

# *Religiosity in Modern Japanese Literature*

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**Abstract:** Literature, a mirror of the society, intensively reflects the ideological culture, ideology and people's spiritual structure of the society. The spiritual structure of Japanese modern literature is pluralistic. From the contradiction between “self” and “home”, the consciousness of “annoyance”, “confession” and “sin” is derived, which is reflected in the literature and presents the unique “religious nature” of Japanese modern literature.

## 1. Introduction

The Meiji government guided the Tennoism system with the emperor as the highest authority to embark on the road of modern civilization with the dual guidelines of restoring ancient ways and reforming. Modern countries were formed in the process of reasonability and irrationality, modern times and pre-modern times, and people, especially intellectuals, were wandering in the annoyance of seeking and establishing “self”. The scholars were vexed by the contradiction between “self” and “home”. They turned their focus on Buddhism represented “tradition”, which made the Japanese modern literature “religion” looming.

## 2. Modern Literature Hovering in the “Self”

After the Meiji Restoration, Japan comprehensively absorbed the western civilization, which had a great influence on literature. Modern Japanese literature “is different in appearance and content from the classical literature of the past,” Kenri Bunsyuu said. It is not only the spiritual conditions and the objects of description that are different, but also the forms of expression and creative ideas.” [1] Initially influenced by western literature, Meiji literature inherited traditional drama literature and imitated western literature while exploring new literary concepts and forms in the transitional period of civilization and enlightenment, namely the period of “political novels” and “translation novels”. Literature appeared in the Meiji 1920s, realism literature represented by Tsubouchi Shouyou (1859-1935) *The Essence of the Novel* (1885), Futabatei shimei (1864-1909) *The Floating Clouds* (1887); It is represented by Futabatei shimei (1868-1903) 's *Golden Yasha* (1897-1903) and Kouda rohan' s *The Five-Storeyed Pagoda* (1891), and absorbs both western and Japanese classical quasi-classicism. Japanese romantic literature pioneer Mori ougai (1862-1922), “*The Dancee*” (1890), and Kitamura Toukoku (1868-1894), *On Inner Life* (1893). The literature after the mid-1930s of Meiji was still on the extension line of realism, and the naturalistic literature, which played an important role in the history of modern Japanese literature, gradually matured, represented by the *Quilt* (1907) of Tayama Katai (1872-1930), the *The Broken Commandment* (1906) and *The Family*(1910) of Shimazaki Touseon. In the late Meiji period, Natsume Souseki and

Mori Ougai established the status of “two heroes” in the history of modern Japanese literature, as well as aestheticism literature.

In modern Japan, the “self” consciousness generated in the background of western civilization is in contradiction and wandering in the shackle of “home” taken shape under the Tennoism system, which is reflected in the literature as well. The question of “self” has been running through modern literature in a vague way. Starting from Mori Ougai's *The Dancing Girl* and Futabatei Shimei's *The Floating Clouds*, all of his works are featured by the typical youth images at that time and the tragic characters who are frustrated in the social era. In the middle of the Meiji period, in order to confront to the high Europeanization and the rise of nationalism and classicism, there appeared the literary group “Yanyouhui” with Ozaki Kouyou as the center. In order to fight against the Futabatei Shimei, Ozaki wrote *The Confession of Two Bhikkhunis* (1889), and later gorgeously depicted social customs in works such as *The Golden Demon*. However, it failed to get rid of the pre-modernity of this consciousness. Together with Kouyou, Koda Rohan, who is well-known for his classical writing style, also bases himself on Eastern culture, showing his relationship with classical Buddhism in works such as *The Love Bodhisattva* (1889) and *Five-storied Pagoda* (1891).”[2] There were literary works based on Buddhism. In the flourishing period of Europeanization, the demonstration of Buddhist thought in the field of literature tended to be latent and internalized, but the influence and tradition of Buddhism would still exist in the minds of literary scholars in a state of “ambiguity”.

The themes of “truth”, “self” and “confession” will come to mind when referring to modern Japanese naturalist literature. The artistic expression object of naturalist literature turns from society to personal issues, and the material selection are mostly limited to the category of individual life, aiming for exploring the sincerity of human life. Yamata Katai's works *The Quilt* reveals a confession of self, expressing uneasiness and doubt towards the woman she loves, as well as a sense of emptiness towards life. Many of their works, including Natsume Souseki and Mori Ougai, involve the contradiction and annoyance between “self” and “family”. Ougai sealed his passion in his first three works, such as *The Dancing Girl*,” says Imanishi Junyoshi. It seals off the problems of the self, linking it to the family and the country. On his deathbed, however, he refused all honors from the state and left a note to hold a funeral in the name of Mori Rintaro. As a military doctor, he not only achieved the perfection of being a courtier, but also left great literary achievements. Although he was too lonely at the end of his life, Natsume Souseki came to mind when thinking about why he suffered such emptiness.”[3] Focusing on the Buddhist thought contained in Natsume Souseki's literature and the problems of “privacy” and “sin” embodied in it, the researchers respectively pointed out: “Souseki is a writer who permeates Buddhist thoughts in the depths of the whole work, and who does not avoid the sin and evil of human nature and treats its ugliness faithfully. It can be considered that the end brought about by Zen enlightenment is also the end of the ugly sin and evil world of human nature.” [4]; Natsume Souseki “not from What kind of attitude I learned from Buddhism and Zen, but based on my own concept of “self” to Zen. Many enthusiastic readers have sympathy with or awe in Souseki, because Souseki examines the sternness of the self. “[5] It is not difficult to figure out a characteristic of modern literature, that is, unfolding in the entanglement and contradiction of “self” and “family”, and inheriting the tradition of Buddhism's influence on literature, and the two maintain the state of “if it is, if it is separated”.

### **3. The Fate between Modern Literature and Buddhism**

Since Buddhism was introduced into Japan, it has exerted an significant influence on Japanese politics, culture, literature and art. As Ookubo Takaki said, “Buddhism has exerted a great influence on modern Japanese literature.” [6] In modern Japan, Buddhism was regarded as a Japanese

tradition to be reviewed, and it was embodied in such areas as literary form, language, and thought as well. Buddhism and literature appear in the form of interaction and mutual vibration. The spiritual structure of modern Japan is pluralistic. After the Meiji Restoration, the state has strengthened the religious policy management, and religion has played a crucial role in the formation of modern Japan. Buddhism, as a “tradition”, is facing a crisis, as well as the “introspect” and reform brought by it. In the early Meiji period, Buddhism suffered a heavy blow from the “abolition of Buddhism and destruction of Buddhism”, but Buddhism still had an immeasurable position in the modern religious sector and generated an irreplaceable effect on the modern thought. As Ookouchi youji pointed out: “Buddhism in modern times as a fresh spirit of the spirit of the time from the beginning should not be ignored. Among them, came into being the doctrine of genius and superman, that is, the emphasis on the heroic personality of the patriarch and the “Nichiren doctrine” with the color of nationalism. What is particularly inescapable from the contemplative and introspective Buddhism of Christianity is the spiritual emergence of something akin to the Shinran doctrine. The popularity of anti-extremist 'Zen', together with its influence on literature, is definitely great.” [7]

After the Meiji period, Reflection Society Magazine centered on Kobayashi Xun and Takanan Junjiro, New Buddhism by the Buddhist Chrysler Association, Kiyozawa Mitsuki's Spirit World, and Kinokaku Tsunejiro's Seeking the Truth, Ito Yoshinobu (1876-1963), Love Without Me. The founding of these magazines not only played a role in supporting the new Buddhist movement, but also led to the development of modern literature and Buddhism. Recent literary works related to Buddhism include: Natsume Souseki's Door (1990), Tanaka one after another were published. a Tanaka Chigaku 's Syunmonno Ishin (1901), Kinoshita Naoe's Nichlien on (1910) and Hounen and shinran (1911), The Love Bodhisattva and Five-storied pagoda(1891) by Kouda rohan , The Oriental Door (1944) by Shimazaki Fujimura (1872-1943), Monks and Disciples (1916-1917) and The Beginning of Love and Cognition (1922) by Kurata Hyakuzou, etc. When referring to Showa's Buddhist literature, Ookouchi Syouji pointed out that “the Buddhist literature of the early Showa period, whatever we can say, is represented by Okamoto Kanoko and Miyazawa Kenji. [8] It is worth mentioning that Okamoto Kanoko (1889-1939), as one of the few female Buddhist researchers and literary writers at that time, created a series of Buddhist literature, such as Sanka Transcript (1929), Guanyin Sutra (1934), Buddhist Reader (1934), New Studies in Buddhism (1934), etc. In addition, her novels and essays are also full of Buddhist elements. Most of these literary writers have had deep personal vexations. Okamoto Kanoko, as an influential female religious researcher and literary writer, is also due to her “troubles” that she cannot extricated herself from.

The influence of Japanese modern Buddhism on modern thought and literature is obviously self-evident. The relationship between them is that Buddhism, as an important modern thought, has a profound impact on modern society and spirit, so it is projected on the literary world, and literature, as a form of expression, condenses and shows the people's style and spirit of that era. Sugizaki Toshio summed up the characteristics of modern literature in this way: Japan's “modern' is the era of rationality, the era dominated by rationality and science. Literature is also an individualistic idea based on adapting to humanitarianism and the realism and objectivity as the mother of realism. It's a well-known fact. It's a well-known fact that literature blossoms on such soil, it is natural to extol the strong self-establishment spirit at its core.”[9] This kind of retreat from the social realm to the personal realm in literature, The phenomenon of extremely emphasizing and pursuing “self” consciousness has not changed in the Taisho and Showa periods. The idealistic literature of the White Birch School that advocates respect for individuality, sings for humanism, and advocates self-dignity has appeared one after another; The pursuit of self-existence in the portrait of ordinary people with “sufficiency of troubles”, along with the confession of “sin”,

formed a unique “private novel” in Japan. Kenri Bunsyuu said: “In fact, it is the proposition of modern literature to overcome this obstacle and break the occlusion. However, the content of the Taisho and Showa periods is still full of bitterness and darkness, which is serious and internalized, and becomes It must not be a tendency to keep thinking or changing consciousness. However, because of this fateful soil and trend, decadence and absenteeism must become a kind of “religiousness”, which is expressed in various gestures in various works. It can be said to be the characteristics of modern Japanese literature.” [10] It can be seen that the strong sense of “worries” and “sin” that gave birth to modern people comes from the distress that is difficult to reconcile between “self” and “home”, which is related to the interior of the era. It is inextricably linked. The spiritual bitterness and absenteeism brought about by the blocked era make literature eager to absorb and release from Buddhism, which represents “tradition”, which makes modern literature and Buddhism forged an indissoluble bond.

#### 4. Conclusion

“Where do I come from and where will I go?” Such simple doubts and thinking, in the final analysis, is a question of self existence, which is exemplified by the recent Japanese history when men of vision including literature scholars firstly shaping their self-consciousness were harassed by self-being. Nevertheless, they had trouble in reaching a spiritual highness, teetering between self-being and family, and were therefore injected the consciousness of sorrows and sins in their conflicting emotions. Influenced by Buddhism for a long time, Japan has ended up as an inheritor of the delicate combination of Buddhism and literature as well as a performer by means of such a form of art as literature works. This made recent Japanese literature embody religious traits in background selections, forms and underlying philosophy.

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