

# The representation of the self in Japanese literature in the first three decades of the twentieth century : major characteristics and their relation to the culture of the period

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THE REPRESENTATION OF THE SELF IN JAPANESE LITERATURE  
IN THE FIRST THREE DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:  
MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS AND THEIR RELATION TO THE  
CULTURE OF THE PERIOD

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Culturally, 1920s' Japan witnessed the formation of urban mass culture,<sup>1</sup> a fact crucial to any analysis of the representation of the self in the 1920s' and 1930s' Japanese literature. This fact has been completely overlooked by the modernist tendencies that have dominated Japanese historical and cultural thought since World War Two, resulting in the historical and cultural trends of Japanese society relating to the first half of the 20th century being mis-read. As such, a radical rethinking of our approach to this period is long overdue. It is within such a context that I present my article as a formative step in this direction.

The rethinking of early 20th century Japanese literary history has beginnings as recently as the 1980s and roots connecting back to the pioneer-

- 1 Crucial to the 1920s culturally becoming the formation period of urban mass culture were factors including the establishment of the mass media, the generation of information within the cities, and the homogenization of cultural enjoyment among the people, including the rural low income earners. Even up until the 1960s very little had been said about the "mass socialization" that marked the 1920s, to the extent that the comments in this regard of literary figures such as Sasaki Kiichi and Ōoka Shōhei stand out. In the fields of sociology and social psychology Minami Hiroshi and others were researching this phenomenon from the point of view of "Americanism," although Ishikawa Hiroyoshi may have been the only one to clearly identify the 1920s as the "first mass society" in contrast to the "second mass society" of post-war period. Into the 1980s, there was a rise in interest, with Isoda Kōichi, Maeda Ai and others conducting literary criticism and research focusing on urban culture, while Unno Hiroshi advocated tackling the problem of 1920s culture from the point of view of the "modern city." Using the magazine *Shinseinen* as a means of understanding the leading culture and trends of the 1920s, Suzuki Sadami attempts to paint a clear picture of the culture and thought behind "the erotic, the grotesque, and the nonsensical" of Edogawa Ranpo and others, although referring to this as "early mass culture." The term "urban mass culture" first appears in *Modan toshi no hyōgen (Expressions of the Modern City)*, see SUZUKI 1991.

ing work of Isoda Kōichi, Maeda Ai, and Unno Hiroshi. However, today much ground work remains to be done in order to sharpen the historical perspective in relation to this period. My article examines the fundamental characteristics of Japanese culture pertaining to the first half of the 20th century, with particular emphasis on the 1920s and 1930s. The article begins with an overview of early 20th century Japanese culture, before moving on to look at the cultural characteristics of the 1920s and the 1930s. It concludes with an analysis of the representation of the self in Japanese literature from 1900 until the 1930s. By approaching the task in this manner I hope to determine the continuity and/or breaks in cultural themes between early 20th century Japanese society and that of the 1920s and 1930s.

This paper is divided into four sections (IV given later):

- I) Overview of early 20th century Japanese culture
- II) Cultural characteristics of the 1920s
- III) Cultural characteristics of the 1930s

The initial three sections are sub-divided into:

- 1. Nation state:
  - a) trends in nationalist sentiment and nationalism;
  - b) trends in overseas expansion;
- 2. Economy/society:
  - c) changes in industrial structure, etc.;
  - d) subsequent social imbalance;
- 3. Social thought:
  - e) reactionary movements;
  - f) generally perceivable trends;
- 4. Trends of cultural thought:
  - g) discussed below.

Thus, by illuminating the connections and/or breaks with the 1900s and 1910s, I hope to highlight the cultural characteristics of the 1920s and 1930s. Examples will be given of literary works that either reflect or respond to these cultural phenomena. The final section is:

- IV) Hypothetical examination of the trends of the representation of the self in the literature of the 1910s and 1920s / 30s.

## I. Overview of early 20th century Japanese culture (1900s–1910s)

The 20th century opened with a spate of “imperial wars” (Lenin), from the Spanish-American War (1898) to the Boer War (1899–1902). Intent since the Meiji Restoration on catching up with the other industrialized countries, Japan finalized the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902, and engaged in its own “imperial war” with the powerful Russian empire from 1904 to 1905 over primacy in Manchuria—a war that required not only a concerted military campaign, but owing to developments in heavy artillery and front-line stalemates, casualty rates<sup>2</sup> were high, and in the end victory was only secured by the barest of margins. Ensuing developments from the end of the war until 1920 can be summarized as follows.

## I.1

- a) Build-up of nationalist sentiment prewar and during the war, and the subsequent deflation of such sentiment post-war;
- b) territorial expansion, and overseas expansion.

Following the internal unrest and political change of the early Meiji period came the establishment of nation-state systems around mid-Meiji, and the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance towards the end of the Meiji period, moving Japan closer to its goal of industrialized nation status. This trend was supported by an ongoing process of territorial expansion (the annexation of Ryūkyū, present day Okinawa, the “opening up” of Hokkaidō, the cession of Taiwan following the Sino-Japanese War, 1894–1895, and southern part of the Sakhalin islands following the Russo-Japanese War, and the annexation of Korea, 1910, resulted in latter Meiji Japan growing to almost twice the size of Tokugawa Japan). The build-up of nationalist sentiment peaked around the time of the Russo-Japanese War. The early part of the war was, however, marked by varying degrees of anti-war protest. While this protest was suppressed during the war, it forewarned of the general unrest

2 Japanese casualties are estimated at 230,000 (50,000 dead). Conscription of reserve troops was undertaken twice during the war, with even the “household breadwinners” being called up. These losses are reflected during the post-war period, in which there was a shortage of male labor, with rural areas especially hard hit. Economically, the government used foreign loans from England and America to finance war expenditure, and when these ran out two additional collections of consumption tax were made, increasing the number of tenant farmers, and widening the gap between rich and poor.

among the people that flared up in the post-war period. Following the end of the war there occurred a relative deflation of nationalist sentiment. This can be attributed to a general weariness among the people due to the post-war slackening of national tensions, and domestically, to a widening of the gap between rich and poor and an increase in the number of labor disputes. Also, cultural nationalism, charged with the production of a new national culture, was instrumental in sewing the seeds of what was to become popular culture.

Officially, Japan participated in World War One on the side of the Allied forces, and used the war period to obtain primacy over the Chinese island of Tsushima, under German lease at the time, and to pour capital into mainland China, managing, for example, the South Manchuria Railways.

<*Doko e (Where To?; 1908)*, by Masamune Hakuchō, conveys well the sense of weariness and aimlessness that pervaded intellectual circles following the post-war dissipation of nationalist sentiment. *Kichōsha no nikki (The Diary of a Returnee; 1909)*, by Nagai Kafū, is about a musician who, after his return from studies in Europe, falls into despair at the extent to which the imitation of modern Western civilization has progressed in Japan. Frustrated in his desire to realize a new national culture, the musician eventually isolates himself in the world of *shamisen* music. Kafū's growing interest in Tokugawa culture is apparent in works such as *Hiyori geta (Fair-Weather Geta; 1915)*, an essay that creates the source of art in the joys and sorrows of the poor crushed by the developments of modern society. *Mankan Tokorodokoro (Here and There in Manchuria and Korea; 1909)*, by Natsume Sōseki, records the Japanese views of and their involvement in the "territorization" and the half "territorization" of the Korean Peninsular and north-eastern China, respectively.>

## I.2

- c) Rapid transformation of industrial structure;
- d) consequent worsening social imbalance.

Characteristic of the rapid transformation of industrial structure was the shift from light to heavy industry, the development of the heavy chemical industry instigated by national capital (e. g. opening of the Yawata Steel plant), and the establishment of a railway network (following the Russo-Japanese War, many private railways were nationalized, while those that remained private were developed as electric rail. Also, the fact that this period

coincided with the change to electric energy was a major factor in facilitating the transformation of industrial structure, and allowing Japan to achieve rapid modernization). The rapid transformation of industrial structure also brought about massive changes in social structure. At the turn of the 20th century farmers constituted 70 % of the population (70 % of which were tenant farmers). However, the infiltration of the capital economy into agriculture necessitated the production of cash crops and expenditure on chemical fertilizer, meaning that the majority of tenant farmers became unable to subsist solely on agriculture. Many moved to the urban factory districts, forming a working class (distinct from the young women mobilized into light industry). By the mid-1920s factory workers and lower grade public servants constituted over 50 % of the population, and the number of capitalists exceeded landowners (many of whom doubled as local magnates). The rapid development of the heavy chemical industry caused an increase in the male work which now nearly equalled the number of female workers. The transformation of industrial structure allowed an increasing number of the urban middle class and their children to receive an education (not the former middle class, made up of the agricultural elite and self-employed business class, but rather the new middle class, made up of government officials, teachers, and office workers).

Naturally, the cities swelled, and the factory and suburban housing districts developed. Working conditions for both light industries and heavy chemical industries were atrocious. Also, the urban factory districts were plagued by environmental pollution (e. g. Suwa, Western Ōsaka) and a falling ash problem (e. g. Asano Cement, Tōkyō), while the rigors of urban mechanized society took a psychological toll on the people.

<Nagatsuka Takashi's long-novel *Tsuchi* (*Dirt*; 1910) captures well the growing exhaustion that engulfed agricultural village.<sup>3</sup> This period also produced novels such as *Chikushō ren* (*Damned Love*; 1910), by Shirayanagi

3 *Dirt*, set in the Kinu River area of northern Ibaraki prefecture, accurately conveys the poverty of tenant farmers in central Japan. Social problems arose from the increase in tenant farmers and the emergence in the cities of the lower class, as a result of heavy taxation after the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). The structure of rural population (1909) was landowners: 169,000, independent farmers: 660,000, small tenant farmers: 3,608,000; percentage of farmers forced to work in wage-paying industries (Niigata prefecture): 1887 = 15 %, 1913 = 50 %, 1914 = 77.5 %.

Shūko, a tragic story of class conflict in which several factory workers, rendered callous by inhuman living and working conditions, rape a young girl. *Baien no nioi* (*The Smell of Soot and Smoke*; 1918), by Miyaji Karoku, is another novel set in the factory district, while *Shinkeibyō jidai* (*The Age of Neurosis*; 1917), by Hirotsu Kazuo, deals with the psychological trauma of city life.<sup>4</sup>>

### I.3

- e) Popular riots and the suppression of socialist thought;
- f) rise of democratic thought.

This degree of social imbalance, naturally enough, gave rise to poverty both in the cities and in rural areas, exacerbating the dissatisfaction among the people. General unrest following the end of the Russo-Japanese War led to popular riots in Tōkyō, Yokohama, and Kōbe, protesting the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty (September 1905), and in the following year, the Tōkyō Transport Strike (1906) led by the socialist Kinoshita Naoe, escalated into popular rioting. Police authorities reacted by using the “High Treason Incident” (1910) to effectively suppress socialist thought, which had been on the rise since the end of the 19th century (Meiji 30s), turning the 1910s into socialism’s “Winter period.” Subsequently, unrest among the people manifested itself in the form of tenant farmer strikes and labor strikes, and struggles over local autonomy broke out intermittently.<sup>5</sup> Symbolic of this

4 *The Age of Neurosis* by Hirotsu Kazuo depicts the mechanization of the workplace and human relations, and the stress this causes a Tōkyō newspaper journalist and his wife, who ends up suffering a neurosis. Hirotsu Kazuo aimed to counter the popularization of vitalism with an objective recognition of social reality.

5 Increases in labor strikes:

year	no. of incidents	no. of workers involved
1914	50	900
1919	497	63,000

Table of factory statistics (1923): structure of factory workers: 46 % men, 54 % women; Strike participation by industry: 31.2 % spinning, 25.4 % machinery, 12.8 % mining, 4.7 % chemical;

Worker population (1927): 8,008,900 male, 9,409,800 female.

In a village in Niigata there is a record of local management of an elementary school for a period of one year during a strike by tenant farmers. Also, in a village in Nagano, a standoff between villagers and an electric company and its political ally over the local management of the electric power authority, led to villagers clashing with police authorities and being charged with rioting.

period were the national "Rice Riots" (1918), caused by mounting fears that the price of rice would skyrocket following the deployment of troops to Siberia. Ōsugi Sakai, who employed the concept of anarcho-syndicalism under the influence of the thought of Bergson and Kropotkin, and Kagawa Toyohiko, who developed a business helping the poor based on Christian ideals (e. g. Mitsubishi's Kōbe plant strike and Kawasaki Shipping Yard strike, 1919) were instrumental in organizing the labor movement at the time. Kagawa also strongly influenced the Japanese Farmers Union, formed in 1922 to oppose the capitalists. The domination of clan and military governments, prevalent since the Meiji Restoration, was replaced in the Taishō period by full party government, leading to a general rise of democratic thought. This movement became known as "Taishō democracy," and produced personalities such as Yoshino Sakuzō. It was, however, the popular riots that, in the first place, made possible the introduction of the Diet and political thought.

<*Kiga* and *Muhon* (*Hunger, Rebellion*; both 1918), by Kitahara Hakushū, are examples of poetry that reflects the period of popular unrest following the Russo-Japanese War. Also appearing around this time were novels such as Miyajima Sukeo's *Kōfu* (*The Miner*; 1916), dealing with the miner strikes. Ōsugi Sakae's *Sei no tōsō* (*Fight of Life*; 1914) presented a theory on the struggle for anarchist revolution based on vitalism, while Kagawa Toyohiko's autobiography entitled *Shisen o koete* (*Transcending Death*; 1920) was a Taishō period best seller.>

#### I.4

- g) Rise of new religions;
- h) spread of "culturalism";
- i) flourishing of popular culture;
- j) prominence of a vitalism that placed 'life' at the center of human interaction with the world, daily life, and the arts.

As the social imbalance worsened, people felt their vitality threatened by the progress of mechanized society, the process of which had been spurred along by the war. Also, the growing weariness among intellectuals due to a lessening of national tension in the post-war period led people to seek spiritual salvation and reformation in religion. There was wide support for new religions such as Ōmoto Sect, Tenri Sect, and the Kokuchū Sect, and generally, a swelling of religious fervor.



<Kinoshita Mokutarō's poem *Shunchō* (*A Spring Morning*) shows clearly the process by which intellectual weariness developed into aesthetic decadence. *Reishō* (*Sneers*; 1910), by Nagai Kafū, and *Uzumaki* (*Whirlpool*; 1910), by Ueda Bin, depict the advocacy of epicureanism in the years following the Russo-Japanese War. While Kafū turned his back on the world after the High Treason Incident, Ueda created a cultural criticism based on vitalism. In this period many poems and novels were produced, beginning with Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's short story *Shisei* (*The Tattooer*; 1910), a combination of aesthetic decadence and Tokugawa renaissance, which thrusts "the noble virtue of foolishness" against competitive society. While a general sense of the religious fervor can be gained from works such as *Fūryū zanbo* (*An Elegant Confession*; 1907, sketch book), by Takahama Kyoshi, and *Mon* (*The Gate*; 1910), the novel by Natsume Sōseki, the fact that Kurata Hyakuzō's play, *Shukke to sono deshi* (*The Priest and His Disciples*; 1917) and Kagawa Toyohiko's *Transcending Death* became Taishō period best sellers demonstrates clearly the mood at the time. Watsuji Tetsurō's *Koji Junrei* (*Pilgrimage to the Old Temple*; 1919) was also a product of the period. This period was marked by an interest in Christian culture from the middle ages, although it can also be seen in terms of a compounding of religious fervor, together with a revival of and exoticism for Tokugawa culture.>

The early 20th century was further characterized by the spread of "culturalism" as advocated by the Kantian scholar, Kuwaki Gen'yoku. During the Meiji period the fact that people were looking for *risshin shusse* (success in life), a form of intellectual class mobility, and also the fact that evolutionary theory had taken a stronger hold in Japan than it had in either Europe or America, served to secure "survival of the fittest" (both individually and racially) as the dominant principle. In reaction to this, culturalism argued that people should seek the value of a spiritual culture that transcends both the act of living and economic activity. Faced with a worsening social imbalance, and in the midst of a spreading culturalist movement, the intellectual youth looked to philosophy and art for solutions to the problem of "how to best live life." This led to the development of what became known as *Taishō kyōyō shugi* (Taishō self-cultivation), a cultural phenomenon represented by works such as Nishida Kitarō's *Zen no kenkyū* (*The Study of Good*; 1911, not widely read until the 1920s) and Abe Jirō's *Santarō no nikki* (*Santarō's Diary*; 1914).

In addition, an increasing awareness of the role of class in society meant that entertainment and cultural improvement provided for workers and farmers gained positive significance as “art for the people” (here the influence of Romain Rolland and Ellen Key is significant), and resulted in the “debates on people’s art” (*minshū geijutsu ronsō*), concerned with the content and appropriate path for popular art (Honma Hisao, Katō Kazuo, Ōsugi Sakae, etc.). The concept of art for children also attracted much attention at this time. For example, *Akai tori* (*The Red Bird*), was a children’s magazine started by Suzuki Miekichi with the help of housewives. Literary works for children included Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s *Kumo no ito* (*The Spider’s Thread*; 1918), while Kitahara Hakushū and others, in reaction to songs promoted by the Ministry of Education, developed a “nursery rhyme” movement, pouring their energy into writing new folk songs.

Important to this movement was the spread of a vitalism advocating that people look for revitalization or fulfillment in life. This trend was visible in everything from Ōsugi Sakae’s social theory of anarcho-syndicalism, which made “fulfillment in life” the basis for individual freedom, to Nishida Kitarō’s *The Study of Good*, which explained that the ultimate essential desire of human beings was the religious state in which the body became one with the original flow of “life” in the universe. Feminist thought and women’s liberation were advocated in this period by writers and activists such as Yosano Akiko, Hiratsuka Raichō, Itō Noe, and Yamakawa Kikue. While their message was positive, their main arguments were strongly vitalistic and/or essentialist in nature, except for the Marxists or Yamakawa, effectively preventing any questioning of maternalism.

Furthermore, in art theory, across the broad spectrum of the arts, there was wide-spread acceptance of a form of “vitalism” known as “expression of life,” which seeks communion with nature. For example, there was the “New Naturalism” of Shimamura Hōgetsu, Iwano Hōmei, and others, the concept of the liberation of the self advocated by Mushanokōji Saneatsu and others of the Shirakaba School, the theories on the renewal of *tanka* (short poem) of Wakayama Bokusui and Saitō Mokichi, the critical statements on modernist poetry of Kitahara Hakushū and Hagiwara Sakutarō, the *haiku* theory of Ogiwara Seisensui, and the aesthetic philosophy of Takamura Kōtarō. The decadent discourses on art proliferated in the Taishō period may be seen as the convergence of vitalistic thought advocating the realization of the energy of life at the very core of the fleeting moment of time, the

impact of end-of-century European art and finally the revival of certain forms of decadent popular culture of the Tokugawa period. (The Tokugawa revival was not confined to literature and the arts, but had an effect on fashion too, such as in the Tokugawa-esque kimono patterns in the period after the Russo-Japanese War.)<sup>6</sup>

## II. Characteristics of the 1920s

What follows is an analysis of how the early 20th century trends evolved during the 1920s.

### II.1

- a) Relative deflation of nationalist sentiment, and the rise in cultural relativism;
- b) opposition to overseas expansion.

In the 1920s Japan became a standing member of the League of Nations, thus tentatively achieving its nationalist objective since the Meiji period of becoming “one of the world’s leading nations.” The relative deflation of nationalist sentiment since the 1910s continued, however, due to such factors as the rise of a class-struggle-oriented socialist movement. Characteristic of this is the fact that the principle of racial self-determinism<sup>7</sup> was isolated out of the 24 conditions for peace advocated by the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson during World War One, and tied to culturalism within the mood of international military reduction, leading to the spread of a cultural relativism that espoused mutual respect for uniqueness among nations.

In the 1920s Japan pushed for territorial expansion in mainland China, despite the prevailing mood of military reduction worldwide. In Korea and China, however, anti-Japanese feelings were on the rise (this is illustrated by the independence and intellectual movements that developed in Korea

6 See SUZUKI 1996a, ch. 6. 1, “Seimeishugi e no sutansu to kiretsu” (The Stance towards Vitalism and Its Rupture). (This effect was not confined to literature and the arts, but also influenced popular fashion. For example, the fine Edo patterns were all the rage for kimonos following the Russo-Japanese War.)

7 However, the right to national self-determination was advocated repeatedly by Lenin from 1913, even becoming the political platform of the Russian Bolsheviks. Indirectly it functioned in support of “one nation socialism” (nationalist socialism).

and China in the wake of the March 1 and May 4 demonstrations in Seoul and Beijing, respectively), resulting in important changes in the Japanese discourse on "Asianism" (a trend of thought advocating the solidarity of Asian nations against the Western powers).

<National cultural relativism is evident in the work of those who proclaimed or tried to prove the uniqueness of Japanese culture. Representative works include the prelude to *Gūzō raisan* (*In Praise of Icons*; 1917), by Watsuji Tetsurō, entitled *Nihon no bunka ni tsuite* (*In Relation to Japanese Culture*), *Dōyō fukkō* (*The Revival of Nursery Rhymes*; 1921), by Kitahara Hakushū, *Shōchō no honshitsu* (*The Essence of Symbolism*; 1924), by Hagiwara Sakutarō, and *Kokubungaku no hassei* (*The Birth of National Literature*; 1924), by Origuchi Shinobu. Works of the caliber of *Fūdo* (*Natural Surroundings*; 1935), by Watsuji Tetsurō, were eventually produced as an extension of this trend.

The internal contradictions that emerged in the discourse of Asianism as a result of anti-Japanese movements is captured in Takami Jun's *Iyana kanji* (*Feelings of Disgust*; 1961). The socialist movement was, by and large, strongly colored by the concept of class struggle, and exhibited only a marginal interest in ideologies of liberation of or solidarity with oppressed people. This position can be seen in *Ame no furu Shinagawa eki* (*Shinagawa Station in the Rain*; 1929), a poem by Nakano Shigeharu, which rallies for the international solidarity of the proletariat. Another kind of solidarity consciousness is discernible in works such as the liberal humanistic novel *Ri Eitai* (1928) by Toyoshima Yoshio, as well as in other works based on experiences gained from travelling to mainland China and mixing with the local people. Yagi Yoshinori's novel *Ryū Kōfuku* (1944) awarded the prestigious Akutagawa Prize for literature, also falls into this category despite being as a whole, firmly positioned within the framework of national policy.>

## II.2

- c) Movement towards national monopoly capitalism and the formation of urban mass society;
- d) subsequent worsening of social imbalance.

The transformation of industrial structure achieved tentative completion around 1930, as is plainly shown by the fact that production levels of heavy chemical industry surpassed those of light industry. The depression and economic paralysis after World War One was overcome through the consolida-

tion of capital and the mechanization of society, which in turn hastened the move towards monopoly/oligopoly. Finance and other areas of national capital played a leading role in the Japanese economy after the Meiji Restoration, a characteristic common to late-comer capitalist societies. The link between nation and capital was bolstered by the organization required to conduct a full-scale conflict with Russia, while developments in the heavy chemical industry also proceeded under national control. The stage of “national monopoly capitalism,”<sup>8</sup> however, represented by the strong link between nation and monopoly capital was reached in the 1920s. The prosperity during World War One contrasted with the situation of economic crisis that existed afterwards to cause a worsening of social imbalance. In spite of this, urban mass society, under the banner of “mass production – mass advertising – mass consumption – mass dumping,” was in a state of formation, fueled by the economic condition of “national monopoly capitalism.”<sup>9</sup>

- 8 The only reference Lenin makes to “national monopoly capitalism,” is to define it based on the World War One German model, as “the principle by which nation and monopoly capitalism combine to form a single system” (*Imperialism, Complete Works of Lenin*, vol. 22, 1957, p. 429). In Japan, Ouchi Tsutomu’s *National Monopoly Capitalism* (*Kokka dokusen shihonshugi*; Tōkyō: Tōdai shuppankai, 1970), which discusses the formation of the international monetary management system during the post-depression years was influential for a long time, although the myth it promoted about the automatic stabilization of gold has since been exposed. The problem was that the functioning of the gold standard as an international monetary system was dependent on the world domination of the English pound. In the Meiji period the economic development of Japan, an advanced capitalist nation, was largely supported by financial capital and related national capital. Also, the full military commitment required by Russo-Japanese war made possible the subsequent strengthening of national capital in the form of nationalized heavy industry and railways (however, the extent of the nationalization of industry was low in comparison to countries such as Germany and England). Furthermore, in Japan transfer to the gold standard was delayed, despite international criticism.
- 9 If “mass production – mass advertising – mass consumption – mass dumping” is taken as the main attribute of this, then the effect of this system is still being felt today, and the remarkable switch to an information society that has taken place since the 1980s can also be attributed to this system. Even computers do not escape the influence of this principle. Until the first half of the 1990s Suzuki Sadami established the main attribute as “mass production – mass advertising – mass consumption,” while “mass dumping” was added in the second half of the 1990s, due to ecological concerns.

## II.3

- e) Politicization of the economic struggle;
- f) rise of Marxism.

The reaction against social inequality, which had tended to erupt spontaneously around economic and working conditions was redirected by the political parties into a struggle over the realization of issues such as basic election legislation. Notably, the Japanese communist party, which adhered to a Marxist-Leninist ideology of class struggle, began to take a leading role. The socialist movement, in which Fukumoto Kazuo's strong advocacy of the historical necessity of the construction of an avant-garde party became dominant (Fukumoto's views were considerably influenced by Georg Lukacs' theory of class formation), chose to strengthen rather than minimize the factional twanging between anarchism and social democracy over hegemony in the increasingly violent struggle concerning economic, labor and living conditions. For this reason, the communist party, isolated from the other political parties, became the target of concentrated authoritarian suppression in the later half of the 1920s. However, political suppression of the party led to involvement in the cultural movement, which had influenced many in intellectual circles, and (despite eventually being exhausted by chronic indecisiveness and disunity) the party remained influential in journalism until 1932.

<*Jigoku (Hell; 1923)*, by Kaneko Hirofumi, tells of the tenant farmer strikes, while *Satō yori amai tabako (Tobacco that's Sweeter than Sugar; 1920)*, a short story by Ogawa Mimei, *Sementodaru no naka no tegami (The Letter in the Cement Barrel; 1926)*, by Hayama Yoshiki, and *Mayu (The Cocoon; 1926)*, by Hayashi Fusao, are three novels that insightfully depict the way in which harsh working conditions exploit the lives of the workers. *Umi ni ikuru hitobito (The People of the Ocean; 1926)*, a novel by Hayama Yoshiki, and *Kani kōsen (The Crab Boat; 1929)*, by Kobayashi Takiji, both portray a laborer in the navy rousing himself to action, while *Kyarameru kōjō kara (From the Caramel Factory; 1927)*, by Sata Ineko, is about women workers, and *Harusaki no kaze (The Winds of Early Spring; 1939)*, by Nakano Shigeharu, reports on the suppression of the communist party.>

## II. 4

- g) Formation of mass culture;
- h) theoretical formation of cultural relativism;

- i) development of a various theories concerned with “overcoming modernity”;
- j) shattering of cultural values and the construction of gender.

In terms of the popular arts, the various forms of oral performance, including *kōdan* (storytelling), *rakugo* (comical storytelling), and *rōkyoku* (*shamisen*-accompanied recital of old tales), as well as the comical narrative arts, all of which had been popular since the Tokugawa or Meiji periods, and had also contributed greatly to the expansion of print media since the Meiji period, were now broadcast through the medium of radio, and thus could be enjoyed simultaneously by a wide audience. At the same time, cinema became a popular form of entertainment for the masses, and there were many adaptations of period dramas, to accompany the foreign films from America and Europe. Coinciding roughly with the introduction of radio broadcast in 1925, “mass literature” also flourished. For instance, the “period novels” of Shirai Kyōji, initiating from the flow of original or creative *kōdan*, and the bizarre detective stories of Edogawa Ranpo. These works captured a wide popular working class readership through serialization in the major nationalized newspapers, and some were adapted to cinema. As a result of universalized education up to junior-high school, and with the added assistance of trendy culturalism, the *enpon* (books costing one yen for one copy) boomed, and the world of publishing embarked on a period of “mass production – mass advertising – mass consumption – mass dumping.” There was a remarkable degree of mutual influence between the media of literature, radio broadcast and cinema, as well as within genres, resulting in new media combinations.<sup>10</sup>

The concepts of “culturalism” and “self-cultivation” were, in some respects, strongly Marxist in flavor. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the “proletarian culture movement” gained popularity among intellectuals, and

10 This is the surely point at which urban mass culture should be distinguished from the popular culture of the Tokugawa period, as well as that of the Meiji and Taishō periods. The contemporary usage the Japanese word *taishū* (translated as “mass”), Buddhist in origin, sprouted from socialism during the 1920s, and became established with the publication of the *Taishū bungaku zenshū* series which came out in *enpon*. See SUZUKI 1994, ch. 9, “Taishū bungaku to taishū bunka” (Mass Literature and Mass Culture). Genre mixing also marked the Tokugawa period, and can be found in the literature, theater, and performing arts of the Meiji and Taishō periods, although in these latter periods novelty can be attributed to the fact that the genres of cinema, radio, and nationalized newspapers were now a part of the mix.

thus exerted considerable influence. This influence was felt until after World War Two. On the other hand, cultural relativism continued to find wide support, promoting the uniqueness of Japanese art and culture. For example, Hagiwara Sakutarō's *The Essence of Symbolism*, claims European symbolism to be an ambiguous imitation of Japanese art. A further example of this trend is found in the work of Origuchi Shinobu who, in *The Birth of National Literature*, notes that the "celebration of life" is unique to the primitive religions of Japan, and not to be found in Chinese Taoism. This trend survived in such later works as *Natural Surroundings*, by Watsuji Tetsurō.

Another characteristic trend of this period was the move to consider Japanese society after the Meiji Restoration as "modern," instigated by Marxist thinkers and those influenced by Marxism, who planned the fundamental reform of the modern social system through a revolution of the working classes to achieve. From here sprouted a great variety of theories concerned with the system of overcoming modernity.<sup>11</sup> Included were theories that advocated replacing subjugation of nature with obedience towards nature (e. g. Tsubouchi Shōyō's *Shinsai yori etaru kyōkun; What the Earthquake Has Taught Us*; 1923), those that argued for harmony and a merging with nature that was to be achieved by relying on the uniqueness of Japanese culture and art as a means of overcoming the "modern" (Satō Haruo's "*Fūryū*" *ron; Regarding "Elegance"*; 1924), and those that proposed, as a development of vitalism, an agriculture-first policy in opposition to industrialized society (Ikuta Chōkō's *Chōkindai no shisō (Overcoming Modern Thought)*; 1925). Also, in Marxist circles, there appeared perspectives on the

11 The Russo-Japanese War marks the initial emergence of thought related to "overcoming modernity," in which the term "modern" is understood to refer to the concepts supporting material civilization, to the movements that reacted against these concepts, such as romanticism and decadence, and to the period of conflict with socialism (Taoka Reiun, Kaneko Chikusui, Nishida Kitarō, etc.). Also, during the 1910s there was much interest in the thought of Kropotkin, who opposed competitive society with the idea of mutual assistance, and plotted to resolve the urban-rural division, arising from industry-centered productionism, by promoting either competition or harmony between the two. The 1920s' thought devoted to overcoming modernity was either an extension of or alteration to Kropotkin's ideas. See *IBID.* 1998a, ch. 11. 1, "Aratana bunseki jiku: 'Kindai no chōkoku'" (A New Focal Point of Analysis: "Overcoming Modernity"), and ch. 11. 2, "'Kindai no chōkoku': Hassei to tenkai" ("Overcoming Modernity": Birth and Development).



history of the class struggle that sought to overcome bourgeois individualism (Senuma Shigeki 1930), and theories that sought to overcome the binary opposition of subject and object (Inoue Yoshio 1932).<sup>12</sup>

In terms of developments in the arts, the avant-garde movements, under the influence of the early modernism of the early 20th century, that is, French Fauvism and cubism, and Italian futurism, was already showing progress in the 1910s (Kanbara Tai, etc.), amidst the flowering of painting and poetry marked by vitalism. After World War One, however, the introduction of avant-gardes such as Dada, surrealism, and compositionism, caused radical transformations in artistic expression which led to the consolidation of Shōwa modernism (the aesthetic/theater of Murayama Tomoyoshi and others, the New Sensation School represented by Kataoka Teppei and Yokomitsu Riichi, and the early work of Hori Tatsuo). In one respect, these movements were actively involved in using the new material provided by the urban consumer culture in which they found themselves. They showed a preference for the urban landscape and its constant change, as well as a strong interest in momentary sensations and changes in states of consciousness. At the same time, these movements were involved in an ongoing process of mutual infiltration with the “proletarian arts” and the mass arts, which led to the development of genre-mixing across the range of cinema, theater, fine arts, and literature.

From the latter half of the 1920s, educated women began working in new urban service industries as English typists, telephone operators, bus conductors, cafe waitresses, and dance hall hostesses. Women students enjoyed sports and were physically active. These women, known as *modan gāru* (modern girl), were single, rented apartments in the city, cut their hair, and had a preference for revealing Western clothing. They were criticized, however, as being *otoko onna* (masculine) by those who tried to uphold former fashions and ethical values. In comparison with the women’s liberation movement of the early Meiji period which sought “equal rights for men and women,” and the women’s movement of the Taishō period which sought liberation on the basis of the essential nature of women; this movement can be characterized as in which the trends and fashions of the day, rather than emancipation, played a control role, and which at the same time absorbed

12 For an historical overview of thought based around “overcoming modernity,” see IBID. 1998a, ch. 11, “Saihen no sutoratejī” (The Strategy of Reorganization).

the impact of discourses on sexual liberation developed by Kollantai and other representative figures of the Russian women's movement. Women featured in many of the literary works of the time that looked at urban fashion.<sup>13</sup>

### III. Characteristics of the 1930s

#### III.1

a) Reemergence of nationalist sentiment;  
 b) foundation of "Manchuria" and the commencement of military invasion. The late 1920s saw the reemergence of a nationalism fueled by celebrations for the reinstatement of the imperial capital and the inauguration ceremony for the Shōwa Emperor. Also, the "puppet state" of "Manchuria," inaugurating the Emperor Pu Yi, was founded in the north-eastern region of China, causing an international stir. There was a migration by many of those who had "seceded" from Marxism, at first to Manchuria, and then gradually to mainland China, resulting in the formation of a unique cultural sphere, in which attempts were made, for instance, to install policies based on those of the Soviet Union, under the slogan of *Gozoku kyōwa* (The Five Family Republic) and *Ōdō rakudo* (The Just Road to Paradise). In 1937 the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) broke out. Domestically, Japan moved towards a total centralization of power, as provided for in national general-mobilization legislation.

#### III.2

c) Completion of national monopoly capitalism;  
 d) centralization of power and the escalation of suppression. The economic crisis continued, and as a result of policies designed to pull Japan out of the international financial crisis, the transition towards "national monopoly capitalism" was completed, and the foundations laid for na-

13 *Modan gāru no yūwaku* (*The Seductive Nature of the Modern Girl*; ed. SUZUKI Sadami, *Modan toshi bungaku*, vol. V, Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 1989) is an anthology of literature and papers of the time dealing with the *modan gāru*. *Muchi o narasu onna* (*The Woman Wielding the Whip*), by Kishida Kunio, features an upper class *modan gāru* who enjoys riding, although she is derided as an "hermaphrodite," a masculine woman. See "Modan gāru, soshite shōsetsu no naka no kanojotachi" (*The Modern Girl, and How They are Portrayed in Novels*) in *IBID.* 1991.

tional control of capital. The police authorities stepped up suppression of the communist party, and succeeded in turning out many *tenkōsha* (converts) from the main body of the party. From the latter half of the 1930s suppression increased to include controls on speech and anti-war peace movements. Furthermore, in 1940 a systemization of domestic affairs proceeded to the chant of “new order,” mirroring the ascendancy of political power in Nazi Germany. In response, the cultural movement became widely popularized, and there was lively discussion of the state of “national literature.”<sup>14</sup>

### III.3

e) Collapse of the Marxist movement;

f) rise of nationalist thought and the resurgence of vitalism.

In 1932, the Japanese communist party converted its strategy on revolution (the Third International, “Program for the 32nd year”) from a socialist revolution to a democratic revolution intent on overthrowing the Emperor. This move served to further isolate the party from the people, and after being subjected to an escalation of suppression, and the loss of a steady stream of *tenkōsha* from the main body, the party faced collapse. From the latter half of the 1930s anti-war peace movements sprang up in opposition to the military rampage through mainland China and the gradual slip towards World War Two, although suppression and controls on speech ensured that these movements never gained much momentum.

At the other end of the spectrum, in response to monopoly capitalism and military corruption, there occurred sporadic incidents and movements, such as the scheming of the “youth officers,” who sought reform while at the same time remaining loyal to the Emperor (May 15 incident, 1932), and movements advocating agriculture-first policies. For example, Okamoto Kanoko was a strong supporter of vitalistic Buddhism, and promoted the spirit of “Mahayana” and its union with the spirit of the universe, although eventually she ended up in a nationalistic vein. In order to effectively mobilize the people towards war, national policy, under the banner of “lifestyle,” was directed towards the complete systemization of society, beginning with the daily lives of the people.

14 For an analysis of “Kokumin bungaku ron” (People’s literature), a response to the 1940s’ call for a “new order,” for the present, see IBID. 1998a, ch. 8. 2. iii, “Changes in ‘National Literature’.”

## III.4

- g) Mass culture popularization of the erotic, the grotesque, and the nonsensical;
- h) the full development of thought directed towards a system of overcoming modernity.

In the arts around 1930, especially in literature, there appeared works that, while carrying on the decadent style of Taishō period writers such as Tani-zaki Jun'ichirō, were experimental in nature. Examples include *Remon* (*Lemon*; 1928) by Kajii Motojirō, which sought to upset the everyday balance by concentrating on momentary illusions, *Imo mushi* (*The Potato Caterpillar*; 1929), by Edogawa Ranpo, which contained anti-war sentiment, and *Kikai* (*The Machine*; 1930), by Yokomitsu Riichi, which in opposition to Marxist social system theory examined the irrationality of human relationships. These works emphasized the enjoyment of living in the midst of a flourishing modern urban mass culture, developing into an overwhelming taste for the erotic, the grotesque, and the nonsensical.<sup>15</sup> There was also an increased urgency in efforts directed towards overcoming the thought supporting, for instance, the modern social system and individualism. One example was the attempt to organize class consciousness towards overcoming bourgeois individualism from a "Marxist" (Lukacsist) inspired historical materialist perspective, while another was the attempt to achieve this through the systemization of racial consciousness (totalitarianism). The former attempt all but collapsed, due in part to the "Program of the 32nd Year" drawn up by the Japanese communist party, and also to the damage inflicted upon the party by suppression and *tenkō* (conversions). The latter attempt developed in tune with the call for a "new order" in 1940, becoming one of the theories concerned with "overcoming modernity." The influence of this trend can be seen, for example, in the symposium held by the Kyōto School entitled "Sekaishiteki tachiba to Nihon" (The Standpoint of World History and Japan; November 1941), in *Kindai no shūen* (The End of Mo-

15 However, "the erotic, the grotesque, and the nonsensical" was a derisive term used after World War Two. Kida Jun'ichirō refers to this fact in *Ero guro nansensu jidai to Edogawa Ranpo* (*Edogawa Ranpo and the Erotic, the Grotesque, and the Nonsensical*; *Taiyō* special edition: "The Age of Ranpo"). The term does, however, appear in *Teimei* (*The Slump*; 1932), by Takeda Rintarō, and thus was not completely alien to the prewar Shōwa period.

ernity; December 1941), by Yasuda Yojūrō, and in the symposium organized by the literary magazine, *Bungakkai*, entitled “Kindai no chōkoku” (Overcoming Modernity; July 1942). In particular, the symposium conducted by the young members of the Kyōto School provided a theoretical foundation for the “Greater East Asian co-prosperity sphere” and the “Greater East Asian War,”<sup>16</sup> despite, in some respects, being in contention with prevailing military thought.

#### IV. Characteristics of the representation of the self specific to each period

I will now move on to examine the trends in literature with respect to each period, the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s, drawing particular attention to the following areas:

- a) representation of the self,
- b) methods of expression, and
- c) changes in the concept of expression.

##### IV.1 The 1910s

###### a) Fears and joys of living in a mechanized society

Poems such as *Natsu kitaru* (*The Coming Summer*; 1917), by Kanbara Tai, and *Midarana toshi* (*The Lewd City*; in the poetry collection *Tōkyōshi*; *Tōkyō City*; 1922), by Nakanishi Godō, employ decidedly avant-garde techniques in order to portray the development of mechanized society, with objects gaining a frenzied life. The expressive subject is swallowed up into the swirling maelstrom of objects, and trembles, sometimes with joy, sometimes with fear. This approach seems almost to praise the power inherent in mechanized society, while at the same time clearly depicting the apprehension and fear of being consumed by such a civilization. It is symbolic of the concept in which material civilization is treated as though it were a new god, a concept that had appeared through the mediation of atomism and other areas of physical chemistry. In comparison to the work of Kanbara Tai, who was strongly influenced by the Italian futurists and referred to his own style of poetry as the Kōki Rittai School (The Late-cubist School), in 1921 *Shishū* (*The Poetry Collection*; 1921), by the Dadaist Takahashi Shinkichi, there is no sense of joy at the liveliness of objects. Rather in the act of writing he

16 See note 12.

seems to be fighting off the fragmentation and maddening noise of the material world, a style which can be interpreted as the final scream before being swallowed up by it. The free use of symbols and thick, curved lines seems to suggest a state of being in which words themselves have been lost. In comparison to the concept of vitalistic expression popular in this period, the insistence, for instance, of Iwano Hōmei in his essay *Junsui shizenshugi* (*Pure Naturalism*), and the views on poetry of Wakayama Bokusui and Saitō Mokichi, among others,<sup>17</sup> who expressed faith in the union with “life” as the essence of nature, the overall tendency of this approach is towards a loss of subject despite the definite parity in terms of the unification of object and subject.

Toyoshima Yoshio's *Tokai no yūki* (*The Silent Demon of the City*; 1924) and Jō Masayuki's *Tokai no shinpi* (*The Mystery of the City*; 1926), are examples of novels that depict the energy created by the material society of the cities as a strange kind of magic.<sup>18</sup>

#### b. i) Penitence (confession) and self-parody

While the 1880s (Meiji 20s) was a period in which “religious freedom” was tentatively secured, it also witnessed from around the time of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) a spate of religious reforms aimed at keeping pace with a rapidly changing society, and there was vocal criticism of the established order. Tolstoi's *A Confession* (1878–1879, first published 1882) was widely read during this period. Written after his secession from the Russian orthodox church, it concerns the idea that “God is life,” and covers the pe-

17 Behind the spread of subject-object unification theory were two main trends; a growing interest in the scientific concept of human beings as animals and the idea of society and the state as organisms, influenced by evolutionary theory and genetics, on the one hand, and the development of a philosophy based on perception theory and existential theory that sought to capture the “pure experience” existing in the pre-reflective state of mind, on the other. These two trends were brought together using the concept of *ki* which underlies the Eastern universality. From here sprung a vitalism that promoted “life” as the fundamental principle uniting the universe, the human world, and the individual. The stimulation of works such as Henri Bergson's *L'évolution créatrice* (*Creative Evolution*; 1907) added impetus to this movement. See IBID. 1996a.

18 See *Toshi no gensō* (*The Fantasy of the City*; ed. SUZUKI Sadami, *Modan toshi bungaku*; vol. IV, Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 1989), and IBID. 1991, ch. 4, “Toshi taishū shakai to ‘watashi’” (Urban Mass Society and “I”).

riod up until Tolstoi secured his own religious beliefs. A *Confession* may have contributed to the spate of confessional records written after the end of the Russo-Japanese War by Kiyozawa Manshi and Chikazumi Jōkan, both of whom belonged to a branch of the reformed True Jōdo Sect of Buddhism, and Kinoshita Naoe, a Christian socialist, among others. Tokutomi Roka is another writer who fits into this flow, particularly in light of the fact that he maintained the theme of confessional offerings of evidence relating to sexual love of the self in his work from *Aoi me to chairoi me* (*Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes*; 1924) to *Fuji* (*Fuji*; 1926).

On the other hand, the loss of self suffered by intellectuals, forced into a drifting existence through the loss of national identity, culminated in displays of humility and self-mockery, such as those recorded in Masamune Hakuchō's *Where To?*. Also, despite displaying an understanding of the younger generation, and clearly distinguishing himself from them, the protagonist of Tayama Katai's *Futon* (*The Quilt*; 1907), a mean spirited middle-aged writer, is cast in comical fashion. Reader responses of the day indicate an awareness of the novel's comic intent. However, the intellectual's self-mockery did not always limit itself to expressions of humility arising from internal feelings of ugliness. Widely held to be representative of Taishō culturalism, Abe Jirō's *Santarō's Diary*, espouses a view of life based on a mixture of philosophy and art, and is strongly colored by the influence of Taishō vitalism, although "Santarō" is in fact a synonym for "fool." The self-mockery and humility was, in some respects, linked to modesty. The opening passage of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's *The Tattooer*, a work which carries on the critical stance against modern Japan adopted in Nagai Kafū's *The Diary of a Returnee*, clearly reveals the intention of the author to contrast "the noble virtue of stupidity" paradoxically with a world driven by competition in which people flaunt themselves pretentiously. This kind of varied and colorful self-parody is characteristic of Taishō period *watakushi-shōsetsu* (I-novel), other examples of which include *Himitsu* (*The Secret*; 1911), also by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *Kurokami* (*Black Hair*; 1924), by Chikamatsu Shūkō, and *Kura no naka* (*Inside the Storehouse*; 1919), by Uno Kōji.<sup>19</sup>

19 In relation to IV.1.bi and bii see ch. 7 "'Shishōsetsu' to 'shinkyōshōsetsu'" (The "I-novel" and the "Mental-state Novel"), in Suzuki Sadami *Nihon no "bungaku" gainen* (*Considering Japanese "Literature"*); "Aru seimeishugi no tanjō" (The Birth of a Certain Vitalism), "Zange no keifu" (The Genealogy of Penitence), in "*Seimei*" *de yomu*

b. ii) Foregrounding of the function of consciousness (sketching (*shasei*), description)

Contributing to the formation of subject-object unification theory was a philosophical movement that focused on pre-reflective consciousness, the consciousness that occurs during the process of acting—termed “pure experience” by William James, it is what Nishida Kitarō took as the starting point of philosophy—at which point subject-object are still united, having yet to undergo the process of separation. Coupled with the self-conscious state of intellectuals forced into an aimless existence through the absence of national tension and subsequent loss of identity, this focus on pre-reflective consciousness led, as a matter of course, to attention being focused on the expression of consciousness and self-consciousness, in a state of perpetual unrest due to changes around and within the subject. This trend finds perhaps its best expression in the early works of Shiga Naoya. Originating in novels such as *Aru asa* (*One Morning*; 1908), this trend was, however, marked by the strong desire to remain “true to tradition,” a desire which, by the time of *Han no hanzai* (*Han's Crime*; 1913), had crystallized into faith in the value of “truth” attained through the complete abandonment of all forms of self-deception. However, even if one is determined to be absolutely faithful to the self, the actual content of an ethical “truth” attained in this way will of necessity differ in value at each point in time and thus be worthless for all practical purposes. As is the case with the concept of the “parity of life and death” (spiritual self-awakening) in Shiga Naoya’s *Kinosaki nite* (*At Kinosaki*; 1917), for example, those fleeting states of self-consciousness that allow one to evade feelings of uneasiness, could be freely developed by relying on the form of “mental-state novels” (at the time, clearly distinguished from the I-novel), which allowed an exploration of the writer’s own mental state, without having to bother about character development.<sup>20</sup>

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*Nihon kindai. Taishō seimeishugi no tanjō to tenkai* (*Reading Modern Japan From the Viewpoint of “Life.” The Birth and Development of Taishō Vitalism*), ch. 4. 1 “‘Seimei’ no kakusei to shūkyō kanjō” (Awakening of “Life” and Religious Emotion); ch. 11. 3 “‘Watakushi-shōsetsu’ no shinwa to jitsuzō” (Myth and Truth of the “I-Novel”), in *Nihon no “bungaku” gainen* (*The Concept of Japanese “Literature”*).

20 See note 19.



b. iii) Introduction of elements from the narrative arts (*kōdan*, *rakugo*)

One factor not to be overlooked when considering the prosperity of “mass literature” in the latter 1920s, is the “period novel,” popularized after the Russo-Japanese War. The period novel evolved as follows:

- a) Historically, the period novel originated when the latter Meiji period popularization of *kōdan* and *rakugo* published in book form and serialized in local newspapers for the enjoyment of those people who were not able to attend the theaters, encouraged novelists to try their hand at writing original or creative *kōdan*.
- b) The literary background of the period novel includes the grand historical novels of Dickens and Dumas (*père*), set in French revolutionary times, and gaining such popularity as to be acclaimed as “national literature.” The period novel evolved from the desire to reinvigorate the domestic literary scene, stifled by the elitist nature of the “literary-establishment novels” of the Taishō period, but to reinvigorate it in a different sense from that practiced by the political novel, which sought to promote the ideals of Meiji period civil rights.
- c) Sakai Toshihiko and Shirayanagi Shūko, among others, wrote “social *kōdan*” in order to spread the world of socialism.
- d) The period novel arose from the compounding of several factors, including the desire of intellectuals to provide popular entertainment for the workers, and it gained popularity for its stories commonly set in the turbulent period at the end of the Tokugawa shogunate.
- e) In *Kaikenchiku jūnidangaeshi* (*Twelve Storey Magical Architecture*; 1920), by Shirai Kyōji, a leading period novel figure at the time, there occurs a blending of period novel with detective novel. The *Hanshichi torimonochō* series (*The Arrest of Hanshichi Series*; 1920), by Okamoto Kidō, set against a background of the Tokugawa cultural revival, was clearly an attempt to create an Edo period version of *Sherlock Holmes* Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s detective series. Forerunning the release of the *enpon*, volume one of the *Gendai taishū bungaku zenshū* (*Contemporary Mass Literature Collection*, Heibonsha Publishing), the *Shirai Kyōji Collection* (1927), sold 800,000 copies, while the *Edogawa Ranpo Collection* (1928), sold 230,000 copies.<sup>21</sup>

21 See IBID. 1998a, ch. 8, “‘Taishō bungaku’ no tanjō” (The Birth of “Mass Literature”).

The prosperity of the period novel was enough to encourage literary-establishment writers to pen *kōdan*-oriented period novels, a trend which produced the works of Kikuchi Kan, as well as *Jashūmon* (1918), Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's unfinished novel. *Inside the Storehouse*, by Uno Kōji, makes use of *rakugo* narration in which the garrulous narrative deviates further and further away from the original story. The fact of its being "narrative" is, however, emphasized three times within the text itself, creating a style in which the narrative refers to earlier passages in the text itself. My reason for focusing on this form is due to the fact that at the end of the Taishō period Makino Shin'ichi was employing the same garrulous style to write the "novel of novel," close re-examinations of the "I-novel." This style was an attempt by Japanese writers to write a novel which reflects upon its own modern form. It survived in the methodology of Ishikawa Jun, who was involved in creating "this novels of novel" around 1935.<sup>22</sup>

#### IV.2 The 1920s and 1930s

##### a) The loss of ego (the center of union) and the joys of confusion

During the 1910s, much of the literary expression was critical in nature, revealing awe and fear directed towards the material civilization of the cities. Once into the 1920s, however, a neurosis of sorts became almost a requirement if one was to capture the formation of beauty, and led to works such as *Den'en no yū'utsu* (*The Rural Blues*; 1917), by Satō Haruo, and *Haguruma* (*Cogwheels*; 1927), by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. Within the literature of the 1920s can be found examples of an attempt to describe such a state of sensual confusion, that is, the dissolution of an ego in which the five senses in union form an awareness of "oneself." One instance of this would be Makino Shin'ichi's *Kagami jigoku* (*Hell of Mirrors*; 1925), or Edogawa Ranpo's novel of the same title (1926), both of which deal with the diffused reflection of self-consciousness surrounding the reflection of oneself in the mirror. Under normal circumstances such a state would be taken as sign of neurosis, although in works of this period the urban experience of disorientation and alienation of losing oneself in the midst of crowds was depicted as pleasur-

22 See "Mottomo utsukushi tamashii wa: Makino Shin'ichi no tame ni" (For Makino Shin'ichi. A Most Beautiful Spirit) in *IBID.* 1987. In relation to "this novel within a novel" around 1935, for the present, see "Shōsetsu no shōsetsu, sono Nihonteki hatsugen" (The Japanese Occurrence of a Novel of a Novel), included in *IBID.* 1989.

able. Chiba Kameo, a literary critic at the time, wrote about such feelings in an essay entitled *Ginza to Shinsaibashi* (*Ginza and Shinsaibashi*, in *Shinseinen*, January 1927). The state of mind in which one strolls through the city, sketching the changing scenery, and enjoying the sensual confusion and momentary illusions is contained in *Tarō to machi* (*Tarō and the Street*), an etude by Kajii Motojirō, and in *Rasshu Awa* (*Rush Hour*) and *Kankakei* (*Looking down*), two modern short poems by Kitagawa Fuyuhiko, and also in the novels of Horii Tatsuo. *Lemon*, by Kajii Motojirō, delves into the neurotic state of a man for whom a chance meeting with an ordinary lemon helps to soothe his nerves and brighten his day, and so for him the lemon comes to stand for “all things good and beautiful in this world.” In this way, *Lemon* succeeds in thrusting against the ordered reality of society a state in which daily values have been turned on their head, and captures perfectly the psychology of a generation which found pleasure in the momentary illusions and nonsensical perversions of this world.

Kajii Motojirō eventually moved on to explore states of mind in which fragmentation of the self leads to encounters with one’s other selves, that is, visual hallucinations of one’s self-image. This tendency is also evident in other works of the period, including, as mentioned above, *The Rural Blues*, by Satō Haruo, and *Cogwheels*, one of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s final novels, as well as in the work of Ozaki Midori<sup>23</sup> and other Shōwa modernist writers. Clearly demonstrated here is the degree of interest in fragmentation and dissolution of the ego generated during this period.<sup>24</sup>

#### b) Exploring the irrationality of the world

From an exploration of the psychological states of illusion and hallucinations, Kajii Motojirō moves on to pursue the reasons behind the psychological pleasures they induced. In works such as *Fuyu no hae* (*The Winter Fly*; 1928), for instance, he explores the formation of an irrational world of pleasurable illusion and deception of self. In this respect, similarities can be drawn here to other works, such as Yokomitsu Riichi’s *The Machine*, which deals with the molding of self caught up in a world of irrational, nonsensical contrivance. This approach was no doubt influenced by the fact that Marx-

23 See the contribution of Livia Monnet in this volume (translator’s note).

24 See IBID. 1991, ch. 4, “Urban Mass Society and ‘I’.”

ism exposed the inevitability of human alienation under the prevailing world system.<sup>25</sup> In *Cocoon*, Hayashi Fusao attempted to give shape to the irrationality of capitalism, a theme shared with other writers belonging to the Marxist camp at the time. In trying to express existential feelings Yokomitsu Riichi sought the reform of expressive language. Finally, Yumeno Kyūsaku's *Dogura magura* (1935) molded, in the form of a detective story, a world in which the dissolution of self and the irrationality of the world came together.

c) Expression as an object, and the filtration of cinematic techniques and avant-garde arts

At the core of Yokomitsu Riichi's desire for linguistic reform was a strong interest in the materiality of expression. The significance of this reform lies in the fact that it attempted to redirect, in a major way, not only established concepts of expression, according to which expression was viewed as the reproduction of objective cognition and the representation of subjectivity, but also emerging expressive trends which sought the unification of subject and object. Despite claiming in *Geijutsu ikkagen* (*My Opinion of the Arts*; 1920) that art is about expression, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō did not, in the final analysis, manage to separate himself from cognitive reductivism. Around 1920, however, Kajii Motojirō, in critiquing the paintings of Kandinski and others, wrote notes to the effect that the act of expression always has the audience in mind. This was the period in which the concept of expression as an object began to take shape, emerging from the flow of early 20th century modernism. Having said this, Yokomitsu Riichi's proposal was merely a one-sided consideration of the materiality of expression, and in combination with Marxist art theory's concern with objective recognition, led to the "debate on formalism" (1928).<sup>26</sup>

However, from the 1920s to the 1930s, literature was dominated by all manner of attempts to introduce new techniques borrowed from structuralist painting, the varied arts of Dada and surrealism, and collage, to cinematic close-up and montage. Standing out among the literature of this period are works such as *Chijin no ai* (*A Fool's Love*; 1924), in which Tanizaki

25 See IBID. 1996b.

26 See note 24.

Jun'ichirō perfects the cinematic cutting from one scene to the next, and Hori Tatsuo's *Bukiyōna tenshi* (*The Clumsy Angel*; 1929), modeled on Jean Cocteau's *Le grand écart* (*Doing the Splits*; 1922) and littered with cinematic terms such as "close-up." The number of works employing montage techniques, however, is far too many to mention. A short list would include *Hae* (*The Fly*; 1923), by Yokomitsu Riichi, *Yasumu kidō* (*Orbit in Rest*; 1929), by Takeda Rintarō,<sup>27</sup> and *Jūgatsu jūnananichi* (*October 17*; 1928), by Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke. While, Hayashi Fumiko's *Hōrōki* (*Wandering Notes*; 1932) also displays a style incorporating collage techniques.<sup>28</sup>

This trend stirred up fears that in terms of depiction, literature was no match for cinema, leading to a literary focus on "narrative." Senuma Shigeki refers to this fear in chapter 3 of his *Gendai Bungaku* (*Modern Literature*; 1930), whereas the title of Takami Jun's essay—*Byōsha no ushiro ni nete irarenai* (*We Can't Rely Only on Depiction*; 1930)—says it all. This fear, directed towards the incursion of cinema, lies behind other works by Takami Jun as well, including *Kokyū wasureubeki* (*Should Old Acquaintance Be Forgotten*; 1933), in which he perfects the garrulous narrative style, and gives voice to individual worries, overlooked by the avant-garde art and politics at the time.

#### d) World crisis, and crisis of the self

The almost complete collapse of the Japanese communist party in 1933 due to suppression and *tenkō* from the main body provoked a large reaction from intellectuals. One example of this was the huge output of *tenkō shōsetsu* (conversion novels). Some of these novels closely examined the mental state of the "converted" individual, while others, having reflected upon the significance of an intellectual movement distanced from daily realities, revealed a renewed interest in the lives of the people. It is, however, noteworthy that this trend was also widely apparent among writers not closely involved with any of the organized avant-garde movements. Representative is *Jūichigatsu tōka* (*November 10*; 1936), by Miyauchi Kan'ya, which describes the existential agony of a self destroyed by feelings of frustration and guilt. Also, the garrulous narrative style of Takami Jun's *Kokyū wasureubeki*,

27 See IBID. 1998b.

28 See IBID. 1991, ch. 2, "Hayashi Fumiko to Shinjuku" (Hayashi Fumiko and Shinjuku).

was shaped by his focus on “narrative” form, and recall of the manifestations for life which marked the Taishō period, rather than exploring feelings of depression. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that, in a national and social climate characterized by the fear of an approaching World War Two, the realization that one was cornered in a situation from which there was “no exit” led to intense existential suffering.

A garrulous narrative style, in which all one’s knowledge, thoughts and desires are revealed, was used in documentary-style narratives such as *Sakaba rūretto funjōki* (*Trouble at the Roulette Bar*; 1926) and *Narindenka no kaisō* (*Reminiscences on His Imperial Highness Narin*; 1929), by Tachibana Sotō, while in works such as Hisao Jūran’s *Mato* (*Demon City*; 1935), which appeared as a detective story, it was used together with a perfected form of parody to sharply satire current situations in international relations and journalism in Japan.

Two writers who used the sharpest methodical inquiry to most sensitively convey the atmosphere during the period of existential suffering were Ishikawa Jun and Dazai Osamu. Around 1935, they produced numerous attempts at centering the narrative of their novels around the actual act of writing a novel (that is, to “write a novel within a novel”). As Yokomitsu Riichi points out in his essay, *Junsui shōsetsu ron* (*On the Concept of the Pure Novel*; 1935), at a time when the dissolution of ego was a central focus, this trend, inspired by Andre Gide’s *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (*The Counterfeiters*; 1925), was clearly a product of a period in which writers were interested in using the novel to explore the writer’s self-consciousness. By paralleling the novel, *The Counterfeiters*, with the daily life of the writer of the novel, Edouard (“writing a novel within a novel”), Gide was able to show the process of shaping a novel, and to explore the relationship between novel and writer. Also, Nagai Kafū’s *Bokutō kitan* (*A Strange Tale from the East of the Sumida River*; 1937) can be read as a parody of the “novel within a novel” form, as suggested by the fact that it features the writing of a novel entitled *Shissō* (*Disappearance*), which, as the title suggests, ends up vanishing. Moreover, the narrative reveals nothing of the writer’s identity. Taking a different approach, a few novels including *Kajin* (*The Beautiful Woman*; 1935), by Ishikawa Jun, as well as a dozen or so short stories including *Dōke no hana* (*The Flower of Buffoonery*; 1935), by Dazai Osamu, remain close to Gide’s *Paludes* (*Marshlands*; 1895), by virtue of the fact that a description of the self-conscious thoughts of the writer “whilst writing a novel” is seen

as critical to the development of the narrative. Furthermore, the style of *ra-kugo* as well as other traditional narrative art forms were revived in, for instance, the style by which reference was made to words that appeared earlier in the text. At work is a dynamism resulting from the contrast between expressing subject and expression as an object, thus forming a concept of expression that differs both from the idea that literary expression is the expression of subjectivity, and ideas that value the objectification of expression.<sup>29</sup>

In conclusion, it is clear that without the 1920s' and 1930s' development of literary concepts and methods, the fertile period of Japanese literature from the post-war period until the 1970s would not have been possible.

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Translated by David Bonnitcho

29 See “The Japanese Occurrence of a Novel of a Novel,” included in *IBID.* 1989.