
***Kokoro* and the Agony of the Individual**

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In this article I examine changes in the concept of identity as a result of the upheaval in relationships brought about by the Meiji Restoration. These changes are seen as reflected in Sôseki's novel Kokoro. I discuss two of the most important concepts of modern Japanese, those of individual (個人 kojîn) and society (社会 shakai), both of which were introduced under the influence of the Meiji intelligentsia's attempts to create a new Japan following the European model. These concepts, along with many others, reflect the tendency of Meiji intellectuals to discard the traditional Japanese value systems, where the group, and not the individual, was the minimal unit of society. The preoccupation with the individual and his own inner world is reflected in Natsume Sôseki's Kokoro. The novel is pervaded by a feeling of confusion between loyalty to the old values of a dying era and lack of attachment towards a new and materialistic world.

The novel *Kokoro* appeared for the first time in the Asahi Shimbun between 20 April and 11 August 1914. It reflects the maturation of Sôseki's artistic technique, being his last complete work of pure fiction (Viglielmo, 1976: 167). As McClellan (1969) pointed out, *Kokoro* is an allegory of its era, an idea sustained also by the lack of names for characters, who are simply "Sensei", "I", "K", etc. It depicts the torment of a man, Sensei, who has grown up in a prosperous and artistic family, and who, after his parents' death, finds out that the real world is different from his own naive, idealistic image. Sensei realizes that he lives in a world where material interest and appearances are more important than spiritual matters and virtue. His friend and rival is K, whose ascetic inclinations and spiritual ways earn him the resentment of K's adoptive parents. Against his own will, K falls in love with the same girl as his friend. Sensei wins her and K, torn between his spiritual ideals and material being, commits suicide, an act of possible revenge against his more materialistic friend. Although a winner, Sensei spends the rest of his life in self-reproach and torment. He finally kills himself, after confiding his innermost thoughts in a lengthy letter addressed to a young man, "Watakushi", who is his spiritual disciple.

The Emergence of a New Literature—A Historic and Cultural Background

The Meiji Restoration brought about a shift of focus from collectivism to individualism. The complex transformation of a highly conservative society influenced the individual, who feels trapped between modern ideals of personal fulfillment and traditional values. Traditional

society recognized the group as a unit of society, whereas the individual was forced into unconditional dependence upon and subordination to the collectivity.

Meiji writers were gradually attracted to the inner universe of their characters; however, unlike Taishō and Shōwa writers, they still seemed tied to an ethic of self-constraint, and to the conviction that individual efforts should be subordinated to transcendental values (Etō, 1970: 49). Literature in the Meiji period reflects this opposition between the individual ego and the collectivistic sense of mission and social responsibility, characteristic of traditional Japanese society.

The rise of individualism initiated during the Meiji Restoration was marked by a turn towards Western values. It was also an attempt to integrate these values into the highly conservative and collectivistic Japanese cultural system. For the first time, writers conceived of a new type of hero—the private individual, whose inner uniqueness and quality of everyday existence were more interesting than his heroic exploits (Walker, 1979: 1).

The conflict between the discovery of the self, on the one hand, and the duty towards society on the other created an irreconcilable contradiction between the concept of *giri*, which stands for individual's public responsibility, and that of *ninjō*, that is one's own desire for personal satisfaction. This conflict was the source of dramatic themes depicted artfully in many of Chikamatsu Monzaemon's plays. The traditional Confucian moral system and the rigid hierarchy of Japan were inimical to social mobility and individual satisfaction. By the end of the Tokugawa shogunate, any such aspirations were strictly sanctioned by society. Chikamatsu's heroes and heroines were lower class people, such as lowly ranked samurai, merchants and sometimes peasants, who lacked moral validation in the social system. These heroes were defined in the official culture as immoral, since their goals were not acceptable under the traditional system.

The Import of Western Culture and its Implications.

In Europe, 19th century was dominated by the struggle of the middle class to break the moral and political canons imposed by the upper classes. Literature regarded love, among other factors, as a moral force contributing to the growth of the individual. According to Watt, individualism and love were considered to be the two dynamic forces that brought about the development of the Western bourgeois novel (1957: 135–138). On the contrary, Japanese society in general and some of the Meiji writers (including Sōseki), in particular, tended to regard love as the cause of moral destruction. In Sōseki's novel, two of the main characters, Sensei and his friend K, owe their moral and, ultimately, physical destruction to their love for the girl, Ojōsan. K, whose rigid ideals of becoming a hermit, and thereby denying his human nature, are confused by the charm of the young woman, chooses to die rather than give in to the yearnings of the flesh. K leaves Sensei with the prize, but also with the remorse of having sacrificed his friend's life and his own peace of mind.

Such lack of self-affirmation created a background against which Meiji literary works dealing with the problems of the individual appeared and were widely disseminated, mirroring a focal shift from the collective to the individual. However, as Pollack points out, even before authors could talk about individuality, and about an "I", they had first to ask a more fundamental question: What is an I? (1992: 54, his emphasis). Indeed, Meiji Japan is

dominated by the quest for an identity to match the Western values. Meiji intellectuals were looking for an *analogue to the Western "self", as the necessary precursor to the political concepts of "liberty", "freedom", and "rights", which are founded upon it* (Pollack, 1992: 55). However, since the old coexisted with the new trend, a major conflict between tradition and innovation occurred, leading to the sense of confusion and despair which pervades Sôseki's novel.

During the Meiji cultural enlightenment, Japanese intellectuals abandoned traditional principles and turned to Europe for guidance (Aston, 1975: 384). Translations of great European thinkers like Mill, Darwin, Spencer and Kant by Fukuzawa Yukichi or Nakamura Masanao helped in disseminating Western ideas of individuality, freedom, rights, equality, progress, etc. The absorption of these ideas promoted a change in the Japanese individual's conception of self and his relationship to the world. Thus, a free and more materialistic individual emerged in place of the person who guided himself after Confucian and Buddhist doctrines of effacing the self, or always relating to and relying upon the group. In his *Gakumon no Susume (An Encouragement of Learning)*, Fukuzawa Yukichi deals with the concept of independence. The ideals of independence and achievement in life (立身出世 *risshin shusse*) gradually started to replace the traditional social cohesion.

From the point of view of individual emancipation, the Meiji enlightenment played in Japan a role similar to that of the Renaissance in Europe, where individualism was *a social system in which the individual is ideally alone in a secularized world, freed from the bonds of family and tradition* (Walker, 1979: 6). However, while in Europe ideas about society, individuality or freedom took centuries to develop, Japanese intellectuals expected to assimilate them in a very short period of time, and without the historical, political and social background presumed necessary for this assimilation. Old concepts gave way to new ones, while new concepts were naturalized even though the reality they were supposed to reflect did not match the Japanese state of affairs. This resulted in the dissemination of terms whose sense was unintelligible to the common reader, such as 社会 *shakai* (society), 個人 *kojin/hito* (individual), 自由 *jiyû* (freedom), etc.

The Avatars of the Individual

As Tsuda Sôkichi points out, Japanese translators introduced new concepts by merely changing their form, but not their contents. Thus a concept was expressed in a multitude of forms, depending on the translator's talent and experience. The initiative, although positive, not only created a great deal of confusion as to which term might be the most appropriate, but went deeper into the very essence of these new words, which could not find a perfect match in the reality they were supposed to express. It was during this time such words as 個人 *kojin* and 社会 *shakai* were created in order to function as translation equivalents to "individual" and "society". They replaced older ones, such as 一人 *hitori* and 世間 *seken*, which had become obsolete in a society that aspired to Westernization.

In his 1995 book 翻訳語成立事情 *Honnyakugo Seiritsu Jijô (Consideration on the Formation of Translation Equivalents)*, Yanabu Akira discusses the problem of concept import, pointing out that, like other words, the terms 個人 *kojin* (individual) and 社会 *shakai* (society), started to circulate in today's form and sense from around 1876 (the 10th year of the

Meiji period). *Shakai* appears in 1873 in Shibata Shōkichi's English-Japanese dictionary, where the meaning of "society" is expressed as 仲間 *nakama* (meeting, assembly, party, association, club), 組み合わせ *kumiai* (association, guild, union), 連衆 *renshu* (companion, party), 交際 *kōsai* (intercourse, association, society, company), 一致 *icchi* (union, combination, fusion, congruence), 社中 *shachū* (colleague). As can be seen, these terms define society as an association, either in a friendly manner, or with the purpose of mutual benefit.

Let us examine the Western definition of "society". According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1994 edition), the term is defined as:

1. Association with one's fellow men, especially in a friendly manner, companionship or fellowship;
2. The state or condition of living in association, company, or intercourse with others of the same species; the system or mode of life adopted by a body of individuals for the purpose of harmonious co-existence or for mutual benefit, defense, etc.

Yanabu notices that as far as Meiji Japan was concerned, only the first point of this definition was applicable. According to it, "society" is a human association, companionship or fellowship, usually based on friendship. However, the idea of society in pre-Meiji and Meiji thinking excludes any notion of association between *individuals*. The point is reinforced in the early English-Japanese and Dutch-Japanese dictionaries. Imamura's 1796 Dutch-Japanese dictionary gives two equivalents for the term *genootschap* (society): a verb—交わる *majiwaru* (to associate, cross, intersect), and a noun—集まり *atsumari* (gathering, meeting, get together). Later on, in the first English-Japanese dictionary (1814) 諸厄利亜語林大成 *Angeria Gorin Taisei*, Motoki Masahide defines the term "society" as 侶伴 *ryohan* (companionship) or 相伴 *sōhan* (participation). A more comprehensive Japanese-Dutch dictionary was completed in 1855–58 by Katsuragawa Hoshuu, entitled 和蘭字彙 *Oranda Jii* (Dutch Vocabulary), where *genootschap* (society) is translated as 寄合 *yoriai* (meeting, assembly, party, get together) or 集会 *shūkai* (meeting, assembly). In Horie Tatsunosuke's English-Japanese dictionary 英和对訳袖珍辞書 *Eiwa Taiyaku Shūchin Jisho* (An English-Japanese Pocket Dictionary, 1862), *society* appears as 仲間 *nakama*, 一致 *icchi* (companion, colleague, comrade, company, party, circle, set, fraternity). There were also other terms given as equivalents: 組み *kumi* (class, group, team, set), 連中 *renchū* (party, company, clique), 社中 *shachū* (clique), etc. Unlike "society", which is, after all, "*a system or mode of life adopted by a body of individuals*" (my emphasis), not one of these definitions takes the individual as the minimal unit of human relationships. According to The Merriam Webster Dictionary, the definitions of *individual* are:

1. a: a particular being or thing as distinguished from a class, species, or collection: as (1): a single human being as contrasted with a social group or institution: A teacher who works with individuals (2): a single organism as distinguished from a group
b: a particular person: Are you the *individual* I spoke with on the telephone?
2. an indivisible entity
3. the reference of a name or variable of the lowest logical type in a calculus.

Under this interpretation, the individual exists by virtue of his being distinguished from, or contrasted with, his group/class or institution. The distinction (at least the visible one) was nullified in Japanese society before the Meiji. Individual interests were subordinated to those of the group one belonged to.

In 1872 Nakamura Tadanao published his translation of J. S. Mill's *On Liberty*, which opposes two fundamental concepts: that of *society*—which should exercise only a limited authority over the individual—and that of *individual*, who should enjoy sovereignty over himself. However, as both the notions of *society* and *individual* in the European sense appeared obscure and difficult to understand for Japanese readers, in his translation, entitled *Jiyû no Ri*, Nakamura chose to oppose two more palpable realities contained in the actual hierarchy of Japanese feudal society, namely 政府 *seifu* or 仲間会所 *nakama kaisho* (the government), and 一個人民 *ikko jinmin* (one of the people) (Yanabu, 1995: 26). This choice is the more interesting if one takes into account the fact that the concept of society, as Westerners perceive it, did not exist in Japanese culture. However, it would be a mistake to think that at the end of the 19th century Japan was not an organized society. The word 世間 *seken*, as well as 藩 *han* (clan, fief, domain) and 家族 *kazoku* (family) had been used for about a thousand years to express the concept of human association. *Seken* reflects a very concrete aspect of this relationship, and although *seken* and *shakai* are often reciprocally defined, the former is seldom used as a translation equivalent of “society” (Yanabu, 1995: 19). According to 角川最新漢和辞典 *Kadokawa Saishin Kanwa Jiten* (Kadokawa Kanji Dictionary, Second edition, 1983), 世間 *seken* is defined as:

1. world, this world, society;
2. extent of one's association with others; people around oneself.

On the other hand, Nelson's *Japanese-English Character Dictionary* (Second edition, 1987) defines *shakai* as “world, society, life, people, society, the public; rumor, gossip.” The Western imitation frenzy of the Meiji period imposed a larger use of 社会 *shakai*, since its abstractness gave it a sense of refinement. As a result, under the influence of the Meirokusha intellectuals, the term 社会 *shakai* started to be used not only in translations, but also in the works of some intellectuals. In his 学問のすすめ *Gakumon no Susume* (An Encouragement of Learning) (1876) Fukuzawa Yukichi uses the term 社会の榮譽 *shakai no eiyo* (social honor), which can only be attained through learning as opposed to worldly honor, the prerequisites of which are not necessarily knowledge and virtuous behavior, but rather the validation of *seken*.

Fukuzawa Yukichi, who aimed at disseminating ideas of human equity, individual freedom and success, attempted to coin a new equivalent for “society”, which would specify more clearly the concept of *individual* interaction. In his 1868 translation of *Political Economy for Use in Schools and for Private Instruction* (author and year unknown), he used, among others, the term 人間交際 *ningen kôsai* as an equivalent for the English “society”. The term 交際 *kôsai*, with its variant 世間の交際 *seken no kôsai* had been in use, but its sense was rather vague, and did not overtly imply individual participation. Other terms that expressed the idea of human association like 藩 *han* (clan), 族 *zoku* (family), and 国 *kuni* (country), did not specifically point to an interaction between individuals. Moreover, the word 交際 *kôsai*, which means “intercourse, association” implies an association between people as independent individuals, and not as a group.

In his novel, Sôseki uses the word 田舎 *inaka* to refer to the countryside, with its worldly but yet unspoiled traditions. This term has the connotation of 世間 *seken* rather than the stiff 社会 *shakai*. Watakushi's father comments on the stricter social obligations that govern the

countryside: 「東京と違って田舎はうるさいからね」 (“We are not in Tokyo, you know,” said my father. “Country people are rather fussy and resentful”). However, his son does not feel obliged to pay his respects to the people in the village 「私は田舎の客が嫌いだった」 (I hated the kind of guests that came to a country dinner party). In the novel, the countryside, 田舎 *inaka*, is contrasted to the big city 東京, 都会 *Tokyo, tokai*. Likewise, one may notice that the two worlds are divided along the semantic lines of 世間 *seken*, which nullifies the individual as a private person and imposes the obligation of maintaining a functional network of relations, and 社会 *shakai*, where one can live, if one chooses, with as little social intercourse as possible. Watakushi remarks that Sensei lacks the social connections which might have enabled him to find a good position for his disciple: 「世間の狭い先生としては何うする事も出来まいと思いながらこの手紙を書いた」 (Besides, I thought to myself, even if he wished to help me, he could do very little, since he led such a secluded life).

The following passage from Fukuzawa Yukichi gives a clue to the new, individual oriented trend:

Every human being is, by his constitution, a separate, and distinct, and complete system, adapted to all the purposes of self-government, and responsible, separately, to God, for the manner in which his powers are employed. Thus every *individual* possesses a body ... (in Yanabu, 1995: 32, his emphasis, my translation).

The traditional Japanese individual was by no means self-governed and responsible to God. He was rather governed by his leaders and responsible to his superiors. However, Sôseki's Sensei is responsible neither to God nor to other people for his deeds. He is a solitary man who does not seek the validation of society 「交際区域の狭いというよりも、世の中にたった一人で暮らしているといった方が適切な位の私」 (As you know, my circle of acquaintances is very small. Indeed, it would be more correct to say that I live alone in this world). Here Sôseki uses the term 一人 *hitori* alongside its opposite terms 世の中 *yononaka*, which means “world, society”, and 交際 *kôsai*, which translates as “social intercourse”. He manages to depict in this single phrase the essence of the new world—the estrangement of the individual despite a more or less rich social life. Again there is a paradox in that while he chooses to depict the inner life of his characters as individuals (一人 *hitori*, as it were), he ascribes to the term 一人 *hitori* a rather negative connotation. Sensei chooses to live alone, but his aloofness comes as a rejection of a world that hurt him and to whom he, in turn, gave pain. On the other hand, Watakushi's father asks his wife whether she is going to live alone (一人 *hitori*) in the house after his death 「おれが死んだら、お前はとうする、一人でこの家に居る気か」 (“What will you do when I'm dead? Do you intend to live all alone in this house?”)—which may suggest that the idea of leaving his wife all alone in an empty house does not appeal to him.

The Dissolution of Old Values

The intellectual revolution of the Meiji Restoration did not leave its marks on the Japanese language only. The intelligentsia eagerly adopted the Western ideals of progress and civilization, superimposing them on a fundamentally conservative and tradition-bound value system. Western things and thoughts became the fashion. However, Sôseki himself, among

others, sensed the mismatch between intentions and reality. His characters' petulant selves serve as an epitome of the epoch and are eventually consumed with the struggle between ideals and duty. The same kind of struggle may be said to have happened at the linguistic level. With their ideals of modernity, the Meiji intellectuals copied the form but struggled with concepts and ideas which were essentially foreign to the Japanese people, creating not only new terms, but also bringing about a sense of disruption of the traditional value system.

Mencius listed five main relationships that fix a person's existence in society. These are father-child, ruler-minister, husband-wife, elder brother-younger brother, and friend-friend. As can be seen, paramount importance is given not to the individual, but to the family, followed by authority, relatives and friends. There should be "affection" or "love" between parent and child; the relationship between ruler and minister should be characterized by "righteousness" or "duty"; between husband and wife there should be "distinction" or "attention to separate functions"; "proper order" or "precedence" should be observed between elder and younger brothers and "fidelity", and "faith" and "trust" should characterize friendship (Pollack, 1992: 59). The emergence of a new culture, that of more individualistic and success-oriented townspeople, the so-called *chônin* (町人), caused the erosion of these traditional values, which are gradually replaced by more materialistic goals of personal fulfillment.

Like Mishima Yukio, Sôseki blames the breakdown of human relationships on the alienation of the individual from traditional values. His characters, while refuting the old world as obsolete and restraining, are not yet ready to face the challenges of solitude and individual responsibility, and lose their sense of direction. In *Kokoro*, Sensei confesses to his spiritual disciple that he feels like a strange creature, a sort of mummy amongst the living 「このまま人間の中に取り残されたミイラのように存在して行こうか……」 (Should I go on living as I do now, like a mummy left in the midst of living beings...).

Kokoro's world is one where human relationships have already been altered. There is little if any filial affection between sons and parents in Kokoro. Instead, Watakushi, the narrator in the first part of the novel, feels more attached to a man with whom he is not related: 「肉のなかに先生の力が食い込んでいると云っても、血のなかに先生の命が流れていると云っても、其時の私には少しも誇張でないように思われて……」 (Indeed, it would not have seemed to me then an exaggeration to say that Sensei's strength had entered my body, and that his very life was flowing in my veins) ... 「私は父が本当の父であり、先生は又いう迄もなく、あかの他人であるという明白な事実を、ことさらに眼の前に並べて見て、始めて大きな真理でも発見したかの如くにおどろいた」 (And when I discovered that such were my true feelings towards these two men I was shocked. For was I not of my father's flesh?). On the other hand, the strangeness Watakushi's newly acquired cosmopolitan airs does not escape his parents: 「儒者の家へ切支丹の匂いを持ち込むように」 (As someone in days gone by might have put it, it was like introducing the smell of a Christian into the home of a Confucianist). Watakushi's brother, a businessman living in a large city, is not quick to leave his business to tend to his dying father—business comes before filial duties. Moreover, in the latter's opinion, Sensei, with his lack of interest in material matters, is an egoist, because he fails to bring his own contribution to society: 「名もない人、何もしていない人、それが何処に価値を持っているだろう……人は自分の持っている才能をできるだけ働かせなくっちゃ嘘だ」 ("That's the trouble with egoists," he said

“They are brazen enough to think they have the right to live idly. It’s a crime not to make the best use of whatever ability one has”). Also, the lack of filial gratitude is expressed by the attitude of the two brothers, who are busy making plans for the time after their father’s death, though he is still alive: 「兄弟はまだ父の死なない前から、父の死んだ後について、こんな風に語り合った」 (And so, while their father was still alive, the two brothers talked of what they would do after his death).

The absence or helplessness of fathers dominates the world depicted in *Kokoro*. The individual is constantly left alone by the death of his material/spiritual father. The lack of parental advice and authority obliges the individual to turn to more materialistic matters. Sensei goes as far as sacrificing the life of his best friend to win the object of his desire.

The death of the Meiji Emperor, who was also a kind of spiritual father to the people, brings about the despair of Watakushi’s ailing father. The old man gives up fighting his death as a gesture of submission towards the defunct monarch. This death is also symbolic for the whole transformation of Japanese society, whose people, deprived of their fatherly emperor, are obliged to take their destinies in their own hands.

The second dissolved relationship is that between ruler and minister. It is symbolically depicted in the relationship between the Meiji Emperor and General Nogi who is doomed to live thirty-five years in shame as a punishment for losing a flag in combat. It can be said that this imposition of real characters into the fictional world of the novel is motivated by the need to exemplify the paternal relationship.

The dissolution of the relationship between friends which, according to Mencius, should instead be characterized by “fidelity”, “faith” or “trust”, is best illustrated in Sensei’s betrayal of K, his best friend. The betrayal is brought about by the young men’s love for Ojôsan. K confesses his love to Sensei, who takes advantage of his friend’s weak frame of mind and invokes his high spiritual ideals in order to discourage his possible attempts at asking for Ojôsan’s hand. Thus friendship here is no longer seen as selfless “association” based on fidelity and trust, but as an encounter of two distinct individuals, who do not hesitate to destroy one another when their interests are at stake.

Thus we can see that the efforts of the Meiji intellectuals to bridge the conceptual gap between Japan and the Western world are notable in that they helped contribute to a better understanding of foreign cultures and philosophy. However, instead of mediating between the language of the original and the target language, writers attempted to adapt the Japanese language to the newly introduced concepts by creating new and sometimes awkward words that were hardly equivalent to their denotation in the original language. Sôseki’s novel reflects, through language and contents, the painful transformation of the individual who attempts to become “a modern man”, but is constantly held back by his still powerful bonds to an old and conservative world of tradition and moral obligations. As Pollack points out,

In *Kokoro* the self is understood as something essentially parasitic, antisocial, and frighteningly destructive of both the social fabric and its human host. Stripped of its traditional social definition it clearly resembles Meiji man in that, in its new undefined and dangerously chaotic state, it has lost its traditional sense of what it is, where it is going, or what its purpose may be (1992: 65).

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Professor Michael Herriman and Professor Bruce Monk for reading the manuscript and making helpful suggestions.

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