

Natsume Sōseki and Shin Buddhism*

MIZUKAWA TAKAO

THE usual position taken regarding Sōseki and Buddhism is to focus on his interest in the Zen tradition of that religion. His connection to Shin Buddhism (*Shinshū* 真宗) is usually ignored with statements such as expressed by Ara Masahito: “He wasn’t particularly interested in it” (*amari konomanakatta* 余り好まなかった).¹ Although Miyazawa Seijun has studied the relationship between Sōseki and the Pure Land teaching,² the usual attitude among Sōseki researchers is expressed in the entry for “Natsume Sōseki” in *Asahi shōjiten: Natsume sōseki* 朝日小辞典: 夏目漱石 (Asahi Small Encyclopedia: Natsume Sōseki): “For Sōseki, Buddhism essentially meant Zen Buddhism” (*Sōseki ni okeru bukkyō wa jisshitsuteki ni zen o imi shiteiru darō* 漱石における仏教は実質的に禅を意味しているだろう).³ There is a heading “Sōseki

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¹ Ara Masahito, “Sōseki kenkyū nenpyō,” *Sōseki bungaku zenshū bekkann*, Tokyo: Shueisha, 1970, p. 453.

² Miyazawa Seijun, “Natsume sōseki to bukkyō: Toku ni tariki jōdomon tonon kankei,” pt. 1. *Nihon Bukkyō* 42 (1977), p. 41; and pt. 2. *Nihon Bukkyō* 43 (1977), p. 32.

³ Nakajima Kunihiko, “Bukkyō to sōseki,” *Asahi shōjiten: Natsume sōseki*, ed., Etō Jun, Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1977, p. 165.

and Lao-tzu/Zhuangzi, Zen” (*Sōseki to rōsō, zen* 漱石と老荘・禪) in the May 1988 issue of *Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 国文学・解釈と教材の研究 (Materials for Studying and Teaching Japanese Literature), but no mention of Shin Buddhism.⁴ This essay seeks to correct such common misconceptions about Sōseki and Shin Buddhism by digging into his life, works, and thought.

Sōseki’s family religion was Shin Buddhism.⁵ His family temple (*bodaiji* 菩提寺) was Honpō-ji 本法寺, which is described in *Shinshū shin jiten* 真宗新辞典 (The New Dictionary of Shin Buddhism) as follows:

Honpō-ji: Associated with Ōtani-ha (Higashi Honganji). 2-chōme Suidōbashi, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 東京都文京区水道橋2丁目. Traces its origins to the period of 1469–1487, when Rennyo [the eighth abbot of Honganji, 蓮如 (1415–1499)] established a temple in Katata, Ōmi Province (present-day Shiga prefecture, nr. Kyoto) and placed his sixth son, Renjun 蓮淳, in charge. Later, sometime between 1570 and 1573, the temple burned down during a battle. In 1627, the resident minister, Kyōei 教映, was ordered by the thirteenth Honganji abbot, Sennyō 宣如, to move the temple to Inuzuka, Mikawa Province (present-day Aichi prefecture). Later, in 1675, Kyōei’s son, Ryōshū 良秀, constructed a temple in Ushigome in Edo (now Tokyo), which was moved to its present site in 1705.⁶

According to *Zenkoku jūin meikan* 全国寺院名鑑 (The Directory of Japanese Buddhist Temples):

The object of reverence is an image of Amida Buddha in the main worship hall (*hondō*). Temple treasures are a wooden image of Rennyo and a letter written by Kennyo [the eleventh abbot of Honganji, 顕如 (1543–1592)] during the Battle of Ishiyama [when Oda Nobunaga laid siege to Ishiyama Honganji for ten years]. The temple was originally known as *Kōgen-zan* 高源山. During the late

⁴ Kamo Akira, “Sōseki to rōsō, zen,” *Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 32, no. 6 (1987), p. 47.

⁵ During the Edo period (1603–1867), all families were required by law to be members of a Buddhist temple. This law was rescinded during the Meiji period (1868–1912), but family ties to temples were still strong during Sōseki’s time, and remain so even today. [Translator’s Note]

⁶ *Shinshū shin jiten*, Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1983, p. 463.

fifteenth century, Rennyo built a structure at Katata in Ōmi Province, had an image of himself carved, and placed his son Renjun in charge . . .⁷

According to the current seventeenth resident minister of Honpō-ji, Reverend Fujiwara Masamaro 藤原正麿, the site encompasses a little less than 72,000 sq. ft. During the Edo period, three branch temples were located within the temple compound but they burned down during the period 1830–1844. About ten assistant ministers (*yakusō* 役僧) were employed by the temple during the Meiji period. Because of changes in the names of streets, the present address of the temple is 4-15 1-chōme, Kobinata, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 東京都文京区小日向1丁目4番地ノ15. How much influence did Honpō-ji, a branch temple of a major Shin Buddhist denomination, have in forming Sōseki's character and personality?

Sōseki was born on February 9, 1867, as the fifth son of Natsume Kohei Naokatsu 夏目小兵衛直克. He experienced the death of close relatives from an early age. The following are those from whom Sōseki was separated, until the age of thirty-one:

Sawa さわ (eldest sister). Died January 11, 1878. Sōseki age 12.

Chie ちえ (natural mother). Died January 21, 1881. Sōseki age 15.

Daisuke 大助 (eldest brother). Died March 21, 1887. Sōseki age 21.

Naonori 直則 (second eldest brother). Died June 21, 1887. Sōseki age 21.

Toyo 登世 (sister-in-law). Died end of July 1891. Sōseki age 25.

Kohei (natural father). Dharma name (*hōmyō* 法名): *Entsū-in Shaku Chokushō* 円通院釋直証. Died June 29, 1897. Sōseki age 31.

Among the above, the young Sōseki must have been especially shocked by the deaths of his beloved mother, his eldest brother, and sister-in-law.

Experiencing the deaths of all these close relatives must have led him to keenly feel the transitory nature of life. Through ceremonies such as the overnight vigil (*tsuya* 通夜), funeral service, seven-week mourning period, and various memorial services (*hōji* 法事) conducted according to Shin Buddhist practice, held at his home and at the family temple, Sōseki was naturally raised regarding the central concerns of Shin Buddhism. As Miyazawa Seijun has pointed out, in a diary entry for 1911 when Sōseki's fifth daughter Hinako ひな

⁷ *Zenkoku jiin meikan*, Tokyo, 1969, p. 18.

な子 passed away, he could differentiate among *Jōdo sanbu-kyō* 浄土三部經 (The Three Pure Land Sutras), *Wasan* 和讃 (Shinran's Hymns), and *Gobunshō* 御文章 or *Ofumi* 御文 (Rennyō's Letters).⁸ He must have become familiar with them as a result of memorial and other regular services.

Sōseki had a strong desire for life. The thought expressed in his essay *Watakushi no kojīn-shugi* 私の個人主義 (My Individualism), “‘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 . . .”⁹ was always a central concern, and spurred him in both his studies and work. But he also seemed to have had a deep-rooted dislike of life and a sympathy for death from an early age. That feeling was expressed as pessimism or weariness of life (*ensei-shugi* 厭世主義) in a letter he wrote to Masaoka Shiki 正岡子規 (1867–1902) dated November 11, 1891, though this was first expressed to him in the following letter dated August 9, 1890:

Ahh, Masaoka-kun! We should not be concerned about rumors that praise or censure us for they are no more than rat shit falling from rafters and from which we should avert our eyes. We will be laughed at by Zen monks, and while not specifically mentioned in [Rennyō's] *Gobun-sama* [*The Letters*], when our two eyes are closed forever and our single breath is stilled for all time, there is neither master nor retainer, virtue, authority, nor even people who can disturb us. We look forward to enjoying true emptiness and tranquility. All is over when the lid is placed over our coffins. If someone were to dig up my white bones, would that person know if Natsume Sōseki had ever lived?¹⁰

Determining the causes that led to the pessimism that took root in Sōseki's mind and heart would require an essay in itself. Here, let me suggest some of them: It was due to his innate “nervous temperament” (*shinkei kabin* 神経過敏) as mentioned in *Bunshi no seikatsu* 文士の生活 (Life of A Man of Letters),¹¹ the fact that he had been given out to be adopted immediately after birth only to be returned to his natural family as a result of discord in his adoptive one,

⁸ Miyazawa, pt. 1, p. 61.

⁹ Natsume Sōseki, *My Individualism and The Philosophical Foundations of Literature*, trans. by Sammy I. Tsunematsu, Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2004, p. 35.

¹⁰ *Sōseki Zenshū*, vol. 14, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1966, pp. 22–23. Hereafter, *Sōseki Zenshū*, published in 1965–1967, is shown as *SZ*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 16, p. 711.

raised as a “nuisance” (*ikko no jama mono* 一個の邪魔物) by his natural father as mentioned in *Michikusa* 道草 (Grass on the Wayside),¹² the isolation of being considered an “eccentric” (*henbutsu* 変物) by his family and relatives for being an intellectual as mentioned in *Shojosaku tsuikaidan* 処女作追懐談 (Reminiscences of the Maiden Work)¹³ and, together with the “development of his individuality” (*kosei no hatten* 個性の発展) as mentioned in *Wagahai wa neko de aru* 吾輩は猫である (I Am a Cat),¹⁴ let me end this list with the coercion of modern society that causes a feeling of helplessness and anxiety because of “thoughts of competition, of always thinking of winning, winning” (*kyōsō no nen, katō katō no kokoro* 競争の念、勝とう勝とうの心) as mentioned in *Wagahai wa neko de aru*¹⁵ that results in “an aggregate of isolated individuals” (*koritsu shita ningen no shūgōtai* 孤立した人間の集合体) as stated in *Sorekara* それから (And Then).¹⁶

What Sōseki agonized over the most—even while knowing he “should not be concerned about rumors that praise or censure” him—was his hurt at being criticized by others. The basis for that agony, of course, was his anxiety about life and his personal timidity and cowardice. In the letter to Masaoka Shiki quoted above, our attention is drawn to the fact that Sōseki mentions Zen monks and Rennyō’s letter entitled *Hakkotsu no shō* 白骨の章 (On White Bones). Within the contradiction of desire for life and a sympathy for death, Sōseki sought calm and tranquility, and through the Zen and Shin teachings of Buddhism, a mind and heart that could not be shaken.

From about the end of December 1894 to January 7 of the following year, Sōseki sat in meditation under Shaku Sōen 釋宗演 (1859–1919) at Engaku-ji 円覚寺 in Kamakura (nr. Tokyo). He went there because his friends Yoneyama Yasusaburō 米山保三郎 and Suga Torao 菅虎雄 had been disciples of Shaku

¹² Natsume Sōseki, *Grass on the Wayside*, trans. by Edwin McClellan, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 148.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. 16, p. 604.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 518. This phrase in the original Japanese does not appear in the Ito/Wilson English translation, *I Am a Cat*. As the translators point out in their Introduction, “Sōseki’s brilliant and extremely concise use of the Japanese language makes all his writings difficult to translate . . . Such problems usually lead translators to beg the indulgence of their readers: but forgive them not, for they know what they do.” *I Am a Cat*, trans. by Aiko Ito and Graeme Wilson, Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2002, p. xvi. [Translator’s Note]

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79. This phrase in the original Japanese does not appear in the Ito/Wilson English translation, *I Am a Cat*. [Translator’s Note]

¹⁶ Natsume Sōseki, *And Then*, trans. by Norma Moore Field, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978, p. 102.

Sōen's master, Imakita Kōsen 今北洪川, and also because Sōseki wanted to, through his own efforts, conquer his pessimism that was becoming stronger. Unfortunately, this meditative effort ended in failure because Sōseki could not solve the Zen riddle (*kōan* 公案), concerning what his original state was [before his parents were born].¹⁷ But Sōseki's devotion to Zen continued. According to Shigematsu Yasuo, more than half of the books on Zen in Sōseki's possession had been published between 1887 and the 1890s.¹⁸ Even during the summer of 1898, Sōseki sat in meditation under Asai Eiki 浅井栄熙.

On the other hand, Sōseki had contact with Shin Buddhism from the time he was a child, which can also be detected in his writings. Miyazawa has pointed out that Pure Land thought can be found in the *haiku* 俳句 collection entitled *Shinsentai* 神仙体 that Sōseki collaborated on with Takahama Kyoshi 高浜虚子 (1874–1959) and Murakami Seigetsu 村上霽月 in March of 1896; a joint *haiku*-based poem he collaborated on with the former, published in the November and December 1904 issues of *Hototogisu* ホトトギス (a *haiku* journal and association initiated by Masaoka Shiki in 1897) under the title *Ama* 尼 (Nun); and his independent *haiku*-based poem, *Tōya* 冬夜 (Winter Eve), published in the same magazine in December of that same year. Miyazawa's essay finds the roots of Sōseki's interest in Shin Buddhism starting with the deep relationship between *haiku* and Pure Land thought in [Yosa] Buson's poetry, and more specifically under Masaoka Shiki's influence. In the final section of *Tōya*, Sōseki sums things up with:

Crawling under the covers,
Trying to sleep, but unable to.
[Reciting] Namu Amida Butsu . . .
Finally, to sleep without worries and dreams.¹⁹

Sōseki was disturbed by nightmares from time to time. In *Garasudo no uchi* 硝子戸の中 (Inside My Glass Doors), he wrote that he had a nightmare in his childhood about committing a crime and spending a large sum of money that did not belong to him. Sōseki had no idea how he had done this and because it was impossible to repay the money, he suffered a great deal worrying about it. He wrote in his memoirs: “. . . my siestas were often accompanied by

¹⁷ “Saitō agu ate shokan (dated January 10, 1895),” in *SZ*, vol. 14, p. 65.

¹⁸ Shigematsu Yasuo, “Sōseki to rōsō, zen oboegaki,” in vol. 5 of *Kōza natsume sōseki*, Tokyo: Yūbikaku, 1982, p. 89.

¹⁹ Miyazawa, pt. 1, p. 48.

strange hallucinations.”²⁰ Even after becoming an adult, Sōseki wrote in a letter, “I had a dream in which I saw (a notice of) a great crime that I had committed long ago and had completely forgotten, plastered on the wall next to my bedside, completely dumbfounding me. The crime was murder or something like that . . .”²¹ This expresses the consciousness of dark guilt deep in Sōseki’s mind and heart. Although it would not do to consider the esthetic world expressed in *Tōya* to be the complete truth, it would not be at all strange to imagine that during times that Sōseki sought a night of peaceful sleep, he would recall Amida Buddha’s name, which he had heard and recited from childhood, and murmur it quietly under his breath.

Sōseki consciously and willfully directed himself to Zen practice from before he began his career as a writer. On the other hand, it can also be said that he became familiar with the teaching of Shin Buddhism unconsciously and very naturally through its services, practice, and atmosphere.

Sōseki began his career as a writer after receiving favorable reviews for *Wagahai wa neko de aru*, which began to be published from the January 1905 issue of *Hototogisu*. In *Danpen* 断片 (A Fragment) that he wrote in 1905–1906, Sōseki expressed negative thoughts about religion. Examples are:

Why don’t we have belief in God? Because I have faith in myself, I do not have faith in God.

Even if I search throughout the world, I will not find anything more sacred than myself.

If we do not consider ourselves to be sacred, we are no more than slaves.

Those who do not consider themselves to be sacred and run to God are nothing more than slaves. It is better to die than to become a slave to God. Most people are slaves, aren’t they?

Life in this floating world is like falling into a crevasse where we agonize over our gloomy, sad, and unhappy lives. Only because there is a future do those in the darkness feel a ray of light [hope] being directed towards them. Those who have faith in a life [after death] are at ease [in this world].

Do not request ease of the future. Living in a golden world in the future—a completely fulfilled world—is no more than weaving silk

²⁰ Natsume Sōseki, *Inside My Glass Doors*, trans. by Sammy I. Tsunematsu, Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2002, p. 113.

²¹ “Noma shinkō ate shokan (dated January 15, 1905),” in *SZ*, vol. 14, p. 275.

on a loom [working actively] in the present. It is no more than collecting a piece of gold, no more than increasing good, beauty, and truth by more than a fraction, nor cultivating a little more land.

Attaining nirvana—after being born in the [Pure Land of] Ultimate Joy—is no more than insisting on one thing a little more than another in this world.

Other than in the sense of developing my will, there is no value in my receiving [the gift] of life . . .²²

Stressing the importance of self-dignity and self-reliance rather than happiness in the future, Sōseki sought the greatest value in the development of the individual will or volition in the present. For Sōseki, however, the dilemma was that this self that relied on itself was always uneasy and tormented because his will was not strong enough to do much about it. In the same *Danpen*, Sōseki wrote the following:

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.

“Self-consciousness” [the English term is used here] gives rise to nervous exhaustion. Nervous exhaustion is the universal illness of people in the twentieth century.

On the one hand, the development of human knowledge and the sciences continue steadily, but on the other hand, people are deteriorating step-by-step.

Stated in an extreme way, when the meaning of the well-known phrase “Being transformed as a result of attaining Nirvana” is realized, we are already in a state of nervous exhaustion and beyond salvation.²³

The following is part of a letter that Sōseki wrote to Morita Sōhei 森田草平:

Relying on anything other than ourselves in this world is not being timid. The reason this is so is because nothing is more unreliable than ourselves. Have you ever considered this, Morita-kun?²⁴

²² Ibid., vol. 13, p. 161.

²³ Ibid., pp. 163–4.

²⁴ Ibid., vol. 14, p. 371.

Just what should he do? His craving for the salvation and deliverance of religion that he denied, suddenly boiled up again from deep within his consciousness.

In *Wagahai wa neko de aru*, the philosopher character Yagi Dokusen 八木独仙 mentions the aforementioned two thoughts, and the sacredness of the Taoist and Zen points of view. What about Shin Buddhism? The following is a passage of a letter in this novel, which is from Tendō Kōhei 天道公平 to Kushami 苦沙弥:

The person who first ate sea slugs deserves respect for his daring. The man who first ate blowfish should be honored for his bravery. He who added sea slugs to our diet performed a service for the nation comparable to Shinran's founding of the Pure Land sect, and the contributor of blowfish may be fairly compared with such a courageous religious innovator as the great priest Nichiren. But you dear Dr. Sneeze [Kushami], your gastronomic genius stretches no further than to dried gourd shavings dressed with vinegared bean-paste. I have yet to meet a man of parts whose prowess was advanced by eating dried gourd shavings dressed with vinegared bean-paste.²⁵

Sōseki greatly respected the courage of the founders of the new Buddhist denominations during the Kamakura period (1185–1333) such as Shinran 親鸞 and Nichiren 日蓮, for their personal convictions that did not allow them to give in to the oppression and persecution they were often subjected to. In contrast, Sōseki scorned the mediocrity and timidity of his other self [Kushami, Dr. Sneeze]. The conclusion of *Wagahai wa neko de aru* is:

I am dying, Egypt, dying. Through death I'm drifting slowly into peace. Only by dying can this divine quiescence be attained. May one rest in peace! I am thankful, I am thankful. Thankful, thankful, thankful.²⁶

In the Japanese original, the part translated above as “I am thankful, I am thankful” is “*Namu Amida Butsu* 南無阿弥陀仏” with indications to repeat this six more times. The unnamed cat, therefore, appears to desire birth in the Pure Land by reciting the *Nembutsu* 念仏. This may seem as a light and froth-like

²⁵ *I Am a Cat*, p. 438. This letter is based on *Danpen* written 1908–1909, in which the name “the Venerable Master Shinran” (*Shinran Shōnin*) appears.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 638.

conclusion, but a careful reader should realize that a passage such as “Through death I’m drifting slowly into peace” [peace and tranquility cannot be attained without dying], contains Sōseki’s vivid sense of rejecting the world.

The novel *Botchan* 坊ちゃん published in the April 1906 issue of *Hototogisu* ends with the words: “And that’s why her grave is in Yōgen Temple in Kobinata.”²⁷ The most commonly accepted theory is that this temple is Honpō-ji in Kobinata. Yōgen 養源 probably came from the temple name of *Kōgen-zan*. Also, the following expression is found in the story, *Kusamakura* 草枕 (The Three-Cornered World), published in the September 1906 issue of *Shin shōsetsu* 新小説 (New Stories):

My mysterious apparition had presumably returned to the land from which it had come, far far away across the Styx.²⁸

From this reference to a place transcending his own, we get an indication of the respect Sōseki had for Shinran and the Shin Buddhist tradition he grew up within. It cannot, however, be said that his understanding of the Shin Buddhist doctrine was particularly deep at that time. This can be determined from descriptions such as Kiyō’s waiting for Botchan inside her grave, indicating that she has become a spirit that lives forever. Further, as expressed in a letter to Masaoka Shiki, already mentioned, and also in *Wagahai wa neko de aru*, and in *Botchan*, Sōseki understood Shin Buddhism to be primarily concerned with peace and sustenance in the next world (Amida’s Pure Land). This indicates his complete unawareness of the central concern of Shinran, who stated that real salvation could only be found in this world as a result of our being in the group of those, whose birth in the Pure Land is truly settled (*shōjōju* 正定聚). The peace and tranquility in the world after death through a superficial understanding of Shin Buddhism reverberated together with Sōseki’s dislike of life, and he found it very attractive. And yet we cannot let escape the following passage in *Wagahai wa neko de aru*:

My master’s family belongs to the Shin sect of Buddhism, a sect in which it is the established custom to lay out substantial sums, more indeed than most of its adherents can afford, on household shrines. My master suddenly remembers how, when he was a very small boy, he first saw the shrine in the family safe-room. It was a minia-

²⁷ Natsume Sōseki, *Botchan*, trans. by J. Cohn, Tokyo: Kōdansha International, 2005, p. 172.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, *The Three-Cornered World*, trans. by Alan Turney, Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1967, p. 53.

ture shrine, somber though thickly gilded, in which a brass taper-dish was hanging. From the burning taper a faint light shone, even in the daytime on the rounded dish.²⁹

The Buddhist altar (*butsudan* 仏壇) of the Natsume family was probably acquired during the latter part of the Edo period when the family was still very influential. As the family's fortunes fell after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 however, in Sōseki's eyes, the grandeur of the altar was probably unsuitable for the family. Further, since Shin Buddhist altars try to express the Pure Land, many are covered with gold leaf and the brass implements are made to look like gold. This large amount of gold used may have led him to consider it unfit for his family's status. At any rate, just the fact that Sōseki was always close to Shin Buddhism without fully understanding its teaching, may have been a reason for his critical attitude towards it.

Just before beginning to work for the Mainichi Newspaper Co. on April 4, 1907, Sōseki made a trip to Kyoto where he visited both the Higashi and Nishi Honganji head temples. He visited the former one where he met Ōtani Kubutsu 大谷句仏,³⁰ a poet who joined the *Hototogisu* association. Sōseki then visited the latter temple and noted in his diary: "A huge tree is growing in front of the main worship hall (*hondō* 本堂)."³¹ Further, as Miyazawa has pointed out to refute the accepted opinion that Sōseki "wasn't particularly interested in Shin Buddhism," on September 10, 1907, Sōseki recommended Togawa Akezō 戸川明三, Nasu Saburō 名須三郎, and Noma Shinkō 野間真綱 to Ōtani Shōshin 大谷正信 as English language instructors for Shinshū University (present-day Otani University). As a connection in Sōseki's work after his joining the Mainichi Newspaper, Miyazawa has suggested that the term "non-deluded state" (*jakujōri* 寂定裏) used in his novel *Gubijinsō* 廣美人草 (The Poppy), is based on the notion of a bodhisttava's enlightenment (*kōfu jakujō* 広普寂定) as mentioned in the *Larger Sutra* 大無量寿経 (Skt. *Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra*), one of the Three Pure Land Sutras on which Shin Buddhism is based.³²

On September 2, 1909, while on a trip to Manchuria and Korea, Sōseki was invited to a reception at the home of an old friend, Nakamura Zekō 中村是公,

²⁹ *I Am a Cat*, pp. 174–5.

³⁰ This is the pen name of Ōtani Kōen (1875–1943), the twenty-third abbot of Higashi Honganji, posthumously known as Shōnyo.

³¹ *SZ*, vol. 13, p. 236.

³² Miyazawa, pt. 1, pp. 56–57.

president of the South Manchuria Railway Co. Sōseki was astonished by the size of the reception room in his house. It was as large as the main worship hall of a Buddhist temple, but without an image of the Buddha.

While in Dairen (Ch. Dalian), I frequently walked through this reception room to reach Zekō's library-den. What surprised me is that whenever I crossed it, Amida Buddha never failed to rise in my mind.³³

When Sōseki thought of the main worship area of a Buddhist temple, the Buddha image that came to mind was always that of Amida Buddha. Although there are not many direct references to this in his works, Sōseki's interest in Shin Buddhism must have remained deep in his mind and heart.

As is well known, his works contain many Zen terms and concepts. The novel *Mon* 門 (The Gate), which began to be serialized in the Mainichi Newspaper during March of 1910, is considered to reflect them to a remarkable extent. The central character, Sōsuke, who had an affair with his friend Yasui's wife, thought of engaging in meditation to overcome his anxiety and fear when he heard Yasui had appeared at his landlord's place. Although the locale is based on the meditation retreat that Sōseki undertook in 1894, that work expresses his mental state while writing *Mon*. The meditation that Sōsuke engaged in ended in failure, mirroring Sōseki's own experience. Using that as the source, Sōseki wrote the following two things about it. First, his motive for meditation was "[to give] direction to the deepest self"³⁴ (*kokoro no jisshitsu ga futoku naru mono* 心の実質が太くなるもの), because:

Under the heavy weight that passed down on him he thought only of what specific means he could take to extricate himself, and he had dissociated entirely the effect from the cause, the weight from the sin that had produced it.³⁵

Second is expressed in the passage:

Sōsuke merely stared vacantly ahead. He was impatient with his own lack of endurance and power. But at the same time, if satori

³³ SZ, vol. 8, p. 163.

³⁴ Natsume Sōseki, *The Gate*, trans. by Francis Mathy, New York: Perigee Books, 1982, p. 176.

³⁵ Ibid.

took so many years to achieve, then why had he come to the mountain to start with? This had been the first contradiction.³⁶

Here we can see a glimpse of Sōseki's doubts regarding meditation, which did not resolve any of his problems such as a sense of guilt and further, according to him, the long period of time it required to undertake this, would make it unsuitable for laypersons, who were living a worldly life. It is therefore difficult to say that *Mon* consistently promotes a Zen point of view.

On September 22, 1910, Sōseki wrote an untitled Classical Chinese poem (*kanshi* 漢詩), which he later revised and included in *Omoidasu kotonado* 思い出す事など (Things Brought Back to Mind), published in the December 2 1910 issue of the Mainichi Newspaper.

Sitting in meditation at Engaku-ji, struck [for not doing well].
The blind [unenlightened] ask where to go for enlightenment.
A mountain (*seizan* 青山) does not reject bones of a hired hand.
When poke head up [from grave], Moon in sky.³⁷

Sōseki came to realize that he was just a “hired hand” or “an ordinary person” (*yōnin* 傭人), an inferior person who was unable to attain enlightenment by following Zen practices using self-power (*jiriki* 自力).

The first time Sōseki encountered Shin Buddhism in an organized way was probably when he read *Kiyozawa-sensei shinkō zadan* 清沢先生信仰坐談 (Conversations on Shinjin with Teacher Kiyozawa, hereafter *Conversations*), written by Andō Shūichi 安藤洲一 and published in 1910,³⁸ which was found in Sōseki's personal library. It is a record of the words and actions of

³⁶ Ibid., p. 198.

³⁷ *SZ*, vol. 12, p. 406. For an interpretation of this poem, see pp. 910–11.

³⁸ Kiyozawa Manshi graduated from the Department of Literature, Tokyo Imperial University (present-day Tokyo University) in 1888; he therefore would have been a senior to Sōseki who graduated in 1894. In 1888, Kiyozawa was an editor of the *Journal of the Philosophy Association* (*Tetsugaku kai zasshi* 哲学会雑誌). In 1892, Sōseki became the editor of its successor, *Journal of Philosophy* (*Tetsugaku zasshi* 哲学雑誌). When Kiyozawa began to publish his *Spiritual World* (*Seishinkai* 精神界), his followers such as Akegarasu Haya learned basic publication skills from Masaoka Shiki and Takahama Kyoshi, who were then publishing the magazine, *Hototogisu*. At this late date, there is little likelihood that we will ever learn definitively whether Sōseki and Kiyozawa were acquainted or not, but both knew Kubutsu, the twenty-third abbot of Higashi Honganji, so it appears Sōseki had at least a familiarity with Kiyozawa, and perhaps even felt a closeness to him.

Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903), a man regarded as “a remarkable religious leader in the Meiji period,” a reputation he still holds.³⁹ *Conversations* is a brief work of just 144 pages that not only expresses Kiyozawa’s personal character, which was said to be “at times as solemn and awe-inspiring as autumn frost and at other times as warm as a spring breeze,”⁴⁰ but also is a simple and excellent introduction to Shin Buddhist doctrine.

On November 29, 1911, Sōseki’s beloved fifth daughter Hinako died suddenly. He was greatly saddened, and in his diary wrote, “. . . thoughts of sorrow arise whenever I think [of her death].”⁴¹ Discord developed between the Sōseki family and Honpō-ji as a result of Hinako’s death. Sōseki’s wife, Natsume Kyōko 夏目鏡子, describes the circumstances of that discord in *Sōseki no omoide* 漱石の思い出 (Reminiscences of Sōseki):

But since [Hinako] had passed away, there was no use in lamenting, even in our dreams. We had to at least go through the formality of a funeral, but then a troublesome event occurred. Specifically, because ours was a branch family, we had never before requested a funeral service, had a mortuary tablet, and a memorial service conducted, nor even had a family temple. On the other hand, the temple of the main family was Honpō-ji, a well-known Jōdo Shinshū temple, where the graves of preceding generations were located. But because Natsume [Sōseki] was not interested in the Shin Buddhist teaching, he did not favor becoming a member of Honpō-ji. [I asked] what we should do [regarding the funeral]. Since there was no suitable quick answer, and because his brother recommended it, we decided to request Honpō-ji to conduct the service.⁴²

The above passage is one of the reasons for the accepted view that Sōseki was not very interested in Shin Buddhism. If we compare the above account with his diary entry for the same period, however, doubts arise.

Sōseki’s diary for November 29 contains a detailed description of Hinako’s sudden passing. In contrast, the funeral arrangements with Honpō-ji are passed over with just, “will ask elder brother to make arrangements with the temple.”⁴³ The entry for the next day, November 30, describes in detail that

³⁹ Wakimoto Tsuneya, *Hyōden kiyozawa manshi*, Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1982, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Andō Shūichi, *Kiyozawa-sensei shinkō zadan*, Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1911, p. 5.

⁴¹ *SZ*, vol. 13, p. 674.

⁴² Natsume Kyōko, *Sōseki no omoide*, Tokyo: Kadokawa bunko, 1966, p. 284.

⁴³ *SZ*, vol. 13, p. 699.

someone at the funeral wrote the characters *Namu Amida Butsu* on a sheet of plain paper, dressed Hinako in her burial clothes, and placed her in her coffin. As far as the burial itself is concerned however, all Sōseki wrote was business-like, “Elder brother negotiated a payment of 25 yen [for services] within a hundred days with Honpō-ji.” There is no feeling in this entry that the discussion among family members and relatives that Kyōko mentions ever took place.

Further, Hinako was given the Dharma name, *Junshō-in Shakuni Myōju* 順正院釋尼妙掬 ([Female] Disciple of Śākyamuni Buddha, Wondrous Chrysanthemum). *Junshō-in* is an honorary title known as *ingō* 院号, which is different from a Dharma name, and has greater prestige. To give an *ingō* to someone who had died after a scant year and eight months of life was, even then, very unusual. It was even more unusual because Sōseki’s family was just a branch of the main one. There may have been a reason why Hinako was given *Junshō-in* from a Buddhist denomination that Sōseki was not particularly interested in. This is another case for not placing complete trust in Kyōko’s account in her *Sōseki no omoide*.

The all-night vigil for Hinako was held on December 1, during which Sōseki heard stories from the Three Pure Land Sutras, Shinran’s Hymns and Rennyō’s Letters. Evidence of this is found in his diary and also in *Higan sugimade* 彼岸過迄 (To the Spring Equinox and Beyond) serialized in the Asahi Newspaper from January 1912.⁴⁴ Anecdotes about Dharma talks in the streets (*tsuji seppō* 辻説法) given by the then resident minister at Honpō-ji, Tsūtatsu-in 通達院, “thirteen generations ago” are included in Sōseki’s diary account.⁴⁵ According to *Sōseki no omoide*, the coarse language used by the minister during this all-night vigil service seems to have been the cause of the discord between Sōseki and Honpō-ji. The minister for that service was not very refined and his talk implied much greed.

From saying things such as, “Our temple will accept anything [you wish to offer]. Things belonging to the deceased will probably cause unease if kept at home so we will accept anything [of hers

⁴⁴ A translation of *Higan sugimade* is available. See *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, trans. by Kingo Ochiai and Stanford Goldstein, Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2005.

⁴⁵ The term “thirteen generations ago” could not be true. It must have been a reference to the thirteenth resident minister, Tatsuei 達英, from which the *ingō* of Tsūtatsu-in was probably derived. Otani University ed., “Furoku: Shuyō jiin keifu” in *Shinshū nenpyō*, Kyoto: Otani University, 1973, p. 228.

that you may not wish to keep]. Other families have donated many articles of their deceased [family members].”

He, then, continued explicitly and unabashedly, “If you have anything like [those I have just mentioned], please feel free to donate them [to our temple]. For example, the white cloth draped over the coffin . . . we will accept things like that.”

At this, Natsume [Sōseki] bluntly refused, saying, “That [the white cloth] is something we borrowed from the undertaker!”⁴⁶

There is, however, no record in which Sōseki himself criticizes the minister for that service—no entry in his diary matches such an incident. If there had been such an unpleasant occurrence, Sōseki surely would have recorded it in his diary. He seems to have dozed off during that all-night vigil. Although *Sōseki no omoide* implies that Sōseki was sitting next to Kyōko during that service, her memory must have been mistaken. This incident might have taken place after Sōseki went to sleep, and Kyōko may have informed him about it at a later time. Because he strongly disliked greed and stinginess, his quick anger may have been why he decided to sever relations with Honpō-ji. At any rate, Sōseki bought a plot in Zōshigaya 雑司ヶ谷 (located in Toshima Ward, Tokyo), and buried Hinako there.

The young minister mentioned in Sōseki’s diary is Fujiwara Genshū 藤原現秀, the sixteenth resident minister of Honpō-ji. He was born in July 1889, and was then twenty-three years of age.⁴⁷ The fifteenth resident minister, Genshū 巖周, had already passed away on February 22, 1909 at the age of fifty-four;⁴⁸ hence, it must have been very difficult for the young Genshū to manage this famous temple and administer the work of assistant ministers. This heavy responsibility may have caused him to act in an arbitrary way and express a rather vulgar attitude, when he officiated at Hinako’s service.

Sōseki’s interest in Shin Buddhism did not decline as a result of his animosity towards Genshū. The central character of his novel, *Kōjin* 行人 (The Wayfarer), serialized in the Mainichi Newspaper from December 1912 to November 1913 (temporarily interrupted by illness), was Ichirō, who was an instructor at Tokyo Imperial University, a person of great intellect, but also extremely self-conscious. Unable to get along with his wife and relatives, he suffered from loneliness and jealousy. Ichirō yearned to follow his friend

⁴⁶ Natsume Kyōko, p. 285.

⁴⁷ Interview with Fujiwara Masamaro.

⁴⁸ *Shinshū nenpyō*, p. 228.

Kōgen who had become a Zen monk, and who exclaimed joyously “one single blow has done away with all my learning.”⁴⁹ Ichirō agonized: “To die, to go mad, or to enter religion—these are the only three courses left open for me.”⁵⁰ And yet he could not devote himself to a particular religion, where “much knowledge and much understanding are hindrances to overcoming anxiety.”⁵¹ That was also Sōseki’s agony, and also his despairing attempt to attain enlightenment through self-power.

Contrary to Ichirō’s struggle, the following scene in *Kōjin* is described. An elderly couple makes a trip from Gifu prefecture to the Honganji head temple in Kyoto. While there, they decide to enter a hospital for a medical check-up. They place a scroll of an image of Amida Buddha on the wall of their hospital room, and happily play the Japanese game of *go* 碁. This is the only place in the novel where these characters appear, but their pure and simple *shinjin* 信心 (entrusting oneself to Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow), which allowed them to get along so well with each other, is diametrically the opposite of Ichirō’s character. Together with the character of Osada-san who also appears in this novel, they reflect the purity and simplicity of human beings whom Sōseki held to be sacred.

It is unclear whether Sōseki ever read the following words of Hōnen 法然 (Shinran’s teacher) or not:

“Persons of the Pure Land tradition attain birth in the Pure Land by becoming their foolish selves.”⁵²

These words are recorded in the sixth letter of Shinran’s *Mattōshō* 末燈抄 (Lamp for the Latter Ages). Whether Sōseki was aware of such a position or not, it can be said that the fact that he realized that knowledge was a “(Shin Buddhist) doer’s attachment” (*gyōja no hakarai* 行者のはからい), recorded in the fifth letter of the aforementioned work, meant he realized that attachment to knowledge was a hindrance to attaining *shinjin*, which is what these two characterizations have in common.

⁴⁹ Natsume Sōseki, *The Wayfarer*, trans. by Beongcheon Yu, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967, p. 316.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

⁵¹ *SZ*, vol. 5, p. 753. Beongcheon’s translation states: “The source of his trouble was in fact his erudition itself” (*ibid.*, p. 315).

⁵² *The Collected Works of Shinran* (hereafter, *CWS*), vol. 1, Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanjisha, 1997, p. 531.

On July 10, 1913, in reply to a request by the then administrative assistant to the president of the South Manchuria Railway Co., Tatsui Raizō 龍居頼三, for Sōseki to recommend lecturers, the name of Nanjō Bunyū 南条文雄 (1849–1927), then Dean of Shinshū University, was suggested. Sōseki wrote the following as a recommendation:

Virtuous people like Nanjō Bunyū are to be admired . . . Although both Nanjō Bunyū and Shaku Sōen have imperfections which I don't care for, those imperfections are not enough to fuss over.⁵³

Here, we see further indications of Sōseki's interest in both Shin Buddhism and Zen.

On November 12, 1913, Sōseki gave a lecture at First High School (*Daiichi kōtōgakkō* 第一高等学校),⁵⁴ which was later transcribed and published under the title *Mohō to dokuritsu* 模倣と独立 (Imitation and Independence). In this lecture, Sōseki said the imitation part of human beings was their inclination to be like others, and that the independence part was their inclination to establish a norm for themselves and try to put it into practice. The spirit of independence, however, requires “thought and sentiment with a deep background supporting them.” Only then can independence transcend the individual and expand to where it can “work for the benefit of others as a human being.” Sōseki considered both imitation and independence to be very important. But considering “the circumstance of Japan today,” he felt that nothing uniquely Japanese would be born if all Japan did was copy European countries. He, thus, placed greater emphasis on being independent.⁵⁵

As an early example of an independent person, Sōseki offered Shinran, and as a modern one, he gave Ibsen. These selections were made from great independent persons in the past and present, and from the East and West.

. . . this may seem like taking an old example but those who are referred to as monks follow precepts against eating meat and taking wives. Resident ministers of Shin Buddhist temples, on the other hand, have for a long time eaten meat and married. From a doctrinal point of view, that is a great revolution. Shinran had great ideas from the very beginning. Unless ideas have great power—unless they are deep-rooted—they cannot cause such a great revolution.

⁵³ The letter is included in *Sōseki Zenshū hoi*, vol. 35, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1980.

⁵⁴ In those days, high schools were equivalent to junior colleges of today. [Translator's Note]

⁵⁵ SZ, vol. 16, pp. 416, 421, 425.

Expressed in other words, Shinran must be considered an extremely independent person. A firm and sturdy foundation must have existed for him from the very beginning to accomplish what he did. Further, that must also have been the case for the path he took, which was not simply, I want to marry and eat meat. Try, not just announcing that you will do so, but actually do it. You don't know how you will be oppressed. Of course, if you are afraid you will be oppressed, you will not even think of doing such a thing from the very beginning. You must be confident at each step—to have the spirit of conviction—to do it. Only then can you do something like that.⁵⁶

As his audience in this lecture was high school students, there was no detailed explanation of Shinran's thought. Accordingly, the only point Sōseki made was that Shinran had broken the precepts against monks' engaging in certain activities, and that he had expressed with his physical being that only ordinary people who are filled with base passions are truly human. That was why Shinran had married and eaten meat. From here, there is an indication of how Sōseki's respect for, and understanding of Shinran and Shin Buddhism, was deepening. There is no implication here of the misunderstanding that Shin Buddhism is a teaching, concerned solely with a desire for peace and comfort after death.

Further, although Sōseki personally studied English, he constantly criticized the Japanese for trying to imitate Europeans. This may have come from his respect for Shinran, who placed his own personal understanding on Buddhism, which had originated in India and developed in China. A copy of *Shinshū seiten* 真宗聖典 (Sacred Texts of Shin Buddhism) published in 1913 is found in Sōseki's library. This is a large volume of 1,084 pages containing sixty-eight works that are essential to Shin Buddhism.⁵⁷ Sōseki very likely spent a great deal of time reading these works, which deepened his understanding of Shin Buddhism.

There is a trace of Shin Buddhist doctrine in the novel *Kokoro* 心ころ, which began to be serialized in the Mainichi Newspaper from April 1914. I believe

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 417.

⁵⁷ *Shinshū seiten*, edited by Kōkōdō, was first printed in 1910, containing works ranging from *The Three Pure Land Sutras* to *Gorinmatsu no goshō* 御臨末の御書 (The Writings at the End of Life [of Shinran]). In this volume, the reading of all *kanji* characters is indicated, and a modern Japanese translation is given for some of the works, which made it relatively easy to read and understand.

a work previously mentioned, *Conversations*, is one of the influences that led to Sōseki's writing *Kokoro*, which is a reminiscence by the author, Andō Shūichi, of his teacher Kiyozawa after the latter's death. It begins with his meeting Kiyozawa and describes his words and actions with great respect and affection.

The plot of *Kokoro* resembles this work in expressing an ideal relationship between a teacher and his student. In *Conversations*, the author receives a telegram informing him that his teacher is on the point of death, and so he hurries to Ōhama, but is unable to get there in time. It ends with Kiyozawa's poem:

Coughing up blood in sick-bed.
Hearing the cry of a [Japanese] nightingale (lit. Bush warbler).⁵⁸

Kokoro ends with the unnamed narrator unable to be with Sensei before his death, but he receives his testament. In like manner, Andō could not be with Kiyozawa before the latter's death, but received his death poem.

There are other resemblances between the words and actions of Kiyozawa and Sensei in *Kokoro*. They include entrusting students with words for the future, and the negativism (*shōkyoku-shugi* 消極主義) of not fighting for honor. Kiyozawa criticized:

Young people today are impatient to succeed, and even though they have not mastered their course subjects, are overly concerned about clothing and food immediately after graduating (from school).⁵⁹

In *Kokoro*, there is a parallel to it: "Why should a fellow . . . as comfortably placed as you, start whining for a job so soon after graduating?"⁶⁰

The "conviction of peace in the present" that Kiyozawa received from Amida Buddha is not found in the anguish of Sensei in *Kokoro*. But Kiyozawa's only too human awareness that "absolutely no one is without moral fault" is no different from Sensei's realization.⁶¹ I believe that although the character of Sensei in *Kokoro* is Sōseki's other self, it nevertheless received hints from the image of Kiyozawa drawn in *Conversations*.

⁵⁸ Andō, pp. 142–3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38. This appears to be the author's summary of it. [Translator's Note]

⁶⁰ Natsume Sōseki, *Kokoro*, trans. by Edwin McClellan. In *Kokoro And Selected Essays*. *Kokoro*, translated by Edwin McClellan and *Essays* by Jay Rubin, Lanham: Madison Books, 1992, p. 120.

⁶¹ Andō, p. 117.

I also believe the reason why Sōseki chose Niigata prefecture as the hometown of Sensei and his friend, K, was because it was Shinran's place of exile when Hōnen's group was persecuted. After giving a lecture at Takada Middle School in that prefecture on June 19, 1911, Sōseki, accompanied by Morishige Rinzō 森成麟造, toured the area to which Shinran was exiled, and visited Kokubun-ji 国分寺 in Gochi 五智.⁶² I believe this experience was the inspiration for his use of that locale. Further, regarding the present site of Shin Buddhist followers in Niigata, there is the following passage in *Kokoro*:

The Hongan church was very powerful in my native district, and so Shinshū priests were more affluent than the priests of other sects.⁶³

This can be considered something that Sōseki heard from Morishige, who lived in Takada city. According to *Niigata-ken shūkyō hōjin meibo* 新潟県宗教法人名簿 (The Register of Religious Organizations in Niigata Prefecture), which is included in the 1911 edition of the *Zenkoku jiin meikan*, among the 2,988 temples in that prefecture, 1,252 or 41.8 percent of all the temples were associated with Shin Buddhism. Higashi Honganji had the most with 900 temples, and next was Nishi Honganji with 278.⁶⁴

The character "K" in *Kokoro* was born as the second son of the resident minister of a Shin Buddhist temple. In the novel, he was adopted into a doctor's family but from an early age he seems to have begun to abandon the teachings of his family temple:

K was born in a Shinshū temple. But I remember that at secondary school, he was already showing signs of moving away from the doctrines of his family's sect.⁶⁵

K tried to progress spiritually by performing religious austerities using self-power:

The men of the past that [K] was referring to were not, of course, heroic figures in the conventional sense, but ascetics who had

⁶² *SZ*, vol. 13, p. 644.

⁶³ *Kokoro*, p. 156.

⁶⁴ *Zenkoku jiin meikan*, p. 141. The number of temples in Niigata prefecture in December 1913 was said to be 3,010, but a breakdown into schools and denominations should not have been very different from what has just been mentioned. Very likely, the combined total number of Higashi and Nishi Honganji temples were what was considered to be the number of Honganji temples (Hori Yūzō, ed., *Dainihon jiin sōran gekan*, p. 1922).

⁶⁵ *Kokoro*, p. 204.

tyrannized over their flesh for the freedom of their souls, who had lashed their bodies so that they might find the way.⁶⁶

Such extreme self-discipline gradually began to affect K's mind and body. As a close friend, Sensei was very moved by his effort, and tried to get him to leave his residence and move in where Sensei was residing. In a note meant to be read after his death, Sensei wrote the following to the unnamed narrator. "I want you to pay attention to what I am now going to say; it is intended for your benefit."⁶⁷ As a close friend, Sensei was very moved by K's earnest self-discipline, but persevering to the extent of disregarding his physical body put K in danger of "willfully proceed[ing] to his own destruction."⁶⁸ Here, Sōseki's own voice seems to reverberate, but it is also a reflection of the Shin Buddhist doctrine, which denies the efficacy of creating good through performing difficult religious practices (*nangyō kugyō* 難行苦行) with self-power.⁶⁹

The introspective nature of Sōseki's work increased remarkably after writing *Mon*. In *Kokoro*, Sōseki wrote about ordinary people suddenly changing into bad ones when placed in extreme positions, and the difficulty of seeing suspicion, doubt, and jealousy just as they are. Human selfishness and frightening egotism are depicted in great detail. In the note he left, Sensei states that he was betrayed by his uncle, but that, in betraying K:

I felt very strongly the sinfulness of man.⁷⁰

Regarding the term "sinfulness of man" (*ningen no tsumi* 人間の罪) that Sensei used, Etō Jun emphasizes that in using this image, Sōseki approaches the third-century BCE Chinese thinker, Xunzi 荀子, whose theory deals with evil nature (*seiaku setsu* 性惡説).⁷¹ Aside from this reference in *Kokoro*, however, there are no indications that Sōseki was particularly interested in Xunzi. Miyazawa Seijun had pointed out Xunzi's influence even before Etō did, but

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 183.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 168.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 169.

⁶⁹ The character of "K" can be considered to be based on Kiyozawa Manshi's complete involvement in living ascetically from July 1891 to June 1895 (i.e., between the ages of 28 and 33), but there is another possible similarity. Manshi was adopted into the Kiyozawa family (the temple of Saihō-ji 西方寺 in Aichi prefecture), just as "K" had been adopted into a doctor's family.

⁷⁰ *Kokoro*, p. 231.

⁷¹ Etō Jun, "Sōseki to chūgoku shisō," *Shinchō* 75, no. 4, p. 168.

Sōseki's perception of human beings is generally affected by the understandings of Xunzi, Shinran, and the thoughts of *Kongō hannya-kyō* 金剛般若經 (Skt. *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*).⁷²

It appears to me that the reference to Shinran in *Mohō to dokuritsu*, the projection of the Shin Buddhist doctrine in *Kokoro* and other works, all point to the linkage between Shin Buddhism and Sōseki. As is well known, Shinran had deep insight into the fact that human beings have a basic tendency to do evil. It is unclear what parts of the previously mentioned *Shinshū seiten* that Sōseki read, nor to what extent. Still, when seen from the point of view of the absolute, human beings are [to use traditional Shin Buddhist terminology] sentient beings deep-seated in brutality (*gokuaku jinjū no shujō* 極悪深重の衆生) and also ordinary persons filled with base passions (*bonnō gusoku no bonbu* 煩惱具足の凡夫). Such thoughts penetrate the entirety of the *Shinshū seiten*. Accordingly, regardless of where in that work Sōseki read, those thoughts must have reverberated deeply within him.

Another thing in *Kokoro* that draws my attention is that Sensei could never forgive his uncle, who as a businessman and politician, was motivated by the coarse and vulgar attitude of self-benefit, and misappropriated and even embezzled his estate. Sensei harbored a fierce anger towards him.⁷³ Sōseki was very much aware of his own personal selfish attitude, but that self-condemnation led to intolerance of injustice committed by those in authority or the power of money. Although Sōseki criticized the militarism then gaining influence in Europe, the underlying theme of his *Tentōroku* 點頭録 (A Record of Understandings) written in the year of his death (1916), was a resistance to power and especially that of wealth that is consistent in all of his works from the very beginning.

Shinran was also an individual who persisted all his life in resisting national laws that oppressed those who followed the teaching of the exclusive practice of the Nembutsu (*senju nembutsu* 専修念仏). Regarding the punishment meted out by Emperor Gotoba in 1207, in later years Shinran wrote the following well-known passage in the Postscript of his *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信証:

The emperor and his ministers, acting against the dharma and violating human rectitude, became enraged and embittered.⁷⁴

⁷² Miyazawa Seijun, "Sōseki no *kokoro* to nikki ni kansuru kōshō," in *Tokō danwa*, vol. 3, 1974, p. 38.

⁷³ See, for instance, *Kokoro*, p. 135.

⁷⁴ *CWS*, vol. 1 p. 289.

Shinran condemned those in power for sentencing four of Hōnen's disciples to death, while sending others including Hōnen and himself into exile, without their having committed any crimes. Further, based on his reaction to the *Kenchō* Persecution of 1256, it appears that rather than compromising with the authorities, Shinran decided to leave the area in order to maintain the purity of the Nembutsu teaching. Another point that Sōseki and Shinran had in common can be seen in the former's *Mohō to dokuritsu*, in which Sōseki expressed his respect for Shinran's spirit of defiance towards those in authority.

In *Ningen aku no ishiki* 人間悪の意識 (The Sense of Evil in Human Beings), Tamura Enchō has pointed out that Shinran's concept of human evil was accepted by the intellectuals and students of modern Japan who had become aware of their personal nature or ego. Because of the pressure of totalitarianism, however, their understanding of Shinran's thought was imperfect. Further, the more conscientious the individual, the more their eyes should have looked outward (to the government and society in general), but the more they turned inward (self), the more they resigned themselves to not criticizing authority. However, because of the awareness of human evil, they were finally able to be turned towards salvation from self-deception and self-hatred.⁷⁵ In such circumstances, Sōseki's attitude of gazing straightforwardly at both these inner and outer positions, must be considered extremely important.

During the ten years from his maiden effort, *Wagahai wa neko de aru to Kokoro*, Sōseki was unable to attain the enlightenment that he had been seeking from following the self-power path of the Zen teaching. Perhaps because he could not, his understanding of the Shin Buddhist teaching gradually deepened from something he was at first only dimly aware of, to that which he was more aware.

In a letter to Hayashihara Kōzō 林原耕三 dated November 14, 1914, Sōseki wrote the following:

I did not intend to state twice in a row that I selected life over death but unintentionally did so because of my mood then. But that's neither a lie nor making light of the matter. I really hope that after I die, everyone will gather before my coffin and send me off with a

⁷⁵ Tamura Enchō, "Ningen aku no ishiki," in *Nihon bukkyō shisōshi kenkyū Jōdokyō-hen*, Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1959, p. 183. Tamura praises Kiyozawa Manshi's Spiritual Activism (*Seishin-shugi* 精神主義) very highly and states it brought about a rebirth of interest in Shin Buddhism in modern times, but still points out its limitations and the same problems.

“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. I do not look fondly on suicide at present, and very likely will try living to the fullest. And while living, like most people, I believe I will exhibit the weak points I was born with. That’s because I believe that’s what life is. What I dislike most of all, however, is while disliking life, to forcibly move from life to the exceedingly agonizing death. That’s why I have no desire to commit suicide. Besides, selecting death is a pessimistic view of life that is not the same as disliking life. You understand the difference between pessimism and a pessimistic view of life, don’t you?⁷⁶

Here, Sōseki is expressing the suffering and agony of life that was whirling around deep in his mind and heart from the time he had been a youth. Further, as in *Kokoro*, there is Sōseki’s awareness of the “weak points” (*jakuten* 弱点) or ego attachment of human beings, as long as they are alive. This mental inclination towards death finds expression in the phrase “Death is more precious than life”⁷⁷ written in 1915.

In the above letter, Sōseki for the first time refers to the existence of a world after death in an affirmative way. Further, it is a world in which “I will return to my original self when I die.” That was absolutely not just a passing thought. Again in *Garasudo no uchi*, Sōseki wrote:

I feel that what is called death is sweeter than life, and the thought strikes me that it is the highest state to which a man aspires.⁷⁸

In a letter to Kuroyanagi Kunitarō 畔柳都太郎, dated February 15, 1915, Sōseki wrote:

I am not saying we do not die. Everyone says we must eventually do so. Further, spiritualists and Maeterlinck say they do not consider individualism or individuals to continue after death. All I would like to state is that only after death do we enter the absolute realm, and when comparing the absolute world with the relative

⁷⁶ *SZ*, vol. 15, pp. 414–5.

⁷⁷ *Inside My Glass Doors*, p. 23.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.

world, I sense something sacred (though I must confess that I recently argued with someone about this term “sacred,” and could not explain it fully).⁷⁹

At the beginning of November 1916, when Sōseki spoke about *sokuten kyoshi* 則天去私⁸⁰ to his disciples such as Matsuoka Yuzuru—which is recorded in the latter’s *Shūkyōteki mondō* 宗教的問答 (Religious Dialogue)—he also touched on the subject of life after death.⁸¹

The image of the world after death that Sōseki came to hold, has many points in common with the concept of the Pure Land in the Shin Buddhist teaching. Shinran denied a Pure Land that existed in order to fulfill the joy of our sense organs. Rather, he expressed the true and real Pure Land in the following way:

Reverently contemplating the true Buddha and the true land, I find that the Buddha is the Tathagata [thus come/thus gone] of inconceivable light and that the land also is the land of immeasurable light.⁸²

Although the Pure Land is a world of light, “Light is none other than wisdom,” according to *Ichinen tanen mon’i* 一念多念文意 (Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling), which means that it is the world of enlightenment, an absolute world.⁸³ Accordingly, the world that Sōseki refers to as one in which “I will return to my original self when I die,” as the “absolute realm,” and also “[death is] the highest state to which a man aspires,” can clearly be regarded as the world of enlightenment. It is also the realm to which we arrive directly after death [after leaving this one]. The influence of Shin Buddhist doctrine can thus be seen in Sōseki’s concept of a world after death.

On November 25, eleven days after writing the letter to Hayashihara mentioned above, Sōseki gave a lecture entitled *Watakushi no kojīn-shugi* to the

⁷⁹ SZ, vol. 15, p. 440.

⁸⁰ Although this term can be considered from many aspects, including religious, ethical, and literary, for this article only what is necessary is discussed.

⁸¹ Matsuoka Yuzuru, “Sōseki sanbō no ichiya: Shūkyōteki mondō,” *Gendai bukkyō* (January 1933). The citation for this article comes from *Sōseki no inzeichō* 漱石の印税帖 (Sōseki’s Royalties Record), Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1955. The subject of life after death is also explored in *Kōfu, Kōjin*, etc.

⁸² CWS, vol. 1, p. 177.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 486.

Hojinkai 輔仁会 at Gakushūin University.⁸⁴ After relating that he had found a way for himself to proceed, Sōseki expressed the importance of developing individuality, and then said,

. . . if society allows you to obtain the respect that should be shown towards your individuality, is it not also completely correct that you should recognize the individuality of others and respect their inclination?⁸⁵

While speaking of “selecting death over life,” Sōseki could not help but also speak of how human beings should live. While believing that our “weak points” would continue as long as we are alive, he addressed the students of Gakushūin: “do not fail to become outstanding people, with real personality.”⁸⁶ Sōseki himself must have been aware that this was a contradiction. The following is contained in his *Nikki oyobi danpen* 日記及び断片 (Diary and Fragment) written in 1915:

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.”

“But, can you reach [such a state] by merely thinking about it?”

“I just want to get there.”⁸⁷

Here, Sōseki seems to be reflecting on his position of “selecting death over life,” and how his dislike of life is related to an idealization of death. He now considers life and death to be one body. By integrating life and death (or in transcending them), he came up with the concept of the oneness (*ichinyo* — 一如) of life and death, which would free him from the shackles of both these aspects. Seeing through the “self benefit of” the everyday life of human beings and their “weak points” (or egotism) will not be exhausted until death, but at the same time, in order to become “outstanding people, with real personality,” one must live earnestly. On the other hand, I believe Sōseki wanted

⁸⁴ *Hojinkai* was a group from all the faculties and students within Gakushūin, which was organized in 1889. [Translator’s Note]

⁸⁵ *My Individualism*, p. 45.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁸⁷ *SZ*, vol. 13, p. 774.

to live in the secular world with its phenomena and relativism, just as they are, and also in the world of existential and absolute enlightenment. While realizing how difficult it was to attain such a state, I believe that was what Sōseki wanted more than anything else.

From about 1915, Sōseki began to entrust his thought to the term “non-ego” (*muga* 無我). His diary entry for March 21 of that year states: “My thought at the moment is to speak about my determination to attain a state of egolessness.”⁸⁸ This was written during a trip to Kyoto, where he spoke about “My thought at the moment” (*imano kangae* 今の考) to Tsuda Seifū 津田青楓 and Nishikawa Issōtei 西川一草亭, and others who had invited him there.

Non-ego for Sōseki was not a denial of the ego’s existence, but rather, not having attachment to the self. It was not the destruction of the individual or individuality, but rather, discarding centering everything on the self. It was to respect the individuality of others in order to develop one’s own individuality. That was the sort of “ego” he wanted to actualize. In *Danpen* also written in 1915, Sōseki states:

Because the absolute self (*taiga* 大我) and non-ego (*muga* 無我) are really one, there is a correspondence between self-power and Other Power.⁸⁹

This is very likely a note that Sōseki wrote to himself while mulling things over, but the result of his speculation cannot be determined with certainty.

The term self-power (*jiriki* 自力) is associated with Zen Buddhism, which follows the Path of the Sages (*Shōdō-mon* 聖道門), while Other Power (*tariki* 他力) is associated with Shin Buddhism, which follows the Pure Land Path (*Jōdo-mon* 浄土門). Sōseki was familiar with these two terms because he had studied Shin Buddhism. It is clear that he was attempting to reconcile these two points of view within himself and therefore was considering what they had in common.

According to Nakamura Hajime, “the absolute self” is used in the sense of Buddha-nature or nirvana in the *Nirvana Sutra* 大般涅槃經 (Skt. *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*). He summarized the historical concept of the ego in the following way:

In Buddhism, what is referred to in some sense as having a substance or a principle, and called ego (*ga* 我) [Skt. *ātman*]⁹⁰—for ex-

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 761.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 772.

ample a spirit or soul—is denied. And from such a philosophical point of view, the practical goal is to leave behind attachment to whatever is referred to as an object that is referred to as “me” (*ga* 我) or “what is mine” (*waga mono* わがもの). Further, from the beginning of Buddhism to the later development of Mahāyāna thought, it was considered to be realization of the true self (*shinjitsu no jiko* 真実の自己).⁹⁰

I do not have the space to pursue the development of Sōseki’s conception of the ego here. It can be said, however, that the respect for the ego that developed in Mahāyāna thought during its latter period as expressed above, and the individualism of modern European thought completely pervaded Sōseki’s thinking.

We can therefore understand the passage from *Danpen* quoted above, to mean something like: Actualizing the true self [original self] is the same as abandoning attachment to self. Whether the term self-power or Other Power is used, both seek the realm of enlightenment that leaves the world of delusion. Since there are two paths to attaining the same objectives, they have something in common.

From the contents of the thought expressed in *Danpen*, it is also possible to infer the following from Sōseki’s interests during that time. In *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼蔵, which was found in Sōseki’s personal library, Dōgen states:

To learn the Buddha way is to learn one’s self. To learn one’s self is to forget one’s self. To forget one’s self is to be confirmed by all dharmas. To be confirmed by all dharmas is to cast off one’s body and mind and the bodies and minds of others as well.⁹¹

This passage expresses the thought that forgetting the self and being shined on by the light of all the dharmas, is how enlightenment is revealed by Other Power. Even on the self-power Path of the Sages, which the Zen teaching is said to be, Other Power is necessary for enlightenment.

⁹⁰ Nakamura Hajime, “Indo shisō ippan kara mita muga shisō,” in *Jiga to muga*, ed., Nakamura Hajime, Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1986, pp. 1, 142.

⁹¹ *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, trans. by Norman Waddell and Masao Abe, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002, p.41. Although there are no references to it, this is clearly the basis for Yagi Dokusen (Dr. Sneezee)’s statement in Chapter 11 of *I Am a Cat*. “In the old days, a man was taught to forget himself. Today it is quite different: he is taught not to forget himself and he accordingly spends his days and nights in endless self-regard” (*I Am a Cat*, p. 600).

At first, Shinran followed the path of self-power in an effort to enter the world of enlightenment. After twenty years of agony and despair, however, he finally came in contact with the teaching of Other Power. Only after following the religious practices prescribed by self-power, and failing, did the way of Other Power open up for him. But Shinran did not deny self-power. As he is quoted as saying in *Tannishō* 歎異抄 (A Record in Lament of Divergences), “. . . I am incapable of any other practice [than the Nembutsu], . . .”⁹² there was no way open for him other than the Pure Land Path. Considered in this way, we can say that rather than opposing each other, self-power and the Other Power complement each other.

After considering the above, from 1915 on, Sōseki started developing the concept *sokuten kyoshi*. A comment made by him to a journalist who interviewed him is included in *Taishō rokunen bunshō nikki* 大正六年文章日記 (Diary for 1917):

Heaven is nature. In comparison with heaven (nature), my self-perception and abilities are infinitesimal, and should be abandoned.⁹³

This can be considered Sōseki’s own words as he spoke them to the journalist. Perhaps, *sokuten kyoshi* might be rendered “freeing the self by moving towards heaven.”⁹⁴

What Sōseki meant by “heaven” (nature) is not easy to grasp. According to Satō Yasumasa, the concepts of heaven and nature appeared in *Michikusa* and *Meian* have many meanings, and “they are used in contradictory ways just as ‘inherent and transcendent’ or ‘emotional and logical’ are,” and also that “it is difficult to refer to a ‘transcendent personality’ as being a ‘savior.’”⁹⁵

Sōseki spoke of *sokuten kyoshi* to his disciples, for the first time at the beginning of November 1917, about a month before his passing. It is however difficult to clarify this term solely by using examples from his writings. Matsuoka Yuzuru gave some suggestions concerning the above in his *Shūkyōteki mondō*, to which some scholars later reacted with doubt, because

⁹² *CWS*, vol. 1, p. 662.

⁹³ *Nihon bunshō gakuin, Taishō rokunen bunshō nikki*, Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1917, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Jan Van Bragt has translated *sokuten kyoshi* as both “one with heaven, free from the self” and also “following heaven while forgetting the self” (*The Eastern Buddhist* 29, no. 2, pp. 173, 192). Marvin Marcus, in his Introduction to *Inside My Glass Doors*, translated it “Follow Heaven, Forsake the Self.” [Translator’s Note]

⁹⁵ Satō Yasumasa, *Natsume sōseki ron*, Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1986, pp. 343–5.

of the time between when Sōseki had spoken of it and when Matsuoka had recalled it, as the latter seems to have combined fragments of Sōseki's words and made his own interpretation of it.⁹⁶ However, Matsuoka's record may be the best means of determining what Sōseki's words point to. At that time, Sōseki said the following about *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."⁹⁷

Here, "heaven" is expressed as the absolute self, and the true and real self (expression of the immanent existence of the original self). It is, at the same time, considered a transcendental existence such as expressed by "in its presence." But even more than examples from *Michikusa* and *Meian*, the term "heaven" can be considered to strengthen the characteristics of compassion and impartiality that save human beings.

The reason Sōseki said in *Shūkyōteki mondō*, "Recently, I have finally reached to such a state of mind"⁹⁸ is because he became aware of the existence of the immanent and transcendent in "heaven" (nature). Acting in accordance with this awareness, as expressed in the fragment just quoted, he felt confident in regarding the realm of "life and death are one" (transcendence), "phenomena is existence" and "relative is absolute."

Certainly, Sōseki did not consider himself to have reached the realm of *sokuten kyoshi*, nor did he consider it to be one that could easily be reached. This is apparent from his letter to Tomizawa Keidō 富沢敬道, dated November 15, 1916: "This may seem strange to say but I am an 'ignorant thing' who,

⁹⁶ Ishizaki Hitoshi, "Sōseki to sokuten kyoshi," in *Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū*, p. 44.

⁹⁷ Matsuoka, *Shūkyōteki mondō*, p. 85.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

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.”⁹⁹ That attitude is also clear from the struggle of the “I” as opposed to the “I” as depicted so keenly and in such detail in *Meian*.

How did Sōseki find the way to approach *sokuten kyoshi*? In *Shūkyōteki mondō*, he responded to Matsuoka Yuzuru’s question of whether the doctrine of self-power was the way to follow or not: “Traditional religious terms such as self-power and Other Power that are encrusted with incense seem to be extremely clear, but that is also why they are bound to be misunderstood.”¹⁰⁰ He probably responded in that way, because as already stated, he considered self-power and Other Power to be in correspondence.

The phrase, “aspiring to follow the Way” brings to mind being cultivated by self-power, but as related in that same letter—“You are proficient in the Zen (teaching) which I do not understand very well”—it was also not the way of Zen. Again expressions such as, “in accordance with nature,” and “the commands of the great self in universal nature” bring to mind salvation based on Other Power. But although there are indications of adherence to this power, the relationship between self-power and Other Power as indicated in *sokuten kyoshi*, still leaves it rather vague and indistinct, indicating that it is also an incomplete or unfinished idea.

Sōseki wrote a Classical Chinese poem on October 6, 1916, that begins: “Not Jesus, Not Śākyamuni, Not Confucius . . .”¹⁰¹ It therefore appears that Sōseki was groping for a universal religious realm not associated with a specific religion or religious denomination. And yet, because *sokuten kyoshi* is an expression that makes use of Buddhist terminology (or is created from such), it cannot be denied that the realm, which Sōseki finally reached, was strongly influenced by Buddhist thought. The phrase, *sokuten kyoshi*, also brings to mind Shinran’s thought in his final years, that of naturalness (*jinen hōni* 自然法爾), expressed in the fifth letter of his *Mattōshō*. Both *jinen hōni* and *sokuten kyoshi* rely on nature that finds expression where all artificial attachments are discarded. The *jinen* and *hōni* parts refer to the same thing: that sentient beings are saved by the activity of Amida Buddha’s Primal Vow.

⁹⁹ SZ, vol. 15. pp. 604–5.

¹⁰⁰ Matsuoka, *Shūkyōteki mondō*, p. 83.

¹⁰¹ SZ, vol. 12, p. 437.

Regarding *sokuten kyoshi*, as already mentioned, “heaven” (nature) implies immanent nature, and at the same time is the transcendent nature that is endowed with the love/compassion and fairness/unbiasedness to save all people. Shinran wrote: “[the] Supreme Buddha is formless, and because of being formless is called *jinen*” and also: “Amida Buddha fulfills the purpose of making us know the significance of *jinen*.”¹⁰² What this means is that Amida Buddha comes into existence with a form, in order to allow one to come in contact with the “nature” that is without form. I believe the heaven of *sokuten kyoshi* comes close to expressing the truth of *jinen*’s being the ultimate truth of enlightenment.

It seems to me that what *jinen hōni* and *sokuten kyoshi* have in common is not by chance. It would not do to lump the meanings of these two terms together by stating that both express the Japanese view of nature. The contact that Sōseki had with Shin Buddhism during his entire life, must be considered to have influenced him in creating the concept of *sokuten kyoshi*.

Making Sōseki’s religious thought clear from the combined positions of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity, etc., is the work of future scholars. But when subjects such as Sōseki and Buddhism, and *sokuten kyoshi* are taken up, his interest in Shin Buddhism must be included. At any rate, I believe the accepted position that there is no relationship between Sōseki and Shin Buddhism has now been demonstrated to be incorrect.

(Translated by Ama Michihiro and Ken’ichi Yokogawa)

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