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# MUSHANOKŌJI SANEATSU: *LUZERN*

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## *Abstract*

This paper documents the fascination with Tolstoy of Mushanokōji Saneatsu, founder of the Shirakaba movement. Under the influence of his uncle, Mushanokōji began in 1903 by reading such texts as *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, but then passed to earlier works and especially to the autobiographical short story *Luzern*. In the coming years Mushanokōji was to develop into an ardent Tolstoyan pacifist, opposing the Russo-Japanese War and founding the agrarian commune Atarashiki Mura. In 1936, after the failure of the commune and the dissolution of the Shirakaba group, Mushanokōji made his only trip to Europe. This took him from Berlin, where his brother was ambassador, to Lucerne which he clearly visited with Tolstoy in mind, even staying at the same hotel where the story takes place. What is significant about his diary account of the episode is its blend of recognition and evasion with regard to Tolstoy. *Luzern* is acknowledged, but its core content of frustrated protest against social injustice is now ignored, giving way to a mere desire to see the same landscapes that Tolstoy described. Mushanokōji's evasion of what must have made the story important to him in the first place signals a shift, typical of the Shirakaba writers, from the ideological to the aesthetic, a withdrawal into a political quietism that ultimately played into the hands of a régime with which he would become increasingly compromised.

In summer 1903, the seventeen-year old Mushanokōji Saneatsu made his first acquaintance with the New Testament and with the writings of Leo Tolstoy.

This crucial event occurred, as we learn from his autobiography *Aru Otoko* (5, 122),<sup>1</sup> during the annual summer holidays that he spent on his uncle's estate in Kaneda, a summer resort situated on the tip of Miura Peninsula. The uncle concerned was his maternal uncle Kadenokōji Sukekoto

1 My citations from Mushanokōji Saneatsu are to *Mushakōji Saneatsu zenshū*, 18 vols, Shōgakusan, Tōkyō 1987–1990. Volume and page numbers are given in parenthesis. Citations of *Luzern* are to Leo Tolstoy, *The Snow Storm and Other Stories*, tr. by Louise and Aymler Maude, Oxford University Press, London 1966. Page numbers in parenthesis.

Probably begun in 1920, *Aru otoko* ("A Certain Man") was written over a span of six years, appearing in instalments in several magazines from 1923 onwards, when it finally appeared in book-form in 1927.

who, after several financial setbacks, had turned to religion. Long attracted to Tolstoy, he had retired to his only remaining estate of Kaneda to work in the fields and spend the rest of his time in religious discussions with a group of new friends: a motley group of Buddhist priests and Protestant pastors.

The years between 1903 and 1905 were crucial in the development of Mushanokōji. They mark his first entry into the world, passing from a sheltered life under the sway of a widowed mother to his first grapplings with society at large. His school curriculum had been peculiar to his class, spent in the exclusive Gakushūin, the Peers' School, reserved for the imperial family, the aristocracy and any affluent commoners who were able to pay the fees. Excellent at an academic level, with teachers chosen from the top-bracket intellectuals in their respective fields, it had nevertheless left Mushanokōji with a permanent feeling of living in a vacuum which he often called "the spirit of the greenhouse." It was probably to counter this feeling of seclusion from real life that he turned to reading the socialist press, and particularly the clandestine copies of *Heimin shinbun* and *Yorozu chōhō* circulating about the campus. "I never missed a single number [of these papers]" – he would later write in *Aru Otoko* (15, 545). This he did in full view of his teachers, knowing well that they would be tolerant enough not to make a fuss. He would, in fact, always retain a fond memory of his tutors and often praise the relaxed, courteous atmosphere that reigned within the school premises.

In winter 1903 he fell in love with a cousin from Osaka; but her family had already promised her in marriage to a wealthy businessman and Saneatsu knew that she would soon have to leave Tokyo. As a result, his marks at the Peers' School fell dramatically. Scolded by his mother, plagued by longing for cousin Tei, he had gone to heal his wounds at Kaneda. But for all his endeavours – early rising, long bracing walks on the Miura seashore and exercises in agriculture – he remained inconsolable. Seeing him so wretched, his uncle unceremoniously presented him with a slender edition of the New Testament and ordered him to read it.

"Contempt of Christianity was at the time a fashionable way to display patriotism" – noted Mushanokōji later. Thus his initial reaction was unenthusiastic, but his misgivings evaporated the more he read. By the time he had finished, his admiration for Christ was limitless. Christ had, in his mind, acquired the image of an uncompromising and courageous dissenter – the very image he himself was cultivating at the Peers' School.

The next stage in his recovery came when he found in his uncle's library Tolstoy's late works: *My Religion* and *The Kingdom of God is within you*, both recently translated into Japanese by a certain Katō Naoshi. One year later, in 1904, Tei returned to her native Ōsaka for good, an event that plunged Mushanokōji back into gloom. Again, he turned to Tolstoy for consolation, this time passing from the late to the early Tolstoy and, more precisely, to the short story *Luzern*. He read the story in German translation with the help of a dictionary. It must have been hard going for it took him a whole month to finish it, after which he found out, to his chagrin, that *Luzern* had been translated into Japanese by Mori Ōgai way back in 1881.<sup>2</sup> But he was never to regret his arduous exercise with *Luzern*, for he had learned enough German to start reading German translations of *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*.

He admittedly never finished *War and Peace*, and in any case, it may be doubted whether *Anna Karenina* or any other long novel ever matched the deep impression left by *The Kingdom of God is within you* and *Luzern*. These first readings of Tolstoy became a turning point in his life. As he puts it in *Aru otoko*:

These readings proved to be a miracle-cure for my sentimental hangover [...] In later years, my uncle would eventually go cool towards Tolstoyanism and return to a more worldly way of life; but I would remain a Tolstoy convert forever (5, 124)

Then came 1904, and the declaration of war on Russia on February 4 of that year. Tolstoy became immensely popular among young Japanese Russophiles, fiercely opposed to the conflict with Russia. Aged twenty, Mushanokōji had just graduated from the Gakushūin high course and was still an assiduous reader of the *Heimin shinbun* and drawn to Kōtoku Shūsui's Tolstoyan-oriented socialism. During the year of the war 1905, he became an ardent Tolstoyan pacifist. Indeed, two passages referring to that year, one written in 1915, the other in 1922, show that his enthusiasm could reach comic dimensions:

2 Mori Ōgai's translation appeared in *Yomiuri shinbun* in 1881 under the title *Suisu-kan ni uta o kiku* ("Hearing a Song in a Swiss Inn"). Since Mori knew no Russian, his text derives from a German translation by Wilhelm Lange, published in 1870.

My admiration for Tolstoy grew into a downright obsession [...] It was enough for me to see the katakana 'to' (ト) in a text, and my face would flush bright red from excitement. (3, 483<sup>3</sup>)

I walked around with a photograph of Tolstoy in his bathing suit, and every time I felt for it in my pocket, a new surge of energy would revive my slumbering spirits. (5, 133)

Yet reference to the Russo-Japanese war is strangely absent from his later writings. In *Aru otoko*, there is just one fleeting mention of it, contained in a single paragraph: "I hated that war," he writes; "two of our student-lodgers were immediately sent to the front and got killed shortly afterwards. The news upset me so much that my loathing of the war – and of all wars, for that matter – became total." Because of his obvious avoidance of the topic of war, it is impossible to ascertain whether he had read an interesting study on Swiss neutrality which was published in October 1903 – hence shortly before the outbreak of the hostilities – in Kōtoku Shūsui's series *Heimin bunko*. Written by the Christian socialist Abe Isoo, entitled *Chijō no risōkoku – Suisu* ("Switzerland, the [only] Ideal State on Earth"), it was a 100-page long report on the development of the Swiss system of government, and particularly on the Swiss principle of neutrality. As the title itself suggests, Swiss neutrality was used by Abe as a polemic weapon against Japanese war-propaganda.<sup>4</sup> The article may well have escaped Mushanokōji's attention, for there is no reference whatsoever to Abe in Mushanokōji's works, while there is frequent mention of other illustrious Christians, such as Uchimura Kanzō, Tokutomi Roka and Kinoshita Naoe. But if we assume that he had just heard about Abe's article somewhere, then he must have been reminded of Switzerland once again after Tolstoy's *Luzern* and perhaps felt the incentive to visit that faraway country sometime in future. But enough with suppositions; let us now return to *Luzern*.

*Luzern* is a fragment of an unfinished novel which Tolstoy intended to call *A Russian Landlord*. The protagonist is a fictional Prince Nekhlyudov, largely a projection of Tolstoy himself, who will eventually re-emerge in 1898 in Tolstoy's last novel *Resurrection*. The first fragment, written in

3 From *Kanshin shinai sakuhin to* ("Works I do not admire," date and place of first publication uncertain), written in Sapporo in 1915.

4 On the details of Abe Isoo's report, see Harald Meyer, "Direkte Demokratie und Neutralität als Gesellschaftsmodell? Zum Schweiz-Bild im Japan des 20. Jahrhunderts", *OAG Notizen* (1/2003), pp. 8-14. I am thankful to Dr. Meyer for his precious help on the subject.

1852, is the actual first chapter of the novel, entitled *A Landlord's Morning*. The nineteen-year old prince decides to abandon his studies and retire to his estate to alleviate the poverty of his peasants. But in one single morning, he realizes that his good intentions are being ridiculed by his serfs and dependents who are deeply fearful of his innovative projects. The chapter ends with a dejected prince daydreaming of distant blue seas and faraway towns.

The second fragment of this unfinished work is *Luzern* which was eventually published as a self-contained short story. It was written five years after *A Landlord's Morning* and is headed by the date "eight of July, 1857." The year is that of Tolstoy's first visit to Western Europe and the episode is not imaginary either. According to Countess Alexandra Tolstoy, who was, just then, travelling through Switzerland with the daughters of the Grand Duchess Marie of Lichtenberg, her cousin Leo was in a state of great excitement when she accidentally met him in Lucerne:

This is what he told us had happened the previous evening. An itinerant musician had played for a long time under the balcony of the Schweizerhof Hotel, where a considerable company of people were sitting. Everyone enjoyed the performance, but when he raised his cap for a reward no one threw him a single sou – an unpleasant fact, certainly, but one to which Tolstoy attributed almost criminal dimensions.

To retaliate on the smart public there assembled he took the musician by the arm and, seating him at his own table, ordered supper and champagne for him. I hardly think the guests, or even the poor musician himself, quite appreciated the irony of this action. It characterized both the writer and the man.

The report of the countess is actually a faithful summary of the plot of *Luzern*. We may simply add that Tolstoy's itinerant musician is from Aargau who sings Tyrolese yodels, plays a guitar and addresses his Lucerne audience in French. Apart from this puzzling vernacular confusion, the general tone of the story is poignantly realistic. Just as in the preceding fragment, the prince's good intentions end in failure. Invited to a bottle of champagne in the splendid Schweizerhof dining-room, the vagabond singer is in such obvious torment that his host is forced to release him in a hurry. Moreover, the prince soon notices that he had covered himself with ridicule. Scorned by the waiters, snubbed by the other hotel guests, he broods over the power of money and the stupid arrogance of his own class:



How could you, as Christians or simply as human beings, respond with coldness and ridicule to the pleasure afforded you by an unfortunate mendicant? But no, in your country there are institutions for the needy. There are no beggars and there must be none, nor must there be any compassion for them [...] Why do these people – who in their parliaments, meetings and societies are warmly concerned about the conditions of the celibate Chinese in India, about propagating Christianity and education in Africa, about the establishment of societies for the betterment of the whole human race – not find in their souls the simple elemental feeling of human sympathy? (246; 248)

To understand this passage better, it should be said that at the very beginning of the story, the narrator Nekhlyudov points out that nearly all the Schweizerhof guests are from the English upper classes. He does not find this massive influx to his liking at all. He finds that English tourism has adulterated the natural beauty of Switzerland and that even Lucerne has undergone disgraceful transformations in order to suit English tastes. For example, a beautiful medieval bridge, the Hofbrücke, has been removed to make space for “a granite quay, as straight as a stick” so that the English can “walk about in comfortable clothes and Swiss straw hats.”

In fact, Tolstoy’s Anglophobia may have had other motives. Anglo-Russian relations were less than friendly after the Crimean War, which had ended only three years before. The war had been a folly, born from a petty quarrel among Catholic and Orthodox monks in Jerusalem which led to a coalition of Turkish, French and British forces against Russia and ended with the famous siege of Sebastopol. H. A. L. Fisher comments that it was a contest “entered into without necessity, conducted without foresight, and deserving to be reckoned from its archaic arrangements and tragic mismanagements rather among medieval than modern campaigns.”<sup>5</sup>

Tolstoy himself, as an officer, had spent the terrible winter of 1855 in the besieged city, and seen famine and cholera decimate the population during the last offensive, mainly directed by English generals. *Luzern* is, in fact, a retaliation for the senseless destruction of a once thriving port by the English forces. The story foreshadows Tolstoy the pacifist, the cultural nihilist and opponent of institutions.

All this made a deep impression on Mushanokōji. Pacifism had long been a tendency in his own family, which was of *kuge* descent and traditionally opposed to the belligerent samurai class. A few years later, in his first collection of essays, he would himself storm against the arrogance of his

5 H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe* (first ed. 1935), vol. 2, Fontana Library, London 1961, p. 1031.

class and the corrupting power of money. According to *Aru Otokō*, (1923), he had felt “a deep affinity of spirit” (*dōkan*) with Tolstoy’s protagonist, whose anger with the world “he shared entirely” – all of which goes to show that the subtle irony permeating the story had passed him by. He would never notice that *Luzern* was the author’s way of distancing himself from his former self; that Tolstoy was now viewing his overzealous Nekhlyudov with a mixture of sympathy and detached irony. What Tolstoy had wanted to convey to the reader was that Prince Nekhlyudov was himself as a much younger man – impulsive and naive, covertly dissatisfied with God’s slowness, too impatient for immediate results and too arrogant to see that God did not need anyone’s help. But Mushanokōji, like so many of his Shirakaba colleagues, would forever remain too proud of his own immaturity and too attached to the cult of youth to grasp Tolstoy’s subtle distinctions and reticences.

More than ten years would pass before a new mention of *Luzern* in Mushanokōji’s writings. This was in 1936, during his first and last voyage to Europe. In the meantime, many things had happened. First came the founding of the Shirakaba group in 1910 and the frequently hostile critical reception of Mushanokōji’s work. Then, in 1918, his move to Kyūshū to found an agrarian commune, the *Atarashiki mura* (“New Village”) on Tolstoyan principles. The disastrous year of 1923 saw his divorce and remarriage, the Great Kantō Earthquake and the dissolution of the Shirakaba group. Finally in 1928, the dissolution of the commune.

Let us look more closely into these last reversals. Plagued by an inclement climate, Mushanokōji’s commune was declared bankrupt after several years of hard toil. Another commune, bearing the same name but much smaller in scale, was then rebuilt in the outskirts of Tōkyō.<sup>6</sup> Both these utopian experiments had cost its founder all his money and left him tired and disillusioned with his fellow human beings. His egalitarian dreams were first to go; then came a hardening against all leftist movements (Marxism especially) and an increased longing for strong leadership and a military takeover.

The general depression of the twenties did the rest: like so many other intellectuals of the time, he had to beg publishers to accept his works and spend humiliating hours in their waiting-rooms. In a rapidly changing political climate, his Tolstoyan past had long become an embarrassment to him.

6 This second commune still exists in Chiba, and is now a poultry farm. See Otsuyama Kunio, *Atarashiki mura no sōzō*, Tomiyama-bō hyakka bunko, Tōkyō 1977, p. 7 ff.



Increasingly, he turned to painting, the only free-lance activity he cherished now, and finally re-emerged in the publishing world as an art-critic. At the beginning of the thirties, his "dark years," as he was to call them later, were over. Published again and with his financial situation considerably improved, he embarked on a journey to Europe as a correspondent for several art magazines.

His brother Kintomo, who had followed a diplomatic career, was at the time Japanese ambassador to the Third Reich. It was 1936, the year of the Berlin Olympic Games, and the Japanese diplomatic corps were being shown special courtesy as Germany's prospective allies. Thus Mushanokōji came in for his fair share of state ceremonies and receptions at the Embassy. On one of these, he had shaken hands with Hitler; but, as he would promptly note in his diary, he felt an instant distrust of the Chancellor, whom he found "impenetrable, self-defensive and awkward." Nor was he better pleased by the Olympic Games which he found "endless, boring, with too much flag-waving and Sieg-Heiling." To avoid the festive Berlin crowds, he took off for a brief tour to Sweden and Norway in the company of several interpreters provided by his brother. But though the quiet art museums were a balm to his strained nerves, the retinue of interpreters put him ill at ease; so it was with a sigh of relief that he left Berlin once again in September, this time alone, for a visit to Italy.

It was on his way to Italy that Mushanokōji stopped in Lucerne for what seems to have been a deliberate reconnaissance tour of the town which had inspired Tolstoy:

I arrived here yesterday evening. Today is September the sixteenth. I am at the very same hotel where Tolstoy stopped eighty years ago, and wrote *Luzern*. The view from his window, he wrote, was beautiful beyond description. But unfortunately, today is a rainy day and all the distant places are invisible. Besides, the view must have been entirely different in Tolstoy's time. Even people who stopped here twenty years ago would feel disappointed if they came back today, so I think that Tolstoy would be even more disappointed if he were shown this place right now. All I see are trams and cars under my window, and their clatter and blaring is at times so loud that I must wait till it stops before I can go on writing. Tolstoy would surely have gone mad with anger at this din, as he wouldn't have been able to write a single line. The lake is, however, as placid as he describes it; yet it can hardly be seen from here, because the straight row of slender trees that angered him so much have become enormous. Yet I don't think that these luxuriant trees spoil the view; what does spoil it are rather the stately mansions in front of me. Each of these mansions look quite elegant, I must say; but because of them, I'd have to climb far up the hill in order to view the whole lake. Now what's the use of a

beautiful placid lake if one must make such an effort for the sake of a panoramic view? So the best thing for me to do today is to take an hour's walk about town and then be off to Basel. The trip may well stop me from fretting about not seeing this lake. Besides, as usual, I forgot my umbrella in the train, so that a walk along the lakeside under the rain would be a nuisance. All right, so much for today: but if I can't see the lake tomorrow, I'll be quite annoyed. I came here precisely so that I could write about the view; but if there's no view to see, what's the purpose of my staying here? I would only be wasting my money. (12, 82-83)

This and other extracts from Mushanokōji's European diary would eventually appear in 1940 under the title *Kohan no gashō* ("An Art Dealer at the Lakeshore").<sup>7</sup> The "lakeshore" is that of Lucerne, of course, though the collection also contains entries from Germany and Italy. Thus the very hint of Lucerne in the title is enough proof that his short stay at the Schweizerhof was an important event in Mushanokōji's life. The visit to Lucerne may even be seen as a gesture of atonement for his betrayal of Tolstoy, something like a penitent's pilgrimage. In that case, Tolstoy must have been quite a revengeful ghost. In fact, after his return from Basel, Mushanokōji found Lucerne still wrapped in mist and fog; but such was his desire to see the lake with Tolstoy's eyes, that he decided to waste more money and wait for the weather to improve. But after three more days under ceaseless rain, he departed without seeing either Pilatus or the Rigi.

The view, nothing but the view and some other irrelevant details, but the main plot of *Luzern* is utterly ignored. One could have expected that the hypothetical anger of Tolstoy with the noise and the spoiled view would bring back to Mushanokōji's mind the anger of Tolstoy's protagonist with the injustice and inhumanity of the world, but there is not the slightest reference to Nekhlyudov either.

Thus what is striking in Mushanokōji's account of his visit to Lucerne is its strange mixture of recognition and evasiveness with regard to Tolstoy. On the other hand it is clear that the only thing that brings him to the city – when in fact he would rather be in Basel or on his way to Italy – is its

7 The *Kohan* diary frequently refers to events which took place long after the dates of the entries. In fact, Mushanokōji kept inserting new material whenever there seemed to be some connection between earlier and later events. Thus the chronology of the journey is often unclear. For example, in the next entry dealing with the visit to the art museum in Basel, he speaks of a painting that he actually saw in Paris a month later. It is probable that, under the pressure of his publisher, Mushanokōji did not have much time for revision.

connection with Tolstoy whose story he regards as straightforward autobiography (nowhere does he mention Nekhlyudov). This matters so much to him that, despite the wretched weather, he is prepared to give the place a second chance. On the other hand, the ideological charge of the tale, which had meant to him so much two decades earlier, is now surprisingly absent. There is no explicit gesture of rejection, but rather a shift of emphasis that can hardly be unintentional. What counts now is not what happened, not the revelation of unjust class-structures and man's inhumanity to man, but simply what Tolstoy saw as a tourist – as if the real focus of the story were not the episode of the Tyrolese singer as a piece of verbal landscape painting. It seems as if Mushanokōji felt a debt to Tolstoy that was too large to be ignored and too disturbing to be honestly acknowledged.

The truth is that, after the problems of the Atarashiki Mura commune and the Kantō Earthquake, Mushanokōji's central concerns had moved from the ideological to the aesthetic, a development not without analogies in the literature of European romanticism a century earlier. The process was, no doubt, speeded up by the repressive atmosphere of a Japan that was already on the way to a militaristic nationalist régime, but we should probably stop short of accusing Mushanokōji of a cynically protective turnabout.

Aesthetics has always been important to the Shirakaba movement and it was no accident that they were the pioneers of Japanese interest in French Post-Impressionism.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, though sincere enough, Shirakaba political idealism was never free of a dilettantish sentimental tinge and lacked a firm intellectual basis. In abandoning the kind of concerns that is central to Tolstoy's story Mushanokōji was arguably being perfectly true to himself. At the prospect of an imminent war, he, a once fiery pacifist, had withdrawn into a sort of political quietism. The selective nature of his references to Tolstoy, combined with his obvious relief at leaving Nazi Germany, suggests a deliberate effort to leave politics behind. In this respect, Switzerland's own neutrality may have chimed with his mood. As things turned out, the apolitical stance played into the hands of a régime with which Mushanokōji, without too much resistance, would become ever more deeply compromised.

8 See my article "Genuflecting at the Altar of French Art," *Japan Quarterly*, 46, 4 (1999), 57-65.

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