White Birch School, some studies overlook the fact that the members' attitude toward imported ideas was critical rather than submissive. This thesis challenges the view that the White Birch School had an "absolute acceptance of Western discourse."[158] Yanagi, for example, wrote that although he doubted if there was a complete difference between the West and the East, he believed that Japanese people needed to learn "the power of questioning" and be more mindful of "an immense importation of foreign ideas."[159] In this way, Yanagi sides with S. N. Eisenstadt's contention that non-Western societies' study from the West entails "the continuous selection, reinterpretation, and reformulation" of imported ideas.[160] That is to say, despite the fact that imported liberal ideas were not alien to the White Birch School intellectuals, they had to go through the process of experimenting with these ideals and reconciling them with a society that was still fostering traditional norms. As Ikuho Amano (borrowing from Homi Bhabha) has pointed out, Japan's mimicry of the West "did not transform Japan into the West but into something almost but not quite the West."[161] Therefore, it is necessary to consider the "local specificity" of the White Birch School's experience with modern ideas.[162]

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158 Suzuki, *Narrating the Self*, 53.
159 Kikuchi, *Japanese Modernisation*, 79
160 S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 15.
161 Ikuho Amano, *Decadent Literature in Twentieth-Century Japan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2. Amano postulates that Japan was in a "'pseudo'-colonial situation."
162 Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 5.

Under the joint influence of liberal ideals and traditional norms, the White Birch School intellectuals, self-assertive as they seemed, were not liberated from identity problems. From one perspective, this group of young men strived to construct their identities rooted in the liberty of the individual. From the other perspective, they were well aware of the impossibility of implementing these progressive values.[163] In that sense, the White Birch School's identity crisis was not so much a problem of the cultural conflict between the West and the East as it was a problem of the opposition between tradition and modernity. Disappointed at the discrepancies between the liberal ideas promoted by the White Birch School and social reality, members like Arishima and Satomi Ton 里見弴 (1888-1983) eventually distanced themselves from the group.[164] Shiga, too, became gradually less involved in the group as he was opposed to its "overt promotion of humanitarianism."[165]

The conflict between the Western-derived liberal values and Japanese traditional norms was particularly intense in patriarchal families like those of Arishima and Shiga. Even more paradoxical was the fact that most members of the White Birch School relied

[163] For example, Arishima, who was of aristocratic origin, lamented in his essay "A Manifesto" (*Sengen hitotsu* 宣言一つ, 1922) that he hoped to reach out to the poor but remained an outsider to them. In 1922, he handed over his family land to his tenants to build a communal farm but was disheartened by obstacles. See Kohl, McClain, and McClellan, *The White Birch School*, 86-87; Michele Mason, *Dominant Narratives of Colonial Hokkaido and Imperial Japan: Envisioning the Periphery and the Modern Nation-State* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 130-39.
[164] Kohl, McClain, and McClellan, *The White Birch School*, 92-93.
[165] Guo, *Refining Nature*, 69.

on their families for nurturing and financial support. In other words, it was difficult for them to divorce from the traditional family bonds, since it was precisely their paternalistic families that allowed them to become who they were and to live as they would desire. Thus, they could not be completely modern, because "to be modern was to be free from ties of community and tradition," nor could they "live with common cultural values and strongly inscribed traditions that effectively denied democracy, individual self-development, and equality."[166] For this reason, a great challenge facing the members of the White Birch School was to find a way out of this dilemma. Such a dilemma is evidenced in Mushanokōji's *Mother and Child* (*Haha to ko* 母と子, 1927), Arishima's *The Agony of Coming into Existence* (*Umareizuru nayami* 生まれ出ずる悩み, 1918), and Shiga's "The Case of Sasaki" (*Sasaki no baai* 佐々木の場合, 1917), where the protagonists struggle to negotiate a balance between their personal desires and their responsibilities for their families and close ones.

This chapter will now use the novella *Reconciliation* to examine the modern Japanese man's struggle between his individual identity and his collective identity. The first reason for choosing this particular piece is that *Reconciliation* has received limited critical attention in Western academia although it is a *shishōsetsu* par excellence.[167] Second, *Reconciliation* manifests the identity issues confronting Shiga and his

[166] Alan Wolfe, *Whose Keeper? Social Science and Moral Obligation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 191-92.
[167] Starrs, *An Artless Art*, 15.

contemporaries. Third, while scholars often read Shiga's autobiographical hero as a steadfast individualist who defies conventions and family values, *Reconciliation* shows that the Shiga hero does not painlessly favor the individual over family but seeks to strike a balance between individual and collective interests.

### 3. Junkichi's Shaky Belief in Individualism

A first-person novella, *Reconciliation* depicts how the protagonist Junkichi reconciles with his father after a long period of disagreement without unfolding the reasons for their disagreement. The only reason mentioned in the story is that Junkichi's father opposed his marriage. Regardless of Shiga's reticence about the sources of the father-son conflicts, *Reconciliation* is one of Shiga's most celebrated works.[168] By interweaving flashbacks and simultaneous events, the story vividly depicts several emotional scenes, including the death of Junkichi's first child, the birth of his second child, his visits to his aging grandmother, and the final reconciliation between father and son.

Since there are close correspondences between events in *Reconciliation* and Shiga's real life, the story is often labeled as a typical *shishōsetsu*. The *shishōsetsu* "mode of reading" of this work is reinforced by Shiga's essay "Digression on My Literary

[168] Ibid., 13.

Working" (1928), where he attested that this story is faithfully biographical.[169] In an unpublished manuscript, Shiga further stated that he wondered why critics questioned his silence about the causes of the rift even though they knew that the author and the hero were "one and the same person."[170] He went on to explain that his silence was due to his unwillingness to go through the pain of recording the rift.[171]

Like many works of the genre of *shishōsetsu*, *Reconciliation* revolves around the hero Junkichi's feelings and experiences, limiting its narrative point of view to that of Junkichi. Although the story ends with a harmonious reconciliation, a considerable portion of it is fraught with Junkichi's frustration caused by his estrangement with his father. On several occasions, Junkichi is overwhelmed by anger, thus allowing his negative feelings to provoke harmful actions toward others. For this reason, Hijiya-Kirschnereit reads Junkichi as an egotist who has difficulties in staying in control of himself – throughout the story, Junkichi depends exclusively on his psychic condition and "the emotional significance of the given situation," always letting his boundless egocentrism guide his actions.[172] Based on her view that the story fails to depict a process of inner development, Hijiya-Kirschnereit also suggests that the reconciliation

[169] Shiga, *Zenshū*, XII, 272.
[170] Fowler, *The Rhetoric*, 216.
[171] Ibid. Shiga gave the major causes of the estrangement a few years later in the novella *A Certain Man and the Death of His Sister* (1920).
[172] Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 218.

between Junkichi and his father is, to a great extent, made possible by the "fortunate coincidence" that his father is in the mood to talk.

At first glance, the reconciliation does appear to be a coincidence. On the day of the reconciliation, Junkichi imagines that when he approaches his father, the latter will ignore him without saying a word. Firmly believing that this scene can actually happen, Junkichi tells his stepmother that "my feelings don't go that far, so I can't just swallow my pride and say I'm sorry. For me now to do as you say and just go to father and apologize, I would have to jump over a wide moat in a single leap."[173] However, the "wide moat" starts to diminish when Junkichi finds that his father's face and tone are both peaceful. Then, contrary to what Junkichi has imagined, his father listens to him with patience. The father's unexpected conciliatory attitude encourages Junkichi to express his regret at their estrangement, which lays the foundation for the reconciliation. In this respect, the process of reconciliation appears to be coupled with uncertainties.

A closer look at the story, however, reveals that Junkichi's belief in individualism is not entrenched, and that this novella is not merely an egotist's self-absorbed account of himself that is too shallow to possess any social value. Quite the opposite to Hijiya-Kirschnereit's reading, Junkichi sets out on a journey to achieve inner growth and confront the identity issues typical to his generation as he deepens his understanding of

[173] Shiga Naoya, "Reconciliation," in Starrs, *An Artless Art*, 227.

family bonds. His transition is particularly evident when we compare the two scenes in which Junkichi is ordered by his father to leave the family home. The first scene occurs a few months before the birth of Junkichi's first daughter. Enraged by his father's order, Junkichi pushes his pregnant wife away ruthlessly, ignoring his crying stepmother and leaving the house at midnight.[174] At this stage, Junkichi is the slave of his emotions.

Yet, Junkichi's state of mind undergoes changes. Following his first "banishment" from the family home, we witness two memorable events of Junkichi's life: his first daughter dies despite his best efforts, and he regains the joy of being a father a few months later when his wife becomes pregnant again. Now, with a growing understanding of life, death, family, and father's role, Junkichi starts to feel "deep sympathy" for his father who is getting old.[175]

Shortly after the birth of his second daughter, Junkichi finds that his beloved grandmother is haunted by the shadow of death. This unfortunate news further distracts Junkichi from his preoccupation with the self. The second scene of Junkichi's reluctant leaving of his family home occurs when Junkichi visits his sick grandmother. After a short meeting with the grandmother, Junkichi is ordered by his father to leave. Yet, this time he is able to control his anger. He describes his feelings as follows:

> I was unhappy. And angry too. But, reminding myself that nothing had happened there which I had not expected, I was able to prevent my whole emotional being

[174] Shiga, "Reconciliation," 186-87.
[175] Ibid., 212.

> from surrendering to that unhappiness. I consciously resisted that temptation. Even so, grandmother's condition caused me deep distress.[176]

Once again, Junkichi becomes irritated, but this time he does not surrender to his negative emotions. What concerns him now is not his disagreement with his father but his grandmother's health.

It could be argued that Junkichi has always had a strong attachment to his grandmother, so it is only natural for him to pull himself out of his self-absorption for the sake of her health. However, Junkichi's change is also reflected in his feelings towards his father, to whom he feels hostile. The two letters that Junkichi writes to his father are the clearest examples of his changing attitudes. The first letter is written shortly after Junkichi's free-choice marriage. In the hope to ease his tension with his son, Junkichi's father plans to visit the newlyweds in Kyoto. Nonetheless, Junkichi decides to shun him. He justifies himself by asserting that although he does not want to hurt his father's feelings, he dislikes even more the idea of concealing his own feelings. Thus, after his father has arrived, Junkichi forces his mentally weak wife to give the father a letter, where he states bluntly that he does not want to meet him. In the end, Junkichi's father leaves Kyoto angrily without seeing his son. In fact, Junkichi knows clearly that the letter is going to give his father great pain, but he decides to follow his emotions, insisting that the situation cannot be helped: "I imagined father all by himself in his room at the inn

[176] Ibid., 221.

reading my letter with a sinking heart. I began to feel miserable myself. But I thought that it couldn't be helped."[177] No matter how miserable Junkichi feels, egotism prevails over him. He cannot help indulging his own feelings at the cost of the feelings of his close ones.

The second letter, though uncompleted, is written after Junkichi's second "banishment" from the family home. During the process of writing this letter, Junkichi once again imagines his father's reactions. Yet this time, his father's reactions exert an overwhelming influence on him: when he imagines his father reading the letter unhappily, he can do nothing but put down the pen. Junkichi's inability to finish the letter is a significant manifestation of his inner changes. Whereas he is determined to express his emotions at all costs when writing the first letter, this time his process is interrupted by his father's unhappy face lingering in his mind. Unable to complete the letter, Junkichi eventually decides to visit his father, and therefore to confront an unknown future instead of hiding behind his wife. Although Junkichi emphasizes that he will only do what he feels natural when meeting father, he also acknowledges that if he can control his emotions effortlessly regardless of his father's attitude, then that would be the most ideal situation. At this stage, Junkichi posits his ego-centeredness as something that needs to be overcome, and he no longer places his own feelings over all else.

[177] Ibid., 185.

## 4. The Individual Self versus the Collective Self

As we have seen, Junkichi's faith in individualism is not unshakable. Instead, his inner development allows him to soften his feelings and therefore prepares him for the reconciliation. However, the reconciliation is not only made possible by Junkichi's inner growth, but also by his continuous negotiation with his family.

Among the very few English-language studies on *Reconciliation*, Ted Goossen's article "Connecting Rhythms: Nature and Selfhood in Shiga Naoya's 'Reconciliation' and 'A Dark's Night's Passing'" is noteworthy. Focusing on the notions of "the frame of mind" (*kibun* 気分) and "the principle of spontaneity" (*shizen* 自然, literally "nature"), Goossen plausibly argues that *Reconciliation* can be better understood if we interpret the "reconciliation" as Junkichi's reconciliation with "the natural principle operating within himself."[178] Taking his cue from the family celebration that follows the reconciliation between father and son, Goossen also contends that Junkichi "returns to" his family fold "painlessly and effortlessly," and that his identity "is not sacrificed in the process."[179] Goossen certainly has a point: after the reconciliation has been achieved, Junkichi

[178] Ted Goossen, "Connecting Rhythms: Nature and Selfhood in Shiga Naoya's *Reconciliation* and *A Dark's Night's Passing*," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 5 (1993): 23.
[179] Ibid., 26.

experiences no difficulty in immersing himself in family life. However, Goossen's analysis overlooks Junkichi's identity dilemma: Junkichi never completely divorces himself from his family fold, nor does he completely object traditional family system and virtues. Instead, he vacillates between individual identity and collective identity, searching for a balance between his individuality and traditional family morals. In this respect, Junkichi's reentry into the family is not simply a one-time effort but is derived from a long negotiation, and the novella can be read in a broader sociocultural context.

Although Junkichi, by taking a stand against his father's authority, appears to be a modern independent man, a few facts illustrate that he never vehemently objects his identity within the family. His earliest compliance with the traditional family structure can be traced back to the time when his wife is about to give birth to their first daughter. In spite of his conflicts with his father, Junkichi sees his family as a reliable source of support: he sends his wife to Tokyo to stay at the family home, letting her go to a gynecologist who is his father's friend and deliver in a hospital recommended by the father. After the delivery, both his wife and the baby stay at the family home for another few weeks. All the expenses of the birth are covered by his father, although Junkichi accepts with resistance. As these facts suggest, Junkichi's role during his wife's pregnancy and delivery is more like that of a son of a feudal paternalistic family than a member of his own nuclear family or a discrete individual.

With this background in mind, it becomes easier to understand why Junkichi gives his grandmother permission to take his newborn daughter from Abiko (where Junkichi is living) to Tokyo at his father's request. Knowing that the entire family wants to use the baby to effect a reconciliation between him and his father, Junkichi claims that this is against his will. From Junkichi's own perspective, he does not want to take advantage of the baby, nor does he want to move the baby. Yet, to meet the family's expectations, Junkichi eventually suppresses his feeling and makes a concession. Such a concession is consistent with his role in the family. Moreover, although the journey to Tokyo eventually contributes to the baby's death and therefore intensifies his animosity towards his father, Junkichi maintains harmonious relationships with other family members. Throughout the novella, he is never completely detached from his family fold.

At the same time, Junkichi refuses to let his collective identity override his individual identity. Thus, he vigorously disagrees with his stepmother when she says "if you should have any kind of clash with your father during this sickness that would be the worst misfortune of all."[180] Paradoxically, Junkichi too views his estrangement with his father as a concern of the entire family. The clearest evidence is that Junkichi has no objection to his uncle and stepmother's presence at his reconciling meeting with father.

[180] Shiga, "Reconciliation," 220.

On the day of the reconciliation, Junkichi once again vacillates between individual desires and collective norms. Before Junkichi meets his father, his stepmother says to him:

> Even one word of apology is enough, so please swallow your pride, admit that the problems between you and him up to now have been your fault, and apologize. Father is growing old, so really he is suffering greatly because of his present relationship with you. And so, if you say just one word of apology, he will be satisfied with that. As a parent, he feels that he should not initiate a dialogue with such a rebellious child – that's not unreasonable, is it?[181]

Underpinning what Junkichi's stepmother says here are traditional family virtues, according to which the son is supposed to be filial, to be obedient, to take care of his aging parents, and to designate moral obligation (*giri* 義理) as more important than feelings (*ninjō* 人情). By these standards, Junkichi surely is a "rebellious child" even though he does not consider himself completely wrong, and even though he is a grown-up man who has already started his own family. As a son, specifically as a rebellious son, Junkichi should be the one to apologize. However, as Junkichi's individualist self prevents him from giving up his pride, he rejects his stepmother's request. Yet, by saying "Maybe when I actually meet him my feelings will improve more easily than I presently imagine," Junkichi suggests that there is room for negotiation.[182]

At the beginning of his conversation with his father, Junkichi's attitude is somewhat ambivalent when he says: "The way things have gone up to now couldn't be helped. I

[181] Ibid., 227.
[182] Ibid.

feel sorry for you because of some of the things I've done. And I think I was wrong sometimes."[183] In an attempt to achieve an agreement with his father, Junkichi expresses his regret and remorse. At the same time, he preserves his pride by emphasizing that he only did some of the things (*aru koto* ある事) wrongly.[184] This echoes with what Junkichi has said to his stepmother earlier: he cannot simply say sorry to his father although he admits that he is "wrong in some things."[185] Then, when the father asks Junkichi if what he says is true only while grandmother is alive, Junkichi's answer is again implicit: "Until I met with you today I didn't intend it to be permanent. It would have been enough to get your permission to visit grandmother freely while she was alive. But if I may really hope for something more than that, then that would be ideal." Although both Junkichi and his father come up with tears in their eyes after these words are spoken, Junkichi never directly articulates what he hopes to achieve. However, when Junkichi's father explains the situation to his stepmother, who has just entered the room at her husband's request, the following conversation takes place:

> "Junkichi has just said that he too disapproves of the way our relationship has been going, and in future he wants to return to a long-lasting father-son relationship… Is that right?"[186] He stopped and looked over at me.
> "Yes," I said, and nodded.[187]

[183] Ibid., 228.
[184] Shiga, *Shiga Naoya shū*, 417.
[185] Shiga, "Reconciliation," 227.
[186] Here I have made minor modifications to Roy Starrs's translation in order to include the translation of the word "*nagaku*" 永く (long-lasting, permanent), and to better illustrate the pause in the father's voice. See Shiga, *Shiga Naoya shū*, 418-19.
[187] Shiga, "Reconciliation," 229.

In the father's retelling, Junkichi's attitude is no longer ambivalent, and he appears to be keen to effect a reconciliation. Moreover, by taking a pause and looking at Junkichi, the father seeks Junkichi's confirmation of his authority. With a conciliatory attitude that develops during the meeting, Junkichi lowers his pride, calmly accepting his father's words and gaze. In doing so, Junkichi eventually fulfills his family's expectations for him.

We do not know if Junkichi is comfortable with the conversation until the next day, when his father visits his house in Abiko for the first time:

> Nevertheless, when the small group [Junkichi's sisters] had all gone outside, father said to my wife: "Junkichi says he hopes that from now on we can relate to each other as father and son, and truly this is also my own wish, so I would like you too to act as if all the unpleasantness between us had never happened." ...When father had begun to speak, I expected him to say to my wife exactly what he'd said to mother the day before. And I'd been confident that, even if he said only that, I would certainly not be dissatisfied. But he hadn't just repeated himself, and I felt very good about this – and also was grateful to him.[188]

This time, the father is more succinct in his description of the reconciliation, and he emphasizes that the reconciliation is also his wish. Stating that he feels grateful that his father does not just repeat himself, Junkichi discloses the fact that he does find something disagreeable in what his father said yesterday, though he is able to spontaneously "draw back and maintain a certain composure" as he has hoped and to swallow his pride as his stepmother has hoped.[189]

[188] Ibid., 233.
[189] Ibid., 225.

After the reconciliation has been achieved, Junkichi's father, by visiting Junkichi's house for the first time, praising the house in front of other family members, and accepting a gift that Junkichi purchases with his own income, treats his son with unprecedented respect.[190] Other family members, too, wholeheartedly welcome Junkichi's reentry into the family. In that sense, it can be said that Junkichi has "found selfhood in his family bonds."[191] But as the above analysis has shown, this happens only after Junkichi has succumbed to his family's expectations.

In the last two parts of the story, Junkichi embraces his collective identity without any forced feelings; hence, the scenes following the reconciliation is depicted by him as a joyful experience shared by the whole family. Shedding happy tears, his stepmother repeatedly expresses her gratitude for Junkichi. His father keeps glancing at the picture of Junkichi's deceased mother and deceased older brother, thereby connecting the deceased ones with this event, and the entire clan in their hometown breaks down when hearing about the reconciliation. Upon reading a congratulation letter from his sister, Junkichi himself also bursts into tears. We can assume that Junkichi now agrees with his stepmother that each family member's behavior affects the entire family. In her brief comment on *Reconciliation*, Cecilia Seigle observes that the novella discloses "the positive side of being a member of a Japanese family in its most traditional feudal

[190] Ibid., 233-36.
[191] Goossen, "Connecting Rhythms," 26.

form."[192] But again, this "positive side" becomes clear only after Junkichi has made concessions to his family.

At the end of *Reconciliation*, as Junkichi immerses himself in the restored harmony of the family, he feels slightly tired, but in a good way: "it was a gentle fatigue that brought with it a sense of slightly detached tranquility, like that of a small lake shrouded by heavy mist in the depths of the mountains. It was also like the tiredness of a traveler who has finally reached home after a tediously long and unpleasant journey."[193] Hijiya-Kirschnereit has noted that in the process of writing *Reconciliation*, Shiga translated "his own personal conflict into literature."[194] In the same logic, it can be said that Shiga also translated his hope of "reaching home" into the work.

Through learning to overcome his egoism and to negotiate his identity in the face of traditional family values and structure, Junkichi, a typical Shiga hero, eventually achieves a balance between his individual self and his collective self. He becomes fully aware that he is not only a modern individual but a member of his family with which he shares emotions and memories. Like Shiga and his contemporaries, Junkichi's modern identity is never linear and stable. He does not simply privilege his individual over his family or the other way around. Instead, he resists collectivism but at the same time makes concessions to it; he celebrates individualism but at the same time tries to overcome it. In

[192] Seigle, "Shiga Naoya," 190-91.
[193] Shiga, "Reconciliation," 232.
[194] Hijiya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals*, 217.

this regard, *Reconciliation*, despite its narrow scope, throws light on the dilemma of identity facing intellectuals in early-twentieth-century Japan.

## 5. The Imagined Native Place in *A Dark Night's Passing*

Here it is necessary to expand our discussion about Shiga's treatment of modernity. Similar to the way in which Shiga and the Shiga hero's modern individualism is taken for granted, their rediscovery of Japanese culture and nature is sometimes treated as a one-way movement from the admiration of the modern to the admiration of tradition.

Section 2 of this chapter noted that in the 1920s, members of the White Birch School started to attach more attention to Japan's native culture. Accordingly, they devoted the last few issues of the journal *White Birch* to Japanese artworks.[195] This shift is interpreted as "a common phenomenon among educated Japanese,"[196] due to the fact that the 1920s and the following decades saw the consolidation of Japan's nationalism and nativism, by which the White Birch School and their contemporaries were influenced. In his survey of Japan's modernism, Donald Keene goes so far as to assert that many Japanese modernists during the 1920s and 1930s, such as Tanizaki and Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 (1899-1972), eventually carried out "an inevitable return to

[195] Arima, *The Failure*, 124.
[196] Ibid., 125.

Japan."[197] Meanwhile, modernization led to an accelerated sense of discontinuity. Kobayashi Hideo once lamented that the ever-changing landscape of Tokyo made him feel rootless: "Looking back, I see that from an early age my feelings were distorted by an endless series of changes occurring too fast."[198] Out of this sense of discontinuity, and under the auspices of the nation-building project, there emerged a popular discourse centering on the rediscovery of the native place (*furusato*/*kokyō* 故郷, literally "old village").[199] Also, the nativist ethnography (*minzokugaku* 民俗学) movement in which practitioners sought to restore the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature came to light.[200]

As already discussed, the world of the *shishōsetsu* hero is a microcosm of the external world. Thus, it is not a coincidence that in Shiga's *shishōsetsu* such as *A Dark Night's Passing* and "Bonfire," a profound sense of nostalgia for Japan's traditional culture and

[197] Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 1:708. The expression "return to Japan" (*Nihon e no kaiki* 日本への回帰) is derived from the poet Hagiwara Sakutarō's 萩原朔太郎 (1886-1942) 1938 essay of the same name. In the essay, Hagiwara encouraged Japanese writers to focus on Japanese traditions instead of Western culture. See William J. Tyler, "Fission/Fusion: *Modanizumu* in Japanese Fiction," in *Pacific Rim Modernisms*, ed. Gillies Mary Ann, Sword Helen, and Yao Steven (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 210-11.

[198] Kobayashi, *Literature of the Lost Home*, 48-49.

[199] Martin Dusinberre, *Hard Times in the Hometown: A History of Community Survival in Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 137. *Furusato* not only refers to actual hometowns and rural villages, but has a strong association with such terms as "countryside," "nature," "mountain," and "simple." See Jennifer Robertson, "*Furusato* Japan: The Culture and Politics of Nostalgia," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 1, no. 4 (1988): 503.

[200] Janet Walker, "The Epiphanic Ending of Shiga's 'An'ya kōro' (A Dark Night's Passing; 1921-1937) in a Modernist Context," *Japanese Language and Literature* (2003): 173-74.

"pastoral tranquility" is cultivated.[201] In particular, *A Dark Night's Passing*, Shiga's most important work, is often used by critics to study his understanding of modernity, tradition, and nature. The novel, consisting of four parts, tells the story of the young Tokyo writer Tokitō Kensaku, who suffers from the incestuous secret of his family, his uncontrollable sexual drive, marital problems, and – typical to the Shiga hero – creative block and egotism. Throughout the novel, Kensaku travels to various parts of Japan until he eventually finds inner peace during his stay on Mt. Daisen.

Previous studies have pointed out that Kensaku's journey is characterized by a progressive retreat from urban areas into nature. The trajectory of his journey is summarized by Goossen as a backwards progression: "from 'modern' Tokyo, to 'medieval' (but modernizing) Onomochi, to 'Heian' Kyoto to the ancient holy mountain."[202] Indeed, since it took Shiga over a decade to complete *A Dark Night's Passing*, the novel outlines a growing sensitivity to native place and culture. In the first half of the novel, which is published in 1921 and divided into two chapters, Kensaku, though feeling alienated by city life, is an admirer of modern science and human will. He does make trips to less modernized areas and engage with nature, but nature is more of a site of threatening otherness. For example, the nighttime sea instills into Kensaku "the hopeless feeling that he was about to be swallowed up by the great darkness around

[201] Robertson, "*Furusato* Japan," 508.
[202] Goossen, "Connecting Rhythms," 29-30.

him."[203] In comparison, in the second half of the novel, which was not finished until 1937, Kensaku finds traditional Japanese culture and rural life to be a cure for his traumatic memories. Later, during his stay at the Renjōin temple on Mt. Daisen, Kensaku is constantly inspired by his natural surroundings while losing interest in modern creations such as airplanes.[204] By the end of the novel, Kensaku, weakened by food poisoning, pleasurably "dissolve[s] into" nature when seeing a sunrise on the mountainside solitarily.

In this sense, Janet Walker, as one of the few Western critics to place Shiga's novels within the broader social context, is right to say that the novel reflects "the 1920s expeditions of *minzokugakusha* (ethnologists) to the rural areas of Japan in search of an unspoiled (i.e., unmodernized) Japanese nature and community life."[205] Similarly, Nanyan Guo views the novel as a primary example of how modern Japanese intellectuals overcome the crisis of modernity by embracing nature, and Stephen Dodd bases his analysis of the novel on the concept of *furusato*.[206] However, if native place signifies a nostalgia for a "pure culture" that is unsullied by "outside forces such as westernization,

[203] Shiga Naoya, *A Dark Night's Passing*, trans. Edwin McClellan (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1976), 115.
[204] Ibid., 374.
[205] Walker, "The Epiphanic Ending," 173-74.
[206] Guo, *Refining Nature*, 11-20; Dodd, *Writing Home*, 214-54. Dodd argues that as a man growing up in Tokyo, Shiga had no real *furusato* and therefore had to invent one. With his outstanding literary skills, Shiga consciously constructed a harmonious, timeless *furusato* but failed to acknowledge the social tension of the 1930s.

industrialization, urbanization, and…internationalization,"[207] then it is necessary to expand Walker's argument: in *A Dark Night's Passing*, an "unspoiled" native place is but an illusion; rather, the *furusato* constituted by Shiga is fluid, integrating both modern and traditional elements. After all, Japan's progress toward modernity has never been halted, and, after decades of modernization and learning from the West, the division between what is indigenously Japan and what is not is no longer clear-cut.[208]

It goes without saying that many Japanese in the 1920s and 1930s considered modern life promising and exciting. Parallel to the nostalgic sentiment and *furusato* discourse, there was a popular discourse celebrating the experience of modernity.[209] The native place that Shiga represents in *A Dark Night's Passing* captures both of these parallel discourses. Throughout his *furusato*-seeking journey, Kensaku never creates a tenable dichotomy between modernity and tradition. Although it is his reclusive life on the mountain that empowers him to attain enlightenment, he never "abandon[s] modernism,"[210] to borrow Keene's comments on Tanizaki. Instead, Kensaku

[207] Robertson, "*Furusato* Japan," 508.
[208] The myth of a unique, pristine Japanese culture has been demystified. For example, it has been pointed out that Japan's literary classics were "invented" in the late nineteenth century for nation-building purposes. See Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki, ed., *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 11-14.
[209] Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 95.
[210] Keene, *Dawn*, 1:757. Keene's statement here is questionable. The most straightforward evidence is that Tanizaki retained his passion for modernist fiction and cinema throughout his career. See Tyler, "Fission/Fusion," 211-12.

incorporates elements of modernity into his everyday life regardless of where his journeys take him. In Kyoto, which Kensaku depicts as an ancient land that leads him "gently back to ancient times,"[211] he visits cinemas and uses modern means of transport no less frequently than he did in Tokyo. In Mt. Daisen, when writing to his wife to tell her that he has gained a more peaceful frame of mind by observing nature, he, perhaps even unconsciously, uses pages from his "Western-style notebook."[212] On the hiking trip leading to his enlightenment, Kensaku's partners are, ironically, a group of company employees from the modern city of Osaka.[213] Even in the climax scene where Kensaku embraces nature unreservedly, modern elements are not out of the picture: electric lights in the nearby city and villages, and the silhouette of Mihonoseki lighthouse – a Western-style architecture designed by a French engineer – seamlessly blend into the natural landscape in which Kensaku is immersed.[214] Viewed in this light, it seems inaccurate to say that Kensaku's epiphanic journey takes him "out of modernity and…back into a natural world that, in its vast geological antiquity, is the antithesis of modernity."[215]

While previous studies on *A Dark Night's Passing* tend to emphasize the destructive power of modernity, this thesis points out that Kensaku is also a beneficiary of modern

[211] Shiga, *A Dark Night's Passing*, 202.
[212] Ibid., 385.
[213] Ibid., 398.
[214] Nihon Kenchiku Gakkai, ed., *Sōran Nihon no kenchiku*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Shin Kenchikusha, 1986), 51.
[215] Walker, "The Epiphanic Ending," 174.

life. Overall, Kensaku straddles modernity and tradition as much as Junkichi in *Reconciliation* does. Kensaku's feelings toward Tokyo are far from entirely negative, nor is his journey a steady "backwards progression."[216] Tokyo, when compared to Onomichi, is a modern capital that provides Kensaku with easy and pleasurable access to advanced medical services and international food. He describes his feelings of returning to Tokyo as "a poor boy who's just moved into a mansion."[217] Such excitement foreshadows Kensaku's uneasiness with the inadequate medical care on Mt. Daisen.[218] In short, for Kensaku, Tokyo is more than a site of alienation. It is imbued with positive qualities like efficiency, vibrancy, and integration. Vice versa, rural areas denote not only tranquility and traditional ambiance but backwardness. To dichotomize Shiga's representations of modernity and tradition/nature is to ignore Kensaku's sense of dislocation in rural areas and to run the risk of essentializing an "originary Japan" where individuals have a stable sense of unity with nature and society.[219]

If *Reconciliation* alludes to the impossibility of cutting ties with Japan's past, then Kensaku's journey sheds light on the impracticality of staying, either physically or psychologically, completely isolated from modernized Japan. In either case, modernity and tradition are not exclusive entities. As Jennifer Robertson has accurately described:

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[216] Goossen, "Connecting Rhythms," 29.
[217] Shiga, *A Dark Night's Passing*, 164.
[218] Ibid., 384-85.
[219] Walker, "The Epiphanic Ending," 167, 174.

"internationalization and native place-making exist coterminously as refractive processes and products, and…together they index the ambiguity of Japanese national identity and its tense relationship with cultural identity (or identities)."[220] In *Reconciliation*, we see Junkichi, a Shiga hero, with his awareness of individuality, rebelling against patriarchy like Shiga and his contemporaries under the influence of Western liberal ideals did. Nonetheless, behind Junkichi's seeming preoccupation with modern values, he tacitly acknowledges and benefits from his role as the son of a feudal family, where he is subordinate to the older generations. Furthermore, regardless of Junkichi's self-assertion, he recognizes his modern ego as a threat to collectivist harmony. The significance of such harmony is never denied by Junkichi or his society, obligating him to compromise his personal preferences from time to time.

In *A Dark Night's Passing*, we again see a Shiga hero, Kensaku, struggling with his modern ego. This time, however, the Shiga hero progressively discovers a new solution to his problems: Japanese culture and nature, which is in line with Japan's native-place building project and discourse during the 1920s and 1930s. Yet, as we have seen, modernity is ingrained in Kensaku. Even the climax scene of the novel can be interpreted as Kensaku's union with a mixture of internationalized, industrialized Japan and its natural landscapes, rather than with an unsullied native place. In this regard, the

[220] Jennifer Robertson, "It Takes A Village," in *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, ed. Stephen Vlastos (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 112.

equivocal relationship between tradition and modernity in early-twentieth-century Japan is highlighted in both *shishōsetsu*.

Through rethinking Shiga and his autobiographical hero's image as either a Westernized modern individualist who is free from the yoke of tradition, or a victim of modernity who eventually "returns to Japan," we become able to see that collectively, *Reconciliation* and *A Dark Night's Passing* underscore the dynamic, intricate image of modern Japan. On the one hand, it absorbs modern civilization extensively; on the other hand, it retains the so-called "traditional, immutable core of culture."[221] Thus, these *shishōsetsu* of Shiga are more than projections of his narrow personal world. They are capable of reflecting social realities as "regular" novels are.

[221] Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 2.

# Conclusion

Deemed a very important figure in modern Japanese literature, Shiga Naoya's works are nevertheless surrounded by controversies, most of which are directed towards his *shishōsetsu*. Flourishing throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century in Japan, *shishōsetsu* is best known for its single-consciousness narration focusing on the private sphere of the protagonist or the narrator, who is often equated with the author.

Yet the definition of *shishōsetsu* is far from clear. In many cases, the connection between the protagonist/narrator and the author is rather tenuous. It is also hard to identify the defining, fixed characteristics shared by the numerous works considered to fall into this genre. It comes as little surprise then that scholars have questioned the validity of categorizing some of Shiga's writings, particularly those with more fabricated elements, as *shishōsetsu*.

The major contributor to *shishōsetsu*'s intangible definition is the concept of "reality." "Reality," long considered a key component of various forms of Japanese literature, denotes not only factual reality but also emotional, spiritual reality, and the latter denotation was assigned greater importance by *shishōsetsu* writers than the first. More importantly, it is the reader who determines whether or not a text reflects reality; it is the also reader who explores the connection between the protagonist/narrator and the author. Thus, as Tomi Suzuki has argued, it is better to understand *shishōsetsu* as a mode of reading instead of a mode of writing. As a supplement to Suzuki's argument, we

should also keep in mind the multilayered meaning of "reality." That is to say, the *shishōsetsu* reading mode can be activated either when the readers see objective truth in a text, or when they see the text as a projection of the author's inner reality. In this regard, fabricated factors do not necessarily disqualify Shiga's works from being *shishōsetsu* or challenge Shiga's status as a leading practitioner of *shishōsetsu*.

Owing to *shishōsetsu*'s personal perspective, a general assumption about *shishōsetsu* writers is that they are preoccupied with their personal lives while showing no interest in surveying their social environment with a critical eye. Correspondingly, the most conspicuous "drawback" of Shiga's *shishōsetsu* and the genre as a whole is said to be their lack of social consciousness and social relevance. Also, *shishōsetsu* writers, including Shiga, often sacrifice plot and characterization to truthfulness and the expression of feelings. These characteristics of *shishōsetsu* contrast strongly with traditional Western novels. In the views of Tanikawa Tetsuzō 谷川徹三 (1895-1985), Shiga's magnum opus *A Dark Night's Passing* is short of "elements essential to the European form," such as the protagonist's development through his interactive experiences with the social world, which results in "a certain static quality to both protagonist and novel as a whole."[222] William Sibley, favoring Shiga's more Western-

[222] Cody Poulton, "Ecce Homo: The Cult of Selfhood in A Dark Night's Passing," in *Shiga Naoya's A Dark Night's Passing*: *Proceedings of a Workshop at the National University of Singapore, December 1994*, ed. Kinya Tsuruta (National University of Singapore, 1996), 22.

style writings over his *shishōsetsu*, comments, "there are few formally satisfying elements in his works, a minimum of well-constructed plot, dramatic incident, 'big scenes', and sustained dialogue."[223] However, to gain a less biased view of Shiga's *shishōsetsu* and the genre, we need to resituate them in their historical context instead of investigating them from a Western point of view.

*Shishōsetsu*'s flowering did not take place in a void but was deeply rooted in Japan's modernization. It reflects important facets of the intellectual history of late Meiji and early Taishō Japan, which was characterized by enthusiastic adoption of Western culture – particularly naturalism and individualism – and drastic modernization in all spheres of life. These changes laid the foundation for Japanese intellectuals to desire a new life free from constraints imposed by Japan's feudal past, a new life where bold self-expression was not denied. Meanwhile, the spiritual crisis provoked by rapid modernization aroused in intellectuals a longing for truth, thereby leading to an even greater emphasis on reality. These are the reasons why Japanese intellectuals, announcing that the purpose of art is to express the self,[224] ignored the "drawbacks" of *shishōsetsu* and practiced it with a great passion.

Reflected in the rise of *shishōsetsu* is not only modern Japanese intellectuals' new awareness of the self but their resistance to the increasingly oppressive socio-political

[223] Sibley, *The Shiga Hero*, 19.
[224] Schoneveld, *Shirakaba*, 116.

environment. Although the Meiji transformation brought about great social progress, it did not put an end to authoritarian political rule, nor did it abolish all feudal traditions. Disenchanted by growing government control, many early-twentieth-century Japanese intellectuals chose to retreat from political engagement. This apolitical trend, along with the imbalance in progress between rural and urban areas, also gave rise to the literary circle. Composed mainly of socially disadvantaged literati, the literary circle played a significant role in *shishōsetsu*'s embryonic and formative stages by promoting self-referential writings, reinforcing the interplay between the author and the reader, and withdrawing from socio-political matters. It is true that *shishōsetsu* are generally devoid of socio-political matters. Yet, on the other hand, this lack of social consciousness is itself a projection of social reality.

Moreover, *shishōsetsu* highlight the individual's concerns in that particular society. Based on the fact that Shiga and his contemporaries, especially members of the White Birch School, were enthusiastic advocates of enlightenment ideas, there has been a misconception that their individualism was taken for granted. However, as demonstrated in Chapter II, Shiga's novella *Reconciliation*, regardless of its monopolistic perspective, provides the reader with a window into Shiga and his generation's struggle between Japan's modernity and tradition, enabling us to explore how they went through the painful process of naturalizing modern ideals. Also widely criticized for its narrowness, *A Dark Night's Passing* nonetheless showcases the dynamic image of modern Japan.

Additionally, although Shiga's *shishōsetsu* have long been censured for having no sense of the protagonist's internal development, a careful reading may lead to a contrasting conclusion, as in the case of *Reconciliation*.

In short, subjectivity and inwardness do not make *shishōsetsu* a defective form of the novel. Instead, these characteristics of *shishōsetsu* provide significant insights into the reality and ethos of early-twentieth-century Japan. Still, readers might find that it is difficult to revere Shiga's work as much as Japanese critics do,[225] or that "there has been nothing in *shishōsetsu* to rival the great books of western literature."[226] Yet, by resituating Shiga and his work in their historical context rather than reading them through our own "lens" of literature, perhaps we will be able to better understand Shiga and the genre of *shishōsetsu*, as well as other literary forms that we have found hard to appreciate.

[225] See Orbaugh, "Extending the Limits," 339.
[226] Richard N. Tucker, *Japan: Film Image* (London: Studio Vista, 1973), 23.

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