

The Eyes of Pure Objectiveness: Natsume Sōseki's Search for the Way

AMA TOSHIMARO

IN *Sōseki no omoide* 漱石の思い出 (Reminiscences of Sōseki) Kyōko, Sōseki's wife states that in his post-mortem examination, his death was recorded as being the result of a double hemorrhage due to a gastric ulcer. I was drawn to the following passage:

One observation that needs to be made concerning his pancreas is that it is much harder and smaller than normal, having already atrophied, and weighing only sixty grams as compared to that of an average Japanese one of seventy to seventy-five grams.¹

As you probably know, this organ produces insulin and a large amount of digestive fluids for the duodenum, and as Sōseki suffered from diabetes, it was quite normal for his pancreas to have shrunk, though there must have been other reasons for this as well. For example, it has been discovered that when one is under stress, this organ begins to malfunction, and stops producing these fluids, resulting in swelling, which then causes the latter to overflow into the blood vessels. If this process is repeated many times, the pancreas becomes as hard as rock.

* Originally this article, "Jun kyakkan no me: Natsume sōseki no gudō no tokushitsu" 純客観の目: 夏目漱石の求道の特質 was written as Chapter 3 in: Ama Toshimaro, *Shūkyō no shinsō: Seinaru mono eno shōdō* 宗教の深層: 聖なるものへの衝動, Kyoto: Jinbun shoin, 1985. The author was awarded the Suntory Prize in 1986 for this monograph.

¹ Natsume Kyōko, *Sōseki no omoide*, Tokyo: Kadokawa bunko, 1978, p. 391.

What, then, was the nature of Sōseki's stress, from which he suffered till his death in 1916? I, myself, had a problem with my own pancreas in my late twenties and therefore, I quickly developed a very close affinity with him, becoming deeply interested in the challenges that he had had to face throughout his life. In my opinion, there were two kinds of demands which lay in front of him: first, how to assure Japanese subjectivity² in the presence of Westernization at the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912) and second, how to identify the basis for this.

For the first question, we are able to ask specifically why a Japanese needed or wished to major in English literature in the first place as Sōseki did. At the beginning of *Bokusetsuroku* 木屑録 (Collections of Wooden Pieces), written at the age of twenty-two under his pen name "Sōseki," he showed a great longing for literature.

As a child, I used to read a great deal of literature of the T'ang and Sung dynasties, and wrote compositions with joy, though often they took quite a while to complete as I would meditate on their themes or embellish my writings. At other times, they were spontaneous. . . . Finally, I made my way up to that of a literary writer.³

When Sōseki came of age to choose a profession, he decided upon becoming such a writer, though his brother, Daisuke, berated him by saying that nobody could ever make enough money by being one. Sōseki then resolved to become an architect, though he was discouraged from doing so by a friend, who pointed out that it would be impossible for any Japanese to create magnificent buildings like St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and advised him that being a literary writer held a better future. Therefore, Sōseki decided to return to his original decision.

He regarded a successful literary man, similar to that of an intellectual, such as a Confucian scholar of the Edo period (1603–1867), who discussed economic policies so as to govern the country. In Sōseki's mind, English litera-

² *Shutaisei* 主体性 is rendered as "subjectivity" throughout this translation. In the author's mind, by referring to Sōseki's lecture entitled *Mohō to dokuritsu* 模倣と独立 (Imitation and Independence), *shutaisei* suggests "independence," which also infers self-standard and for such a person possessing this, there is something to pursue on his/her own accord, instead of merely following others. Sōseki believed that Japan, at that time, needed such independent-thinking people rather than those merely imitating others. See *Sōseki Zenshū*, vol. 15, p. 426. Hereafter, *Sōseki Zenshū*, published in 1965–1967, is shown as *SZ*. [Translator's Note]

³ *SZ*, vol. 12, p. 445.

ture would sooner or later appear as a new form of Sinology in the forthcoming years. According to the Preface to *Bungakuron* 文学論 (The Theory of Literature),

I humbly think that English literature serves the same purpose. If that is the case, I shall dedicate my entire life to its study without any regrets.⁴

However, his error in equating this with Sinology caused him to suffer, as basically the former never did play the same role as the latter had done in the past. In fact, scholars who taught English literature at university dealt with trivial technical matters.

At university I specialized in English literature. Perhaps you are going to ask me exactly what I mean by “English literature.” For me, after three years of study, it was as hazy as a dream. Dixon was my professor: he made us read poems and prose extracts aloud in class; he made us write essays; he snarled at us when we forgot articles, and got himself into a temper when we made mistakes in pronunciation. In the examination he asked us for the dates of the birth and death of Wordsworth, the number of pages in Shakespeare’s manuscripts, and even a chronological list of the works of Walter Scott. That is the only type of question he set for us.

However young you may be, you can doubtless understand what I am saying. When I wondered what English literature was, and when I wondered first what literature was, temporarily leaving aside English literature, I of course had no answer to the question. If I had been told “you only have to read it yourself to understand!,” I would have retorted that that would be like a blind man looking through a fence. I could not find anything in the library that caught my eye, however long I browsed over the shelves. This was not simply because of a lack of willingness on my part, but also because the available resources were poor in the field of English literature.⁵

When Sōseki began to major in this subject, he ambitiously wished to astonish the West by demonstrating his proficiency in English, through becoming a

⁴ Ibid., vol. 9, p. 9.

⁵ Natsume Sōseki, *My Individualism and The Philosophical Foundations of Literature*, trans. by Sammy I. Tsunematsu, Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2004, p. 34.

leader in the scholarship of Western literature in Japan, and writing great books in English. However, he soon realized the impossibility of fulfilling such aspirations after spending three years at university.

Upon graduating from Tokyo Imperial University (present-day Tokyo University) as the second person to receive a bachelor's degree in English literature, Sōseki decided to become an English teacher, though he was still unsure of himself. "‘Since I was born into this world, I must do something in it,’ I told myself, but I had not the faintest idea of what was good for me . . ."⁶ As if he were wrapped up in a bag, he wished impatiently for something sharp to poke holes into it.

His anxiety and irritation became even more intense while studying in England and in the midst of a nervous breakdown there, he came to realize, for the first time, how the Japanese should study English literature, which is, in my opinion, from a Japanese perspective, not following the instructions of Westerners. In order to do this, Sōseki needed to return to his original question which was, what was literature, and hence was able to name the sharp instrument with which he could prick the bag, as being "self-standard" (*jiko hon'i* 自己本位), meaning subjectivity.

I gained a great deal of strength from this period of introspection ["self-centered"] and it prompted me to ask who these Westerners were. In fact, this concentration on myself set me in motion—I who up to then had remained stuck in one place, disoriented—and pointed out the way to me.

I must admit that this marked a new departure in life for me. When we imitate Westerners and make a lot of noise about nothing, it only brings us anxiety. So if I endeavored to explain to people why they should not let themselves be thus influenced, telling them it was better that they should not act like Westerners, not only would I feel I was doing the right thing but they too would benefit greatly. That is what I thought. Then I decided to dedicate my life's work to carrying out this plan by writing books and in other ways.⁷

Bungakuron, composed after his return from England, demonstrated this process. In its Preface, he expressed the various hardships through which he, as a Japanese, had finally been able to discover the way to study English lit-

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 38–9, though "self-centered" is used here for *jiko hon'i*.

erature from a subjective point of view. In this respect, therefore, the Japanese owe Sōseki a great deal for allowing them to see modernity through Japanese eyes.

The Unpredictable Self (*Kenon naru jiko* 険呑なる自己)

Sōseki lived at a time when a series of raging waves of Westernization continued to pound. The first challenge that he had to face was how to establish his own subjectivity without imitating Westerners. The idea of self-standard only offered him a direction toward a new way of living, as he still had to grapple with questions concerning life in general, such as at what degree was the self, as self-standard, assured? Or who am I, anyway, in the first place? What is it like to be a human being? The notion of self brought Sōseki these related questions, even though he had already been engaged with these since his youth. At this point, he further clarified his challenge, which was to pursue certainty in his own life with pressure from modernization, and because of this, it was unique to him.

When asking himself who he was, Sōseki faced an abyss within his own mind, which could not be measured by sound judgment. In *Jinsei* 人生 (Life), he states:

My mind is like a triangle without a base. What can you do with just two lines? If life is understood through a mathematical equation and if the meaning of life “X” is discovered with a proposition, that is, if man is capable of presiding over his own life, and if there is no life apart from the ones that poets, writers and novelists describe, then it will be very convenient and man will be superior. However, things happen unpredictably, and the mind generates unexpected ideas. Violent and unforgiving phenomena, such as earthquakes or bore tides, which flow against rivers, creating walls of water, not only occur on the Nōbi plains, but can also take place right here in our minds.⁸

Man cannot be his own master, as he does not know when he betrays himself. “There is no order, no logic, no discretion, or discernment in my mind and body. I give way to a moment’s impulse.”⁹ This was how Sōseki described the self that he had discovered.

⁸ SZ, vol. 12, p. 270.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

First of all, he referred to the idea of the unpredictability of self when he was twenty-nine and from then on, it became a central theme of his novellas. Thus, how to overcome this remained his lifetime objective, which was also discussed in his idea of “leaving oneself while entrusting in great nature” (*sokuten kyoshi* 則天去私)¹⁰—words that Sōseki supposedly spoke in his last year of life. However, as an example, let us now look at his writing *Sorekara* *それから* (Now Then).

Daisuke, the protagonist, had given Michiyo up to his best friend, Hiraoka, for the sake of their friendship, even though he loved her very much. However, when he met her a few years later, he could not control himself and confessed his love to her, and as a result, he was not only rejected by Hiraoka and his family, but also ostracized by society. Why had he given her up in the first place and later confessed his love to the married woman? The response to these questions can only be found in the movement of Daisuke’s unpredictable self.

Sōseki considered the expression of this self as living “naturally” (*shizen* 自然) and suggested that man should live according to their own nature. Although this premise needs to be discussed separately, descriptions of this unpredictable self appear constantly in other novels of his as well. For example, in *Kokoro* *こころ*, a definition of a bad person is portrayed in a conversation between a teacher and the writer:

“As a matter of fact, country people tend to be worse than city people. You said just now that there was no one amongst your relatives that you would consider particularly bad. You seem to be under the impression that there is a special breed of bad humans. There is no such thing as a stereotype bad man in this world. Under normal conditions, everybody is more or less good, or, at least, ordinary. But, tempt them, and they may suddenly change. That is what is so frightening about men.”¹¹

The same message is recapitulated at the beginning of his last novel, *Meian* *明暗* (Light and Darkness). Tsuda, the main character, decides to have an oper-

¹⁰ In Jan Van Bragt’s translation, this is rendered as “one with heaven, free from the self.” See “Sōseki and Buddhism, Reflections on His Later Works,” pt.1, *The Eastern Buddhist* 29, no. 2 (Autumn 1996), p. 173.

¹¹ *Kokoro*, trans. by Edwin McClellan. In *Kokoro And Selected Essays*. *Kokoro*, translated by Edwin McClellan and *Essays* by Jay Rubin, Lanham: Madison Books, 1992, pp. 57–58.

ation for hemorrhoids and goes to see a doctor. On his way home, his mind starts wandering off:

“This body of ours can undergo a violent change at any time. What’s even worse, right now perhaps some change is taking place inside of me, and I know absolutely nothing about it. That’s really frightening.”

With his thinking having advanced this far, he could not stop. Suddenly, he was pushed forward from behind with a force nearly enough to knock him down. As if a physical force had been responsible, a thought immediately flashed through his mind:

“In the world of spirituality too, it’s the same. We don’t know when or how our feelings will change. And what’s more, I’ve seen how they change.”¹²

What Tsuda saw was a change in the mind of Kiyoko, with whom he should have married, though Onobu¹³ later became his wife as Kiyoko suddenly left him for someone else.

“Why did she marry him? Undoubtedly because she wanted to. But still she certainly shouldn’t have. And why did *I* marry the woman *I* did? Again undoubtedly because I wanted to. And yet earlier I hadn’t wanted to. A coincidence? Poincaré’s so-called consummation of complexity? I don’t quite know.”¹⁴

To reiterate, the idea of the unpredictable self as described in *Jinsei*, refers not to mathematics in which by drawing a line, two dots are connected, but to uncertainty and anxiety as “the direction of one’s life is undetermined no matter how one sees two, three, or even a hundred dots.”¹⁵ Sōseki also called such an irrational self a “person incubating inside of oneself” (*senpuku sha* 潜伏者) as described below:

Just as an illness has an incubation period, there is an incubation period for our thoughts and feelings. Although we possess these

¹² *Light and Darkness*, trans. by Valdo. H. Viglielmo, London: Peter Owen, 1971, p. 3. Translation is slightly modified.

¹³ Although the Viglielmo translation gives the name of one of the female characters as O-Nobu, it is spelled as Onobu in this article.

¹⁴ *Light and Darkness*, p. 4.

¹⁵ *SZ*, vol. 12, p. 270.

thoughts and are controlled by these feelings during the incubation period, we remain unaware of them. And if nothing happens in the outer world to bring them to the surface of our consciousness, we go on being controlled by these thoughts and feelings for the rest of our lives, insisting all the while that we have never been influenced by them. We try to prove our point through actions and words that negate the thoughts and feelings, but an outsider's view of our actions reveals the contradiction. Sometimes we are amazed to see the contradiction ourselves. Sometimes, without seeing it, we experience tremendous pain. My own suffering at the hands of the girl I mentioned earlier was caused, ultimately, by my inability to perceive what was incubating inside of me. If only we could inject some powerful medicine that would kill off these unknowable creatures before they could violate our hearts—then what contradictions, what misfortunes mankind would be spared!¹⁶

As far as the concept of a “person incubating inside of oneself” is concerned, it is fair to say that Sōseki was greatly influenced by his contemporary, William James, the American psychologist and philosopher, who was one of the first scholars to propose the concept of “a stream of consciousness” as well as that of the “subconscious.” Sōseki read his books eagerly and his own idea of a “person incubating inside of oneself” is very close to James' latter notion, though differing at the same time. This, I shall discuss a little later.

For Sōseki, both the uncertainty and anxiety of the self were not only related to the concept of unpredictability in oneself or a “person incubating inside of oneself.” The “I” as being entirely conscious was, in the first place, based on a certain kind of “hypothesis” (*katei* 仮定) though it was impossible to say from whence it came.

“Succession of Consciousness”

According to Sōseki, one's existence is based on a series of different kinds of consciousnesses. For example, in our everyday world, we create our own lives, in which the “you” and the “third person” are accommodated and negotiated. Also, time and space as well as the law of cause and effect are involved, though there is no doubt that I exist. However, by meditating upon this aspect carefully, one starts wondering what one's identity truly is. What constitutes

¹⁶ *The Miner*, trans. by Jay Rubin, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, pp. 26–27.

the “I” anyway? “I” am not my clothes, neither are my hands nor feet though I become aware of them when I feel pain or they start itching. If they are not full of sensation, what is their function? In like manner, without consciousness, do I really exist, and how about the “I”? In other words, I am not an entity that exists objectively. What constitutes the “I” is the awareness of continuous experience of various conscious phenomena. By scrutinizing his real identity, Sōseki was able to conclude that the “I” was a tentative name given to a succession of consciousness, which was life itself.

Normally, to prove that something exists we look at it, do we not? Basing our perception on what we have seen, we try to touch it with our hands. Then we try to sniff it or taste it. Perhaps, it is not necessary to take so much trouble to prove one’s existence. However, as I said before, with our eyes we try to see, with our ears we try to hear, but at the fundamental level it is a question only of becoming aware of the senses of sight and hearing and, if this process of being aware is changed, there is no reason for objects and beings independent from us to exist. When I see or touch you, it is only consciousness operating in me which makes the shadows clothed in black students’ uniforms with gold buttons appear, because nothing else allows my perception or recognition of the reality of your existence. Therefore, having maturely reflected on the subject, we could say that I myself do not exist and neither do you. Other than that, there is really nothing but consciousness. . . . And what I call the succession of consciousness is, in plain words, what we call life.¹⁷

Sōseki had already realized this while in London. According to *Sōseki shiryō: Bungakuron nōto* 漱石資料: 文学論ノート (A Reference to Sōseki: Theory of Literature Notes), he states:

When life is physiologically observed, it is a constant transformation of energy, though from a psychological standpoint, it is a continual succession of consciousness.¹⁸

¹⁷ *The Philosophical Foundations of Literature*, pp. 66–67. The translation is slightly modified here as “succession of consciousness” is used instead of “continuity of awareness,” due to Sōseki’s own preference for such an English expression.

¹⁸ Muraoka Isamu ed., *Sōseki shiryō: Bungakuron nōto*, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1976, p. 115.

What truly exists is this endless succession. However, how is the “I” differentiated from the “other” and distinguished from a particular object? For Sōseki, this was merely an “assumption” (*katei* 假定) as described in *Danpen* 断片 (A Fragment)¹⁹ or in other words, through making relative distinctions, one uses one’s life as one wishes. Not only the relationships between “I” and “others” and “I” and “objects,” but also the concepts of time and space and the law of cause and effect, based on this assumption as well, though not actually existing externally, are involved.

Abstractions and assumptions are, in general, the results of “all the lies that one makes in order to deal with unbearable pain”; therefore “truth has come out of this lie.”²⁰ As human beings have been accustomed to such untruths since olden times, “we have taken this hypothesis for reality, and indeed we are very happy to accept it.”²¹ The problem is that in the succession of consciousness, an unnecessary discord between the “one” and the “other” is bred, and because of this, misunderstandings and conflicts constantly occur. For Sōseki, a great deal of human suffering comes from one’s failure to distinguish between these two, though neither really exists. What makes the ordinary ego consciousness more complex is that it “grows acutely, along with the development of civilization.”

What we need to be most careful about in human beings, is that their awareness has grown so much stronger. Awareness here does not mean awakening to Buddhist enlightenment, realization of a spiritual substance, or a discovery of the unity between one and heaven/earth, but refers to a perception in which one is distin-

¹⁹ SZ, vol. 13, p. 255. Sōseki, writing in English, states that: “It is a logic taking effect for cause, topsy-turvy way of proving things. We started from convenience, everything that is convenient to satisfy our tendency has been assumed. Those assumptions have been sifted by the experience of hundreds of thousands of centuries. As a matter of fact, therefore, those assumptions which we keep now, must be looked upon as vitally important to the preservation of ourselves. The existence of the same consciousness in beings we call men is just one of those assumptions, recognized by us as absolutely necessary, because it has been found most harmonious to the fulfillment of our tendency to live. Then the reasoning should be, —this assumption has been most convenient, therefore, experience has not sifted it, —and should not be— we can communicate our state of consciousness in humanly perfect fashion with each other, therefore others as well as we must be endowed with similar consciousness. (*We* is not, strictly speaking, a proper word; it ought to be *I*: *I* in every stage of existence)” (ibid., p. 255).

²⁰ *The Philosophical Foundations of Literature*, p. 78.

²¹ Ibid.

guished from the other, and which grows acutely, along with the development of civilization, and for this reason, every kind of behavior we portray, becomes unnatural.²²

The awareness mentioned here is a negative one, as one does not understand the provisional “I” against the stream of consciousness. This perception is based on an egotistical mind in which a distinction between “one” and the “other” is justified. Sōseki further states:

People in the past said to forget the self. People in the present say do not forget the self. We are never at peace or tranquil because we are continually filled with our thoughts. We are solely concerned with our own consciousness, whether during the day or at night. Thus we are never at peace.²³

These passages also represent his analysis of ego consciousness, in which one is separated from the other and the object.

The concept of self-standard that he had discovered was different from the so-called ego, as the self in this context was similar to the one defined by Carl G. Jung, in which consciousness contained both ego and self. The former is placed in the center of ordinary consciousness in such a way that the “I” is normally referred to as the ego. However, in the structure of the human consciousness, there is an immeasurable part of the unconsciousness beneath the ego. For instance, if the latter is likened to the center of an iceberg on the surface of an ocean, which represents consciousness, the unconsciousness corresponds to what is below water. In other words, the “self” can be regarded as the center of the entire iceberg itself and hence, it is difficult for one to recognize this “self” within one’s ordinary consciousness, though constituting one’s entire being. According to Kawai Hayao, “self” refers to the total unity of the mind, in which both consciousness and unconsciousness are included. While occidentals are good at fulfilling their ego desires, orientals have accumulated much more wisdom concerning “self.”²⁴

Based on this explanation, the cause of Sōseki’s anguish of how to understand the “I,” can be identified as a conflict between an oriental self and an occidental ego. It is fair to say that as the traditional concept of “self” started collapsing within him, he began to search for a new self by accommodating

²² *Danpen* in *SZ*, vol. 13, p. 170.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²⁴ Kawai Hayao, *Jung shinrigaku nyūmon*, Tokyo: Baifūkan, 1980, pp. 275–80.

the latter notion of “ego.” For this reason, by asking himself who he was, Sōseki was able to regain a basic recognition of the “I,” which, although being a provisional entity as given against the stream of consciousness, was still indispensable for life. The “my” consciousness based on this assumption is very unreliable, even though it plays a central role in daily life.

By our nature we cherish a common desire to live, whatever the cost. Because of this common motivation, there is a differentiation between the ego and the beings or objects outside it. In this context, there arises a desire for choice as to the type of succession of consciousness to be developed; as a result of the broadening of this choice, a form of the ideal is engendered. This has various ramifications which lead us to become philosophers, scientists, artists, men of letters, or even men of action.²⁵

Sōseki acknowledged the process of differentiation in which an ideal form was pursued. However, at the same time, he pointed out repeatedly that the ego could not be a response to the explanation of why one cherished a common desire to live and why one did not want to eliminate this from the succession of consciousness. Hence, this was one of the fundamental causes by which the “I” felt insecure about “my” life.

For Sōseki, as we have already seen, self-consciousness was questionable for two reasons; one was the uncertainty triggered by an unpredictable self, in which ordinary consciousness was challenged by the subconscious, while the other was that the former as the “I” was provisional. To be more specific, it refers to the contradiction of how a provisional being governs one’s real life. One cannot understand the origins of one’s life or ask why one exists, just by reflecting on self-consciousness as its finitude makes itself uncertain.

There is always a chance for this self-consciousness to become more unsettled as it becomes conditioned by the progress of civilization. I have already discussed the fact that Sōseki cautioned against an excessive pursuit of ego desire, by his explaining that the concept of self-standard was against an expansion of egotistical consciousness, and hence that a stronger ego would only result in more conflicts between the “I” and the “other.” This was not the realization of a new self for which Sōseki had been searching. In his mind, such a self meant perceiving the core of the iceberg intuitively and establishing subjectivity in which one’s entire being, including both one’s conscious-

²⁵ *The Philosophical Foundations of Literature*, p. 138. Translation is slightly modified.

ness and unconsciousness became unified. This is the realization of the subject remaining unaffected even by a sudden emergence of unconsciousness and is the recognition of the “I” that is “leaving oneself while entrusting in great nature,” as mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Sōseki came to this resolution that easily. In the aforementioned *Danpen*, he warned that people in those days were getting more perceptive in terms of the differentiation between the “I” and the “other” and continues:

Although there are a thousand Jesuses, ten thousand Confuciuses, as well as millions and billions of Buddhas, the growing difficulty [i.e., the sensitivity of separating the one from the other] cannot be resolved. The only way to overcome this gap is to submerge the entire world at the bottom of the ocean for twenty-four hours and eliminate the conventional mind of awareness, after which one then dries it out in the sunlight.²⁶

In order to destroy an expanding ego, Sōseki, himself, sank his entire life of forty-nine years to the ocean floor, and, then, exposed it to the sun.

No Encounter with A Glittering Thing (Denkōtei no mono ni hōchaku sezu 電光底ノ物ニ蓬着セス)

Sōseki’s challenge was to overcome the uncertainty of self-consciousness and rediscover the subjective self. The effort to do this had to be made from a rational or intellectual perspective. I should like to stress this point again because what made his pursuit of the way unique, was the emphasis he placed on the intellect, which is still significant for us today.

Sōseki criticized Zen precisely because of this. In his youth, he had become interested in its practice, and in his twenties and thirties, it is said that he read a considerable amount of literature on this subject.²⁷ However, he was skeptical about traditional Zen as he was still holding on to his intellect.

In 1894, he participated in a Zen session at Engaku-ji 円覚寺 in Kamakura (nr. Tokyo) and received a Zen riddle (*kōan* 公案) from Shaku Sōen 釋宗演 (1859–1919), namely, what was one’s original state before one’s parents were born (*bumo mishō izen* 父母未生以前). In other words, Sōseki was being asked who he was before his parents even existed. The exchange between the two

²⁶ *Danpen* in *SZ*, vol. 13, p. 171.

²⁷ See Kitayama Masamichi, “Sōseki to zen,” *Daijōzen* 46, no. 11, p. 25.

is portrayed in his short novella, *Mon* 門 (The Gate), as that of the old master, Sendō and his disciple, Sōsuke. The detail description of Sōseki's response to the *kōan* can also be found in *Sōseki shiryō: Bungakuron nōto*, according to which, he said, "There is no mind apart from object and no object apart from mind."²⁸ The master then told him that anyone who had even a little knowledge could have said such a thing, and drove him away, saying "stop calculating with your reason" and "come up with something glittering."²⁹ This description corresponds to the following passage in *Mon*, which goes "it is not good unless you bring something that's glaring."³⁰

Later, after being rejected, Sōseki admitted that he was unable to encounter anything glittering, but he went even further so as to question whether or not Zen was merely a magic trick (*genjutsu* 術術).

I humbly think that, if one does not understand it intellectually or emotionally, if it is not being or non-being, then it must be something that goes beyond recognizable reality. Scholarship and intellect have nothing to do with this. If forced to explain it, one would end up with an unusual imagination. . . . If reason cannot be advanced and sentiment is not stirred up, I absolutely do not understand the details of Zen, so I must give it up. Let me discount a few masters in India and China. Instead of struggling so as to understand the minds of Daitō 大燈, Shōshū 正宗, and those of other masters in Japan who were so courageous and strong, whose demeanors were free from attachment and different from those of ordinary people, without hesitation, I consider Zen to be like a trick in a show and deceptive scholarship.³¹

After the appearance of Śakyamuni Buddha in India, there were many great masters in that country and China. Although unable to examine what was in their minds, Sōseki wished to know at least what Japanese masters such as Daitō and others had been thinking. However, if reason, intellect, or even sentiment was useless to inquire into their states of mind, he had no choice but to give up his attempt. Therefore, he merely considered Zen to be just a magic trick. Sōseki persisted in reason and intellect, which can be more clearly seen

²⁸ *Sōseki shiryō: Bungakuron nōto*, p. 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁰ *SZ*, vol. 4, p. 844. Although a translation of *Mon (The Gate)* is available, this passage has been rendered into English by the translator of this article himself.

³¹ *Sōseki shiryō: Bungakuron nōto*, p. 15.

in his marginal notes to some of the Zen literature he was reading at that time. In *Tanpyō narabi ni zakkan* 短評並に雜感 (Short Evaluations and Miscellaneous Thoughts), he states:

The significance of Zen masters is to raise doubts and engage themselves in the question of who they are, day and night. The same thing happens in the West amongst those who doubt their own existence, thus, they stop eating and sleeping. Each person who really wants to encounter [something that is glittering] has, more or less, this kind of doubt. Therefore, Western scholars search for the truth throughout their lives. Nonetheless, I have never heard even one of them brag about the *satori* that they had attained. This is suspect.

Basically, for those born with a suspicious nature, they must give up their hope for *satori*. Thus, there is no way other than to look at the responses to all Zen riddles as complex combinations of Chinese characters.³²

Questioning oneself is universal no matter where one lives. There are countless people engaged in such activity. However, since the beginnings of Greek history, no one has been able to claim that they have been spiritually enlightened in Europe. Why not? This is where Sōseki's criticism of Zen stands. It is fair to say that he basically wanted to know why it was wrong for anyone to use reason and intellect in order to discover their true identity, or, in other words, he questioned Zen's exclusiveness. Such an attitude is moreover observed, for instance, in his marginal notes to *Zenmon hōgoshū* 禪門法語集 (The Collection of Words of Zen Dharma).

It is an intoxicating play where questions and answers are further exchanged as though preparing for a dialogue, which is similar to exchanging opinions prior to a discussion. I see this tendency in the way Zen monks live their lives. Instead of having such a foolish dialogue, I feel it's better to yawn.³³

When responding to the following passage from the aforementioned work, "The path to enlightenment means to realize one's own mind, which is what is inherent in all sentient beings and this has never changed up to the present since the time prior to one's birth and even before those of one's parents and

³² SZ, vol. 16, pp. 266–7.

³³ Ibid., p. 269.

hence, this is one's original state (*honrai no menboku* 本来の面目).” Sōseki stated that:

Repeatedly, it talks about one's own mind and one's own nature, though neither exists externally. To eat a sweet potato and break a fart, to kill a person, or to help others, these acts are all reflections of one's own mind and one's own nature. Why is it then necessary to discuss one's original state?³⁴

Though still appreciating reason and the intellect, Sōseki was also a “man of the ordinary” (*tsune no hito* 常の人), who saw the importance of the common way of living.

God is something created by those who are either mostly self-conceited or mistreated and hence seek consolation. In the extreme case of the former, one is instantly God or Śakyamuni Buddha. Nietzsche was somewhat similar to this, while in the extreme situation of the latter, one is instantly the Son of God, Jesus Christ.³⁵

Sōseki did not accept either Buddha or Christ, as neither was an ordinary being. Concerning who was happy or not, Sōseki saw that both the “big-headed” and the “fool” were happy, even though their characteristics were totally opposite to each other. Those who did not fall into either category were unhappy. He realized that, “the majority of people do not want to be unhappy, but yet do not have the resolve to become either big-headed or a fool.”³⁶ Although such a way of living is incomplete, this is how ordinary people live their lives and Sōseki chose to be just like them.

The basic characteristic of his seeking the way was “not to gain peace of mind if it meant paralyzing the intellect and knowledge.”³⁷ This position is consistent when he cautiously denied a mystical interpretation, regarding the problem of the “person incubating inside of oneself.”

Previously, I mentioned that the “unpredictable self” referred to this and that William James had made an impact on Sōseki in the way that “self” was influenced by the subconscious. However, the latter did not regard this process as a way to link man to God, but rather that this occurrence was merely one event out of many, which could be found in daily life.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 268.

³⁵ *Nikki oyobi danpen* (Diary and Fragment) in *SZ*, vol. 13, p. 152.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 152–3.

³⁷ *Sōseki shiryō: Bungakuron nōto*, pp. 31–2.

James emphasized the subconscious as it could explain the phenomenon of conversion, in which the ordinary self died so as to be born a religious entity. For some people, this comes suddenly such as a revelation from God, while for others, it takes a long time to change and become devout. According to James, conversion meant that “religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now takes a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy.”³⁸ Particularly for him, sudden conversion referred to a phenomenon such as “automatism, sensory or motor, emotional or intellectual, to this whole sphere of effects, due to ‘uprushes’ into the ordinary consciousness of energies originating in the subliminal parts of the mind.”³⁹

Conversion was unlikely to occur when the gap between ordinary consciousness and the subliminal one could not be bridged naturally if too rigidly separated. In other words, James evaluated the subconscious in a positive light, when it rose up into ordinary consciousness, which was indispensable for conversion. However, Sōseki was not so optimistic concerning the moment of this arising as he considered this occurrence would disturb and agitate the ordinary self, bringing about unpredictable events. The difference between these two men was that, for James, one could be linked to God through the working of the subconscious, and stressed that:

If there be higher powers able to impress us, they may get access to us only through the subliminal door.⁴⁰

His conviction that God appeared to man through the subconscious was similar to medieval Japanese, who believed that they could communicate with Buddhas and kami in visions.

For Sōseki, however, the subconscious was something that was not of this world and hence, a source of anxiety, and its emergence led to an increase of unpredictability in the self, contrary to James’ hope for salvation. Owing to this difference, the former, who was in London at the time, eventually became critical of the latter, even though he had once admired him. James stated that logic did not actually trigger conversion, though it might generate conviction and thus, he lowered the value of logic. Sōseki did accept that logic was not

³⁸ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Cambridge: Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 162.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

totally full of energy, but disagreed with him over its priority. James also asserted that emotion was the source of deeper religiosity, with philosophical and theological understanding of religion as secondary. Sōseki, however, argued that emotion could often be explained by reason.⁴¹

William James by no means advocated mysticism as he, himself, tried to understand religion from a scientific point of view, by eliminating both extremes of intellectualism and mysticism. Here, though Sōseki deeply sympathized with him, he became skeptical as the latter was much more interested in the world of transcendence than he was. In my opinion, as Sōseki evaluated the emergence of the subconscious in a negative light and was uncertain of the mystical nature of Zen, he wished to know how a person, who appreciated reason and logic, could find a way to liberate himself from the consciousness of the self.

The Eyes of Pure Objectiveness (Jun kyakkan no me 純客観の目)

So as to pursue a way to transcend birth and death, Sōseki took a position of not detaching himself from consciousness, knowledge, emotion or will.⁴² As I have repeated several times before, this meant seeking truth through exploring one's intellect and reason. Therefore, how did Sōseki go about doing this? The simple answer was for him to objectify one's consciousness of the self, or to gain "the eyes of pure objectiveness."⁴³ It is to cast one's eyes on one's own consciousness impartially and thoroughly, even though it is often stirred up by the subconscious, creates conflicts with others, and is in constant flux. Sōseki was able to objectify various aspects of his own consciousness through writing novels. He named this approach "watching human emotions objectively" (*hi ninjō* 非人情), which is clearly described in *Kusamakura* 草枕 (The Three-Cornered World). Here, the theme is how to find such a way:

There is no escape from this world. If, therefore, you find life hard,
there is nothing to be done but settle yourself as comfortably as you

⁴¹ *Sōseki shiryō: Bungakuron nōto*, pp. 32–33.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁴³ Alan Turney translates *jun kyakkan no me* as "a pure objective standpoint" ("only when I completely forget my material existence, and view myself from a purely objective standpoint, can I, as a figure in a painting, blend into the beautiful harmony of my natural surroundings"). *The Three-Cornered World*, trans. by Alan Turney, London: Peter Owen, 1965, p. 25. Citations are to the paperback edition, 2002.

can during the unpleasant times, although you may only succeed in this for short periods, and thus make life's brief span bearable.⁴⁴

The subjectivity as presented here, is fulfilled by watching one's own emotions objectively, which is to make one "free from personal interests,"⁴⁵ and by standing "three feet away (from the canvas you can look at it calmly),"⁴⁶ or "taking a pace back to give oneself the room to move that a bystander would have, examine one's own feelings calmly and with complete honesty."⁴⁷ This is the concept of the eyes of pure objectiveness. According to Sōseki, "The so-called pleasures in life derive from material attachments, and thus inevitably contain the seeds of pain. The poet and artist, however, come to know absolute purity by concerning themselves only with those things which constitute the innermost essence of this world of relativity."⁴⁸ "For them, pleasure does not lie in becoming attached *to* things, but in becoming a part *of* them by a process of assimilation,"⁴⁹ which is to gain the perspective of pure objectiveness.

Once this perception is established, one understands that nature, such as mountains, rivers, grasslands and trees, exists unaffectedly. For example, the reflection of mountain cherry blossoms on the surface of water, "not only is it pretty, it has the advantage of having nothing to fear even if the wind should blow."⁵⁰ Such a reflection "moves as a whole."⁵¹ The way nature appears serves as a model for those seeking a state of being unaffected by human emotions. "This is the great charm of Nature, that it can in an instant, discipline men's hearts and minds, and removing all that is base, lead them into the pure unsullied world of poetry."⁵² In this situation, "one throws off the shackles of common sense, and breaks through the bars of desire and physical attachment."⁵³ "The more freely one is able to float, the easier life becomes, until his very soul floats, he will be in a state more blessed than if he had become a disciple of Christ."⁵⁴

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 49. Translation is slightly modified.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 86–87.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 156.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 128.

⁵² Ibid., p. 18.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 102. Translation is slightly modified.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Translation is slightly modified.

Does the concept of watching human emotions objectively offer man enough subjectivity to survive in a real society full of egotistical interests? Being in a society upon which the consciousness of the self was reflected, Sōseki later modified this idea, which needs to be discussed separately, but for now, I just wish to point out that his eyes of pure objectiveness went beyond the perceptions of those of poets and artists.

The notion of such eyes is also the vision in which the ordinary ego consciousness is regarded as one of several “stages.” Here, Sōseki states:

The mind is a stage on which joy, anger, sadness, and comfort occur. What is left backstage? Blind passion and awakening are just like the front and back of a piece of paper . . . something that either is changeless or constantly changes is not enjoyable, human beings are difficult to please. Search for those things that are changeable yet unchangeable, and unchangeable yet changeable. From the beginning to the end, the ocean is in great comfort.⁵⁵

Although there is a suggestion of a Zen riddle in the expression, “changeable yet unchangeable, and unchangeable yet changeable,” it represents the concept of the eyes of pure objectiveness, which means to cast one’s eyes on things that are both changeable and unchangeable at the same time. According to Shigematsu Yasuo, Sōseki obtained this concept from Bergson, who suggested that “there is no essential difference between passing from one state to another and persisting in the same state.”⁵⁶ It is uncertain whether or not Sōseki’s perception was only attributed to Bergson, because as I previously discussed, the former was familiar with Zen literature as well.

If what are changeable and unchangeable can be seen as identical, the problem of death, the ultimate theme of flux, can also be explained.

Death over life . . . but that implies disliking life and does not seem to integrate life and death. In order to be consistent about life and death (or transcend the two), one must accept *phenomena is existence* and *relative is absolute*.

“That may be so logically.”

“Perhaps.”

⁵⁵ *Nikki oyobi danpen*, pp. 5–6.

⁵⁶ Henri Bergson. *Creative Evolution*, trans. by Arthur Mitchell, New York: The Modern Library, 1944, p. 4. See Shigematsu Yasuo, “Sōseki bannen no shisō, chū,” *Bungaku* (December 1978): pp. 1493–504.

“But, can you reach [such a state] by merely thinking about it?”
 “I just want to get there.”⁵⁷

Being “consistent about life and death” means to look at these two events impartially. Sōseki sincerely wished to establish such a perspective in which not only life and death, but also various changes and continuities could be observed on an equal basis. His wish was soon to be embraced as he discovered two kinds of consciousnesses: one being the unfulfilled state of objectification, while the other its opposite. He called the former the “small self” (*shōga* 小我) or “small nature” (*chiisai shizen* 小さい自然), and the latter “great self” (*taiga* 大我) or “great nature” (*ōkina shizen* 大きな自然). In *Meian*, we find:

And it was not only this, for actually, as far as O-Nobu was concerned, this contest did not have primary significance. What she really was aiming at was rather the true facts of the case. Her principal objective was to dispel her own suspicions rather than to vanquish her husband. For to dispel these suspicions was absolutely essential for her existence, which had as its object Tsuda’s love. This in itself was already a great objective. It loomed before her eyes as a problem, the significance of which was so enormous as almost to blot out all methods of solution.

From the context of the situation she was forced to adhere to that one point with the force of her entire being and to the limit of her powers of thought and judgment. It was her nature to do so. Unfortunately, however, the entirety of nature, which included her own, was greater than she. Extending far above and beyond her, it did not hesitate to cast an impartial light on the young couple and even to attempt to destroy her in her pitiable state.

Each time she tried to pin down one item he retreated from her one step. If she tried to pin him down to two items he retreated two steps. Each time she attempted to get at the true facts the distance between her and Tsuda only increased. The larger scheme of things wantonly thwarted her efforts, which emerged from her own smaller nature. With each step it did not hesitate to destroy her objectives. She was dimly aware of what was happening, but she could not understand its significance. She simply remained convinced

⁵⁷ *Nikki oyobi danpen* p. 774.

that the contest ought not to turn out that way. And finally she lost her temper.”⁵⁸

It was natural for Onobu to be assured of the love of her husband, Tsuda. As far as the ordinary ego was concerned, her action was a matter of course and hence, her behavior normal. Nevertheless, the more faithful she was to her instincts, the more there was a distance between her husband and herself. The further she tried to remove her doubts that he might be in love with someone else, the more she separated herself from him. What was then natural for her, did not make sense to him. In other words, what was natural for Onobu was merely an expression of her egotistical desire in the name of love. Komiya Toyotaka considers her nature like one “of an animal,” and not of the universe.⁵⁹ It is the “small self” in which one claims the “I.”

Yet, in Sōseki’s mind, Onobu’s own nature was also linked to “great nature,” which transcended her. Both the “small self” and “great self” are not two separate entities. The latter does not fit into the former but rather often crushes it. What did Sōseki mean by this? “Small nature” refers to our egotism but by understanding this, it is possible for one to objectify it. Man cannot objectify his own consciousness from scratch, but by sticking to the point where he realizes that he is attached to it, he begins to see its totality, from which he can obtain an awareness of “great nature.” When one is attached to one’s ego, there is neither realization of “small” nor “great self.” However, when one’s own consciousness is objectified even a little bit, one starts seeing both. When one is occupied with “small self,” “great nature” appears in some way or other so as to crush one’s concerns. Once, the self that is attached to egotism is objectified, one begins to see the “light of equality” (*kōhei na hikari* 公平な光り).

In Sōseki’s later conversations in which the idea of “leaving oneself while entrusting in great nature” is mentioned, “great nature” is described as “seeing everything equally” (*isshi dōjin* 一視同仁) and “difference is instantly non-distinction” (*shabetsu soku mushabetsu* 差別即無差別). This means that one is able to see all things impartially once they are objectified through reflecting on one’s own consciousness. According to Matsuoka Yuzuru’s *Kikigaki* 聞き書き (“Verbatim Account [of Sōseki]”) in *Ah, sōseki sanbō* ああ漱石山房 (Sōseki’s Study Room), one of Sōseki’s students asked him whether *satori* 悟り meant for one to overcome instinct or not, to which he denied this by say-

⁵⁸ *Light and Darkness*, pp. 282–3.

⁵⁹ Komiya Toyotaka, “Meian kaisetsu” in *SZ*, vol. 9, p. 690.

ing that it referred to one's control of one's instincts freely and further stated that he had recently come to experience this.

Recently, I have finally reached to such a state of mind, which I wish to call "leaving oneself while entrusting in great nature" (*sokuten kyoshi*), even though others might express it differently, it means to leave the small self, which is ordinarily called the "I" and entrust oneself to the commands of the great self in universal nature. Having said all this, however, I feel that words are not enough to describe such a state. In its presence, the arguments, ideals or principles, which are said to be very important, appear to me like trifling matters; yet, things that are usually seen as less important, appear to me as something that possesses some kind of meaning. In other words, from the viewpoint of the observer, this means that one is able to see everything equally, or that "difference is instantly non-distinction."⁶⁰

"Entrust oneself to the commands of the great self in universal nature" refers to "great nature" as described in *Meian* and hence, "seeing everything equally" or "difference is instantly non-distinction" is a traditional way of expressing this, which Sōseki, however, replaces with "the eyes of pure objectiveness."

The question is how to gain such an insight where man inevitably is able to pursue his own interests. In other words, how can he transform his perspective from "small self" to "great self," or rather how can he be consistent in the eyes of pure objectiveness all the time? The answer is that one gains it only through training (*shugyō* 修業) or action (*jissen* 実践). In the aforementioned quote, Sōseki's words, "Recently, I have finally reached to such a state of mind," point to this. However, before making this remark, he had also said (responding to the student's question on whether or not *satori* meant for one to overcome instinct):

No, that wouldn't be the case. *Satori* probably refers to the capacity to freely control one's instincts while following them. In order to gain this, training (*shugyō*) is needed. Although this looks rather evasive at first, I think that the effect brought about by this, will demonstrate the best way of living nobly.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Matsuoka Yuzuru, *Ah, sōseki sanbō*, Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1967, p. 150.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 149–50.

After this exchange, that particular student continued to ask him whether he, himself, had obtained such a state of mind or not. On this matter, I have already stated that Sōseki responded that training was necessary for him to objectify consciousness.

Therefore, what did he specifically mean by training? In my opinion, it was through his writing novels and moreover practicing Zen. For him, the former was a way of practicing how to thoroughly objectify consciousness, which is clearly demonstrated during the time that he was writing *Meian*, his last novel. His daily routine was to do this in the morning, and paint, practice calligraphy, or compose Chinese poetry (*kanshi* 漢詩) in the afternoon. He set up such a regime, as writing this, was a very painful experience for him, as the novel describes all different psychological personalities in detail, including their individual egos. However, he tried to be as fair and impartial as possible with each persona by objectifying his understanding of each of them equally. I wonder how exhausted he was in this process. Thus, in order to recuperate in this agonizing situation, he looked upon the afternoon routine as purely recreational.

According to Kyōko, (Sōseki's wife), he especially painted when facing a spiritual crisis at the time of writing this novel, and created a miniature work with his laborious efforts when his brain was not working normally.⁶² Also, concerning Chinese poetry, she recalled his saying something like “writing a novel makes my thinking vulgar” thus, “he made a daily routine from this summer by composing Chinese poetry in the afternoons and evenings, after writing (the novel).”⁶³

His body was extremely exhausted, and during his writing of this novel, he sent his urine to the hospital almost every day to be examined, even though he had already been treated for diabetes. In his *Nikki* 日記 (Diary) on May 28, 1916, he asks “Is it because I use my brain in the morning?” when the doctor told him that his sugar count was found to be high in his afternoon urine. He suffered from a gastric ulcer and often had to go to bed. Two months later, he lost a great deal of weight and finally in December, he vomited a tremendous amount of blood, eventually resulting in his death. Though his soul and body were fatigued, he continued to write *Meian*. If this is not considered “training,” then how can his life be characterized? This is rightfully a training performed by a practitioner of consciousness with all his strength.

⁶² *Sōseki no omoide*, p. 135.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

The second method, which Sōseki found effective for objectifying his consciousness, was *zazen* 坐禪, sitting meditation. As I described earlier, he kept his distance from traditional Zen, even though he was interested in it. However, in his later years, he came to praise Zen practice highly, though that did not mean that he had given up intellectualism, but rather showed his re-evaluation of traditional Zen, after he, by himself, had confidently found it an effective method for objectification and was convinced of its efficacy.

With its long history, Zen provides a curriculum for the practitioner to reach *satori*, which is completely different from Sōseki's lifetime achievement of objectifying consciousness. First of all, he was interested in Zen not because he aimed to establish a settled mind (*anjin ryūmei* 安心立命), but rather he wished to question how the self, as a modern entity, should be defined in the Meiji era and how the modern ego, which was capable of sustaining a reality in that period, could be created.⁶⁴ Once he had discovered the possibility of establishing a Japanese subjectivity, he began to re-evaluate traditional Zen. In one of Sōseki's letters addressed to a young Zen priest, with whom he had become acquainted in 1914, it says:

This may seem strange to say but I am an “ignorant thing” who, only after reaching the age of fifty, has become aware of aspiring to follow the Way. Considering when I will be able to devote myself to it, I am surprised at how great the distance is. You are proficient in the Zen (teaching) which I do not understand very well. It is true that you have painstakingly sought this way through practice. Therefore, you may be able to embrace happiness much more than I, as I have lived hesitantly until the age of fifty. How unique your state of mind is! I deeply respect it. You are much more noble than the young fellows who have come to my place.⁶⁵

Also, in *Tentōroku* 點頭錄 (A Record of Understandings), which was written over the New Year's in 1916, the very year, in which Sōseki passed away, he states:

One cannot ultimately predict one's death, as one's length of life cannot be determined by oneself. Although having many kinds of illnesses, I am still ten years younger than when Zhào-zhōu 趙州 [a Zen monk in China] raised the bodhi-mind. I shall not live for a

⁶⁴ See Kitayama Masamichi, “Sōseki to zen,” p. 16.

⁶⁵ “Tomizawa keidō ate shokan (dated November 15, 1916),” in *SZ*, vol. 15, pp. 604–5.

hundred and twenty years, but I think that it is possible for me to make some kind of achievement if I try as hard as possible. Therefore, I am determined to exert myself by modeling myself on Zhào-zhōu as he frowned [on practice].⁶⁶

Even before making this observation in his November diary of 1915, Sōseki had given his thoughts on an old story in which a Zen monk continued to stay awake in his practice by poking his crotch with a sharp instrument. According to Sōseki, people today understand physiological and psychological phenomena very well, but because of this, they become cowards. Both physiology and psychology are types of science, of which the basis is in the statistics of average people. If one thinks that this is the only way to look at the world, one cannot accept exceptions. In other words, for such a person, poking a sharp object into one's own crotch is unthinkable. However, in this world, there are some people who are not bothered by such phenomena, and they are geniuses. So be a genius! Sōseki thought it necessary to transcend scientific knowledge in order to seek a way and, therefore, he promptly reconciled himself with traditional Zen after discovering an effective method of objectifying his consciousness in it.

Just in passing, how did he deal with the unpredictable self in connection with change and continuity in consciousness? When the subconscious suddenly arises, what can one do about it and how can one objectify the confusion caused by it? In Matsuoka's *Kikigaki* in which Sōseki's idea of "leaving oneself while entrusting in great nature" is recorded, the former recalls what the latter had said:

(Sōseki says) "Just imagine, for example, that one's daughter opens a paper sliding-door right now and says 'goodnight' to her father. As he looks at her face, he notices a difference in it since the morning. One of her eyes has swollen. This must be a serious problem for any parent whose adolescent daughter has trouble with her eyes. They will cry and moan, as they are confusingly astonished. But today, I perhaps will be able to say 'Ah! That's what happens' and look at the event calmly."⁶⁷

Sōseki's students were surprised at his saying such a thing, and they unanimously accused him of being cruel. He responded by saying "truth is gener-

⁶⁶ *SZ*, vol. 11, p. 469.

⁶⁷ *Ah, sōseki sanbō*, p. 147.

ally cruel.” In his mind, man is spiritually able to bear difficult things if one is highly trained, even though they might not be physically so. As proof of this, Sōseki writes that one does not want to die no matter how much one understands death intellectually.⁶⁸

Abe Yoshishige also records the aforementioned case of the young girl’s having an eye problem.⁶⁹ Kitayama Masamichi learned this from Ishihara Kenshō.⁷⁰ Whatever account one chooses, it still shows Sōseki was seeking a state of mind that would be undisturbed even by a terrible situation. This is the way of objectifying one’s consciousness in the presence of events that are either changing or continuous, and keeping the same impartial distance from either. Nevertheless, Sōseki had already managed to come up with a similar idea when he began to write *Bungakuron*.

A sudden change means when one is unable to notice a rising of new consciousness. The way this appears seems to be unexpected, but such a consciousness has gradually and already developed inside oneself.⁷¹

Sōseki made this remark in response to *satori* in Zen, which is suddenly experienced. In his mind, such an experience was not only limited to Zen. Here, it can be seen that by clarifying the structure of human consciousness, he was, in fact, trying to deal with changes within it.

Previously, I introduced William James’ concept of the subconscious through which God approaches man, and how Sōseki disagreed with this notion, though he thought that there was an opportunity in the consciousness, including the subconscious, from which one could realize something that went beyond oneself. In this regard, his thoughts were still similar to those of James’. In other words, he thought that by objectifying ordinary consciousness (or by recognizing it as “small self”), one could transcend it. If religion could be defined as an activity in which one was able to be assimilated into something greater than oneself, Sōseki’s position was definitely a religious one. Yet, the uniqueness of his understanding was that the opportunity, which was immanent in one’s consciousness, led neither to God/Buddha nor heaven, even though Sōseki did not mind whether other people wanted to identify it

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

⁶⁹ See Abe Yoshishige, “Natsume-sensei no tsiuoku,” *Shichō* (June 1917).

⁷⁰ See *Sōbun*, 2 (1977), p. 159.

⁷¹ *Bungakuron*, p. 432.

as such or not. In his discussion of “leaving oneself while entrusting in great nature,” Sōseki states:

Although the concepts of self-power and Other Power, which sound so Buddhist-like, seem to be very clear, people are easily misled. It is unnecessary to presume the existence of absolute figures in the first place, however I think, there will be no salvation unless one reaches the stage explained by these concepts. We, as rational beings, cannot think of God that is transcendent, and we do not need it if we examine ourselves immanently. However, if one wishes to identify the absolute value of awakening or the ultimate experience of having spiritual enlightenment as God or Buddha, that will be fine.⁷²

Sōseki’s position was to fix his eyes on consciousness and by objectifying this, he tried to recognize a deeper level beneath it. He did not look for a transcendent being apart from his own consciousness. His understanding of this could be juxtaposed with that of Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (a prominent modern Shin Buddhist scholar), in which *ālaya-vijñāna*, one of the deeper levels of consciousness, is equated with the vow-mind of Bodhisattva Dharmākara. One can also see a parallel between Sōseki’s interest in consciousness and Nishida Kitarō’s philosophy. In any case, the former’s effort to find salvation through the analysis of consciousness is unique to this modern age, and hence, it is still meaningful for us today.

Sōseki’s (Wearing a) Smile (Bishō suru Sōseki 微笑する漱石)

Sōseki sought for the establishment of subjectivity in order to overcome the uncertainty of consciousness without resorting to God or Buddha. In his later years, he started becoming close to such a state of mind, which I have already described. I feel, therefore, it is appropriate to call him a “practitioner of consciousness” (*ishiki no gyōja* 意識の行者). What was then the landscape, which was opened up in front of him?

Up to now I have been writing at random on other people and on myself. When referring to others I was haunted by the fear of embarrassing them. When referring to myself, on the other hand, I was able to breathe freely. However, I have not succeeded in ridding

⁷² Ah, *sōseki sanbō*, p. 148.

myself of a certain complacency. If I am not enough of a poseur to deceive people with lies, I shall in the end have avoided revealing the worst and pettiest aspect[s] of the faults by which I could have lost face. Someone once said, “The Confessions of Saint Augustine, the Confessions of Rousseau, the Confessions of an English Opium-Eater . . . if one were to trace them back to their origins, the real truth would be absent and people could not restore it.” Besides, what I have written is not a confession. I suppose I have disclosed only the brighter side of my sins if they can be so described. To certain readers this may be unwelcome. But now, indifferent to this reaction, I look around me, view Humanity in general, and smile. It is the same look that I bestow on the trifles that I have written hitherto; with a feeling that they come from someone else, I continue smiling.⁷³

The smile mentioned here perhaps refers to one’s “seeing everything equally.” Sōseki was able to smile under any circumstances because he was free, as his ordinary ego was not disturbed by any event, including his difficult relationships with others and confusion caused by sudden rises of the subconscious. He was able to accept everything as it was and this allowed him to smile. Sōseki’s state of mind, whether described as “leaving oneself while entrusting in great nature” or “smiling,” can easily be equated with some kind of Buddhist enlightenment. Or one can say that the ordinary ego as “small self” is dissolved into “great self.” That may be the case; however, it seems to me that he had a tenacious will with which the totality of his consciousness was thoroughly examined and objectified. He came to this conclusion as he held the highest values in logical thinking, rational judgment and a keen sense of reason. What is remarkable is that Sōseki grew much more sympathetic in his later years when he exercised his eyes of pure objectiveness. For instance, in one of his letters addressed to Mushakōji Saneatsu 武者小路実篤, he writes:

Mushakōji-san, there are as many things as particles of dust that make me unpleasant, upset and angry. However, man cannot clean them up by himself. If it is the dignity of man to forgive them, instead of fighting them, I recommend both of us to practice the former as much as possible. What do you think?⁷⁴

⁷³ *Inside My Glass Doors*, trans. by Sammy I. Tsunematsu, Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2002, pp. 116–7.

⁷⁴ “Mushakōji saneatsu ate shokan (dated June 15, 1915),” in *SZ*, vol. 15, p. 473.

The capacity to forgive things, which make one unpleasant, upset and angry is the ethics, which resulted from Sōseki's exhausting efforts to objectify his consciousness. It is the ethical expression of "great self" and "great nature." In the same vein, let me quote another letter, which was addressed to his young students, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介 and Kume Masao 久米正雄:

If it is absolutely necessary for us to become a cow, even though we may wish to be a horse, then it will be quite difficult to be completely a cow. Even an old person like myself is like a cross between a cow and a horse. Don't be in a hurry. Don't make your heads dull. Be patient! People in this world know how to bow their heads in the presence of patience. However, it is only a memory of the moment given to fireworks. Push while grunting and groaning until you die, that's all. Never fix someone as your opponent and push them. Our opponents continuously come after us, which make us worried. But the cow continues to push as though not bothered by them. If you ask me what one needs to push, I shall answer. It is to push man, but not the writer. I am going to take a bath now.⁷⁵

Sōseki seemed to continue seeking a way as can be seen by his responses to questions such as, what should man be like and how should he act. In other words, he was searching for the "nature of the human being" (*ningen no shizen* 人間の自然), indicating a state of mind that follows one's ego, i.e., "small nature." However, at the same time, it has the possibility of objectifying the ego and treating it as "small self" as opposed to "great self." I have already discussed that human consciousness can be divided into two extremes, depending on the degree of objectification.

In addition to this classification, Sōseki also thought that there were two characteristics in human nature; one, close to Mother Nature and the other, quite its opposite—the aspect of the social animal. To put it differently, on the one hand, one appreciates the beauty of a mountain, river, grassland or a forest, while on the other hand, one regards the pursuit of justice and the fulfillment of a love for one's compatriot as the greatest virtues in a historical reality. Sōseki had already expressed this idea in his earlier writings *Eikoku shijin no tenchi sansen ni taisuru kannen* 英国詩人の天地山川に対する観念 (The Notion of English Poets Regarding Sky, Earth, Mountain and River) and

⁷⁵ "Akutagawa ryūnosuke/Kume masao ate shokan (dated August 24, 1916)," in *ibid.*, pp. 580–1.

Whitman no shi ni tsuite ホイットマンの詩について (On Whitman's Poems). In the case of Sōseki's novels, the character of the persona varied, as for example, the painter, the protagonist in *Kusamakura* represented the "one," while Shirai Dōya in *Nihyaku tōka* 二百十日 (*The 210th Day*) represented the "other."

Sōseki had originally been fond of Mother Nature, and this longing for it became much stronger in his later years:

People, whom I like, have gradually lessened, and I'm getting a sense of beauty in the sky, earth, grasslands and forests. The spring light these days makes me particularly happy and I am living my life for this purpose.⁷⁶

In spite of his inclination toward disliking people, there was always a persona in his novels, who thought about going to Manchuria (or elsewhere connected with the Japanese empire) and making some success in the world. Particularly in *Meian*, Kobayashi appears glued to the economic conditions of the Japan of his time. In *Tentōroku*, while showing a desire to begin Zen practice, Sōseki severely criticizes Japan's nationalism and militarism. In other words, he was deeply concerned with the reality of the social life in the Meiji period, while seeking a commonality between man and Mother Nature as the ultimate goal of human beings. He hoped to find a way to understand how man should be, as just one form of various beings in Mother Nature, which, in turn, could offer him an ideal, such as heaven (*ten*) and "great nature," which would teach him about human nature and how to fulfill it. Sōseki, in this way, strongly believed that the most natural way of living for man would be found through the objectification of consciousness.

He was a modern seeker after truth as he focused on the consciousness of the self while rejecting the worship of God and Buddha. Nevertheless, by trying to discover the meaning of life most ideally in the domain of Mother Nature, his search for truth remained traditional. During his stay in London, Sōseki made a comparison of Eastern and Western cultures and described it something like this: What Orientals have sought is how to obtain freedom of mind in a given situation, whereas what Occidentals have searched for, is how to become happier by placing a particular mind in a better position. Hence, the former tries hard to obtain peace of mind, which will not be disturbed by external changes, while the latter makes efforts to improve external conditions, which will make them happy. "For the Orientals, effort is internally

⁷⁶ "Tsuda seifū ate shokan (dated March 29, 1914)," in *SZ*, vol. 15, p. 341.

made. For the Occidentals, effort is externally created.”⁷⁷ Sōseki’s search for truth was compatible with the way he defined Oriental tradition.

In conclusion, I shall quote what appears to be the culmination of his spiritually-devised plan.

I really hope that after I die, everyone will gather before my coffin and send me off with a “Banzai!” I believe consciousness is all there is to life, and yet I cannot believe that the same consciousness is all of me. I believe something of me will remain even after I die, and further, that I will return to my original self when I die.⁷⁸

The practitioner of consciousness discovered a world, which transcended his own consciousness, by exhaustingly objectifying it. Whether the reader of this paper agrees with him or not, is not a matter of my concern. Rather, I should emphasize the way this practitioner lived as a process of life in the making. Sōseki searched for the significance of human existence and the meaning of life, in ways through which he became faithful to the spirit of his time, Japan’s modern period. I am greatly moved by such an image.

(Translated by Ama Michihiro)

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

The *Sōseki Zenshū* cited in this article, refers to the one published in 1965–1967. Please note that this list is based on the volume number as found in the *SZ*, rather than alphabetical order.

Natsume Sōseki. 1966. *Kusamakura* 草枕. In vol. 2 of *Sōseki Zenshū* 漱石全集. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.

———. 1966. *Kōfu* 坑夫. In vol. 3.

———. 1966. *Mon* 門. In vol. 4.

———. 1966. *Kokoro* ころ. In vol. 6.

———. 1966. *Meian* 明暗. In vol. 7.

———. 1966. *Garasudo no uchi*. 硝子戸の中. In vol. 8.

———. 1966. *Bungakuron* 文学論. In vol. 9.

———. 1966. *Watakushi no kojīn-shugi* 私の個人主義. In vol. 11.

———. 1966. *Bungei no tetsugakuteki kiso* 文芸の哲学的基礎. In vol. 11.

———. 1966. *Tentōroku* 點頭錄. In vol. 11.

———. 1966. *Jinsei* 人生. In vol. 12.

⁷⁷ *Sōseki shiryō: Bungakuron nōto*, pp. 161–5.

⁷⁸ “Hayashihara kōzō ate shokan (dated November 14, 1914),” in *SZ*, vol. 15. pp. 414–5.

- . 1966. *Bokusetsuroku* 木屑録. In vol. 12.
- . 1966. *Danpen* 断片. In vol. 13.
- . 1966. *Nikki oyobi danpen* 日記及び断片. In vol. 13.
- . 1967. “Akutagawa ryūnosuke/ Kume masao ate shokan (dated August 24, 1916)” 芥川龍之介・久米正雄宛書簡. In vol. 15.
- . 1967. “Hayashihara kōzō ate shokan (dated November 14, 1914)” 林原耕三宛書簡. In vol. 15.
- . 1967. “Mushakōji saneatsu ate shokan (dated June 15, 1915)” 武者小路実篤宛書簡. In vol. 15.
- . 1967. “Tomizawa keidō ate shokan (dated November 15, 1916)” 富沢敬道宛書簡. In vol. 15.
- . 1967. “Tsuda seifū ate shokan (dated March 29, 1914)” 津田青楓宛書簡. In vol. 15.
- . 1967. *Tanpyō narabi ni zakkan* 短評並に雑感. In vol. 16.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Bergson, Henri. 1944. *Creative Evolution*. Translated by Arthur Mitchell, New York: The Modern Library.
- James, William. 1985. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Cambridge: Massachusetts, Harvard University Press.
- Kawai Hayao 河合隼雄. 1980. *Jung shinrigaku nyūmon* ヨング心理学入門. Tokyo: Baifukan.
- Kitayama Masamichi 北山正迪. 1969. “Sōseki to zen” 漱石と禅. *Daijōzen* 大乘禅 46, no. 11, pp. 3–85.
- Komiya Toyotaka 小宮豊隆. 1966. “Meian kaisetsu” 明暗解説. In *Soseki Zenshū*, vol. 9. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- Matsuoka Yuzuru 松岡譲. 1967. *Ah, sōseki sanbō* ああ漱石山房. Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha.
- Muraoka Isamu 村岡勇, ed. 1976. *Sōseki shiryō: Bungakuron nōto* 漱石資料: 文学論ノート. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- Natsume Kyōkō 夏目鏡子. 1978. *Sōseki no omoide* 漱石の思い出. Tokyo: Kadokawa bunko.
- Shigematsu Yasuo 重松泰雄. 1978. “Sōseki bannen no shisō, chū” 漱石晩年の思想 (中). *Bungaku* 文学, pp. 1493–504.

TRANSLATIONS

- Inside My Glass Doors (Garasudo no uchi)*. 2002. Translated by Sammy I. Tsunematsu, Boston: Tuttle Publishing.
- Kokoro*. 1992. Translated by Edwin McClellan. In *Kokoro And Selected Essays*. *Kokoro*, translated by Edwin McClellan and *Essays* by Jay Rubin, Lanham: Madison Books.
- Light and Darkness (Meian)*. 1971. Translated by Valdo.H. Viglielmo, London: Peter Owen.
- My Individualism (Watakushi no kojīn-shugi) and The Philosophical Foundations of Literature (Bungei no tetsugakuteki kiso)*. 2004. Translated by Sammy I. Tsunematsu, Boston: Tuttle Publishing.
- The Three-Cornered World (Kusamakura)*. 1965. Translated by Alan Turney, London and Chester Springs: Peter Owen.