

## Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan

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# Discourses on Death-and-Life in Modern Japan and the Desire behind Them

Quest for the New Identity  
among Modern Japanese Elites

Susumu Shimazono  
(University of Tokyo, Japan)

**Abstract** It was at the beginning of the 1900s that the term *shiseikan*, the ‘view on death and life’, was devised in Japan and many people became interested in the discourses on it. In the three decades from 1900 to the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific War in 1931, discourses on death-and-life showed some level of deepening. The author throws light on why discourses on death-and-life had spread around 1900, and then refined by the educated intellectuals in the following decades. The feature of the novelist Shiga Naoya’s view on death-and-life is investigated. The process of Shiga Naoya himself overcoming serious crises of youth by squarely facing the guiding principle of his life and the problem of spiritual independence from his parents is described. Spiritual independence includes overcoming conflicts in human relations centring on one’s family and accompanying moral questions, and searching to find one’s proper position in relation to a lofty ideal and a transcendental dimension. In the process, the experience to attain a view on death-and-life and the creation of literary expressions to the view played a great role. It will be observed that views on death-and-life and their expressions have found suitable roles to play as elements for selfhood formation based on the inner selves of the modern intellectuals of Japan.

**Summary** 1 Emergence of Discourses on Death-and-Life around 1900. – 2 Identity Quest by Shiga Naoya. – 3 “Kinosaki nite” as a Novel Expressing View on Death-and-Life. – 4 View on Death-and-Life and the Awareness of Enlightenment. – 5 Lineage of Literature Describing Views on Death-and-Life. – 6 Inner Life-oriented View on Death-and-Life.

**Keywords** Shiseikan. Identity Quest. Shiga Naoya. Kinosaki nite. Selfhood. Leo Tolstoy.

## 1 Emergence of Discourses on Death-and-Life around 1900

It was at the beginning of the 1900s when the term *shiseikan*, ‘the view on death and life’, was devised and many people became interested in the discourses on it. The discourses on death-and-life in modern Japan came into being around that time, and were successively revitalised a second time during the Asia-Pacific War. Furthermore, there was a third rise since

the seventies affected by the world-wide hospice movement that has continued to date (Shimazono 2003a, 2008).

In the three decades, from 1900 to the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific War in 1931, discourses on death-and-life showed some level of deepening in the first period. I began preliminary consideration as to why discourses on death-and-life had spread around 1900, and what characteristics these discourses had by examining Katō Totsudō (1870-1949), who was the main actor to create and spread the term *shiseikan* (Shimazono 2003b).

Katō was born in a warrior family and learned Chinese classics as well as Buddhism. He gained a footing as a propagator of Buddhist teachings by writing books for the general readers, and later became a famous writer and a lecturer in moral instructions for ordinary people. In 1919, he gave as many as 230 lectures, and in 1924 he was elected a board member of the Federation of Edification Organizations, which was formed upon the “Imperial Edict on Lifting National Spirit” in 1923. It is understood that he was considered as an important leader to edify the nation by the government too. Being born into a warrior family, he had a feeling of familiarity with Japanese chivalry. He represented the group of people advocating that Japanese chivalry would develop into the national morality. This line was strengthened by the martyred death of Nogi Maresuke (1849-1912), former Army general, on the day of the funeral of the Emperor Meiji. After the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific war, this line of discourse gained a new vitality and became the dominant style.

However, it was not the only trend of discourses on death-and-life of that period. Another influential line of discourses was held by well-educated and literary people who were not forced to keep silent during the Asia-Pacific war. Even though they were not as influential as the aggressive and dominant trend, they had influence on the public to a certain extent. For example, the essay “Mujō to yu koto” (On the Idea of Impermanence) written by Kobayashi Hideo (Kobayashi 2002), strongly impressed many readers and continued to be widely read even after the war. In this essay, he quoted a passage from *Ichigon Hōdan* of the medieval Jōdo Sect that argued that “thinking about the impermanence of death and life (sa. *anitya* and *saṃsāra*), we should not worry about things in this world”, and stated his thought that history is an act to remember (past happenings) in a clever way.

His discourse also contained the thought according to which only death could complete a human life. We should recall that *Ichigon Hōdan* is a typical medieval document on the view on death and life recommending the followers to contemplate death. It was an essay that showed a different way of describing a view on death and life when discourses encouraging young military servicemen to be prepared to die abounded. It cannot be ignored that this kind of discourses on death-and-life, which required a high level of education to understand the contents, exerted influence on

young people during the war. In the case of the critic Yoshimoto Takaaki, who frequently spoke on death after the eighties, it is natural to see the influence of Kobayashi's "Mujō to yu koto" behind his strong interest in *Ichigon Hōdan* (Yoshimoto, Ohashi 1996).

How then were these discourses on death and life developed in the world of *kyōyō* or 'education-oriented culture'? An early example can be found in the discourse on *hanmon* (agony), which aroused a public sensation in the early period of the development of education-oriented culture. In 1903 Fujimura Misao (1886-1903), a student at First High School, committed suicide by jumping into the Kegon Fall in Nikko. Fujimura was a son of a former budget examiner of the Ministry of Finance and a grandson of a Nanbu clansman. The suicide incident occurred soon after he entered First High School after graduating from Keihoku Junior High School, which was founded by Inoue Enryō (1858-1903). Reflecting Inoue's thought, who founded Tetsugakkan and Tetsugakudō (Philosophy House, later to be Tōyō University, and Philosophy Hall), Keihoku Junior High School emphasised philosophical education. Fujimura's uncle, Naka Michiyo, wrote an article to inform of his nephew's death in condolence saying,

Fujimura Misao, son of my elder brother, was ambitious in his childhood, and wanted to pursue philosophy, the truth of the cosmos, in order to help people awaken from their illusions. He entered First High School last year and took a preparatory course in philosophy. He was not satisfied with the classroom study and devoted himself in studying philosophy, religion, literature and art. (Etō 1970, 253-5)

A prose, "At the Head of the Fall", carved on a tree above the Kegon Fall by Fujimura himself before he throw himself in the fall, surprised the public as it showed the philosophical motivation of his suicide:

How wide is heaven and earth? How long is history? I tried to measure the greatness with my small body. Horatio's conventional philosophy finally was not proven to be worthy of authority. The truth of everything can be expressed in one word 'inexplicable'. I have been sick at heart with this quest and at last I determined to die. Standing at the fall, there is no anxiety in my heart. I realize for the first time in my life, great pessimism coincides with great optimism.

Horatio's philosophy here means practical and this-worldly thought of common people. Fujimura did not think it right to live a life occupied with miscellaneous matters in this world and tried to face the more important core of the transcendental truth. He finally realised that the ultimate 'pessimism' was the lack of meaning in life. On the other hand, he said that facing death was great 'optimism'.

This incident left the message that being determined to die and to face death would give one the answer to the ultimate question about one's existence, the meaning for living. There seemed to be a number of young people who sympathized with him and committed suicide in the Kegon Fall. Uozumi Setsuro (1883-1910), Fujimura's friend from junior high school days, left a written message sympathizing with his death. In his words of condolence, he stated,

I recall that I could not tell you about my thinking of dying when I fell into religious confusion in October last year, and in May this year, when you had a great question about death, you did not tell me about it. How could I imagine that today I would have to say my words of condolence? Upon hearing the news of your death, deep sorrow overwhelmed me, and I did nothing but think about dying. Death lured me and made me feel like dying again. If I had disclosed my anxiety last October, you might not have had to suffer from anxiety alone. Or, I may have jumped into the water together with you.

Later, Uozumi contributed an article entitled "On Suicide" in *Koyukai Zasshi*, a magazine of the Student Fraternity Association of First High School (May 1903), in which he said:

I have three things that I can choose without being ashamed. They are insanity, suicide and faith. I approached the first two, but passed them by, and finally I arrived at the third to find relief. I once saw insanity and felt a shudder come over myself but I sent it away like sending a cloud away, then, I was tempted by death and suffered intense agony, however I managed to overcome it (I am grateful to my teachers and friends for their kind care and friendship). Finally, now I stand for faith after having cleared skepticism. (Uozumi 1974)

In short, he considered it right to face ultimate questions squarely, and even to be prepared to die or to commit suicide.

Uozumi was attracted to Uchimura Kanzō from earlier days and became a Christian, but suffered skepticism over the teachings. After graduating from First High School, he entered the University of Tokyo first majoring in German literature, then in Philosophy. He eagerly read Tolstoy's works. He advanced to the graduate school and resumed writing activities. He sympathized with Tsunashima Ryōsen, the author of *Yoga Kenshin no Jikken* (My Experience of Seeing God), and Nishida Tenkō, the founder of Ittōen training institute. He died in 1910 from illness. In those days, religious teachings and experience attracted many students. Religiously intelligent people who exerted strong influence on students were Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1930), Kiyosawa Manshi (1863-1903), Nishida Tenkō (1872-1968),

Tsunashima Ryōsen (1873-1907), Itō Shōshin (1876-1963) and Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910). While being conscious about death, Uozumi struggled to establish his identity as a pursuer of the truth and a student of philosophy by learning from these religious intellectuals. Despite this, suffering poor health, he passed away at a young age.

## 2 Identity Quest by Shiga Naoya

It was the novelist Shiga Naoya (1883-1971) who achieved sophisticated expressions of views on death-and-life and established himself in a prominent position in discourses on death-and-life in modern Japan. Together with Mushanokōji Saneatsu, Kinoshita Rigen and other friends from Gakushūin High School, he founded the literary magazine *Shirakaba* in 1910. He was among the leaders who launched a literary movement in the name of Shirakaba School including Arishima Takeo, Satomi Ton, and Yanagi Muneyoshi. Shiga was about the same age as Fujimura Misao and Uozumi Setsuro. He also seriously attempted to establish his own identity based on the education-oriented culture; but while he was living a scholarly life seeking after the truth, he fell into a severe inner conflict.

The president of Gakushūin School at that time was the former army general Nogi Maresuke, towards whom no one in the Shirakaba School felt a favourable feeling. Outside the group, Natsume Sōseki and Mori Ōgai were shocked by Nogi's self-immolation following the death of Emperor Meiji, and respectively wrote *Kokoro* (Heart) and *Abe Ichizoku* (The Abe Family) with deep esteem and emotion towards Nogi. The young Shirakaba members did not seem to sympathise with the Japanese chivalry-oriented view on death-and-life represented by martyrdom. Honda Shūgo, who is known by his works on the Shirakaba School and Tolstoy, says in his *Shiga Naoya*:

At the news of General Nogi's martyrdom, Mushanokōji Saneatsu commented that General Nogi's act was only praised by people with unhealthy reasoning affected by an ideology developed in an unhealthy time.<sup>1</sup> In Shiga's journal, he wrote that when he learned that Nogi committed suicide, he felt 'what a fool!' just as if one of his housemaids or other servants had done something wrong without thinking too much. (September 14, 1912) (Honda 1990, 66-7)

1 The article that Honda refers to is "Jinruitteki, Hu Nogi Taisho no Junshi" (On Universally Human, with Martyrdom of General Nogi), published in *Shirakaba* in November 1912.

Honda Shūgo commented on Mushanokōji's and Shiga's attitude as follows:

They may have the unconscious sense of privilege of the graduates from Gakushūin. They discuss matters like the state, loyalty, and distinguished services quite lightly without adhering to old concepts. I do not agree with Mushanokōji and Shiga unconditionally. I just indicate the difference in thought between generations. Shiga Naoya was thinking that literature was the only work that was worthy of devoting his full energy, and thought that he would not care even if his life would be shortened in pursuit of this work. (Honda 1990, 67)

Mushanokōji and Shiga might have felt it strange that individuals would martyr themselves out of a sense of chivalry for the sake of the survival and honour of a specific organisation. They who wrote books making frequent use of 'I' wanted to establish their identity as individuals who devote themselves to the pursuit of the universal truth and hoped to come close to the universal truth through education, but not through religion and not as members of a specific group or organisation. They might have succeeded some spirit from warriors who had thought that there was something to respect beyond life in this world. Even if they were faced with the loss of transcendental values or 'nihilism', they never fell into pessimism to think that there would be no other way than committing suicide as Fujimura Misao did. They lost 'God' or 'Buddha' but found an alternative thing, such as 'nature' on which they were able to lean.

Even so, the notion of death sometimes played an important role. It was true with Shiga Naoya. He left behind novels that would represent discourses on death-and-life under the education-oriented culture in the Taishō period (1912-1926). Having experienced conflicts with his father and Uchimura Kanzō, Shiga's self-identity as an intellectual élite (literary person and artist), which was considered as the 'modern selfhood', grew through his experiences of facing death. It was in his novel "Kinosaki nite" (At Kinosaki, 1917)<sup>2</sup> that he depicted his 'experience of facing death', to clearly show the interrelation between the establishment of himself as an individual and a writer, and his view on death-and life.

Shiga experienced troubles with his father for a long time. He opposed his father, a businessman who wanted to exercise paternalistic power over his family members, and attempted to devote himself to the spiritual value that was central to the education-oriented culture. In his late teens, he was mentored by Uchimura Kanzō. Under the guidance of Uchimura, Shiga studied Christianity and tried to live away from the worldly life with

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2 For the quotations from Shiga Naoya's "Kinosaki nite", I have used *Chikuma Nippon Bungaku 21 - Shiga Naoya* (Chikuma Japanese Literature 21 - Shiga Naoya). Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 2008.

the aim of seeking pure ethics. However, eight years later, he departed from Uchimura. He did not attend school and left Tokyo University. He could not become economically self-supporting. Further, as he could not stand the repression of sexual desire, he one-sidedly made up his mind to marry a household helper to have a sexual relation. This matter worsened his relation with his father and, consequently, he had to leave his home. He wrote an autobiographical novel, “*Ôtsu Junkichi*” (1912), depicting this process by featuring the hero’s sexual torments and perplexity. This novel was published in the literary magazine *Chûô Kôron* around the time of Emperor Meiji’s and General Nogi’s deaths.

Later, Shiga married a different woman and had a child who died in infancy; on this occasion, he reconciled with his father. The process was written in the work “*Wakai*” (Reconciliation) in 1917. What changes occurred in his state of mind in these years? Reading through “*Kinosaki nite*”, “*Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi*” (A Man and his Elder Sister’s Death, 1920), and *An’ya Kôro* (A Dark Night’s Passing, 1919-37),<sup>3</sup> it appears that he experienced facing death, becoming acquainted with literary expressions about death. To overcome his youthful identity crisis and to set up his firm ethical identity (establishment of his selfhood), he owed much to his experiences with facing death, as well as to his ability to develop expressions of view on death-and-life.

### 3 “*Kinosaki nite*” as a Novel Expressing View on Death-and-Life

After his “*Ôtsu Junkichi*” was published in 1913, about one year after Emperor Meiji’s and General Nogi’s deaths, he was hit by a train and suffered a severe injury that made him think about death. This was described in the beginning of “*Kinosaki nite*”:

I was hit by a Yamate-line train and severely injured. To recover, I went to Kinosaki hot spa in Tajima all alone. If the injury on the back were to develop into vertebral tuberculosis, it would be fatal. But the doctor said that would not happen. If it would not develop so in two or three years, you should not worry about it, so said the doctor. Even so, he advised that I should take good care of myself. So, I came here. (Shiga 2008)

In “*Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi*”, while he was on a tree branch, he was so surprised to see a snake trying to attack a bird nest on the tree that

3 For the quotations from Shiga Naoya’s “*Ôtsu Junkichi*”, “*Wakai*” and “*Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi*”, I have used *Ôtsu Junkichi/Wakai/Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi*, Tôkyô: Iwanami Bunko, 1960. For the quotations referring to *An’ya Kôro*, see *An’ya Kôro*, Kadokawa Bunko, 1967.

he fell down from it. He was injured and blood seeped out from his head, thus he lost consciousness. He was carried to the hospital and stayed there for 20 days. While at hospital, he was worried about the injury on his back rather than that on his head. Even so, the psychological shock seemed to be great. In "Kinosaki nite", he said "my brain is not clear yet. I forget things more frequently. But I feel more tranquil than at any other time in recent years. I feel calm and comfortable" (Shiga 1960, 316). He depicted a state of mind in which 'sad', 'depressed' and 'calm' feelings were similar to one another.

A 'sad' concept is something like:

With a little misfortune, I may have been lying down under the ground of Aoyama (urban grave garden in Tokyo), with a pale and cold face and with the injury on my head and on my back. The corpses of my grandfather and my mother are beside me, without communication among us. I imagine such a scene. It is sad, but the image does not scare me. It will become a reality someday. But when will it be? So far, I had thought that 'someday' would arrive far in the future. But now, I have come to think that 'someday' may come to me at any time. (Shiga 1960, 317)

He says that he is not frightened by this idea. However, he is thankful for his saved life or a sense of mission to make use of the saved life. Rather, this state of mind is combined with 'calmness'. "Strangely enough, my mind became calm. Somehow, an affinity toward death has developed in my mind" (Shiga 1960, 318).

In the following part of "Kinosaki nite", he explains the calmness of his mind with the consciousness of his own death and his "affinity toward death" while depicting the death and life of creatures that he observed at Kinosaki. The first one is a bee found dead on the roof of the entrance. "The legs were under the belly, the antennae were loosely down on the head". Then, "it rained heavily all through the night. It was all clear in the morning, tree leaves and the ground surface were washed away. There were no remains of the bee. [...] Maybe it stays still somewhere covered with mud". And he repeats "it is so calm" (Shiga 2008, 319).

Next, he depicts a rat struggling to live. A rat was thrown into a river flowing into the sea:

The rat is swimming very hard to find a way out of the water. A 20-centimeter long fish skewer is pierced through the neck. [...] It managed to hold a rock with its front legs, but the skewer prevented it from climbing up. It fell into the water again. The rat is struggling to be saved. I could not see how its face looked, but from the movement of its body, I realized how hard it was trying to get away from the difficult situation. [...] I did not want to see the last moment of the rat. But the way the rat



was struggling at full power to find a way out from dying even though it is destined to die remained deeply printed in my mind. I felt sad and uncomfortable. I thought it was the reality. Before reaching the calmness that I seek, it is terrible that I have to go through agony like that. Even if I feel affinity to the tranquillity after death, I thought it scary to have to go through a struggle such as the rat before reaching death. Not knowing suicide, animals must continue their struggles to live until the last moment. (Shiga 2008, 321)

Then, Shiga asks himself how it was when he was hit by a train. He desperately looked for a hospital. "I thought it wonderful afterwards that my brain had worked to arrange the most important thing even though I was half-conscious at that time. It was a problem to know whether the injury was fatal or not. But it was strange that I was not attacked by the fear of death while wondering whether the injury was fatal or not". As a matter of fact, he was not told to have been fatally injured. But, any case, he was in a condition similar to that of the rat. He may or may not have become upset: "I might accept the situation as it is. I don't care whichever the case". And he says "It cannot be helped" (Shiga 2008, 322).

Finally, he refers to a newt in the stream along the road. In an attempt to surprise a newt on a stone and cause it to jump into the water, he threw a stone at it. The stone hits the newt and kills it. "I threw a stone but its death was accidental. For the newt, it was unexpected death. I stood still for a while. I felt I was alone with the newt, and I placed myself in its position and felt its emotion. I was sorry for it, and at the same time, I realized the sadness of a creature" (Shiga 2008, 325). He felt that the newt, which died by accident, and himself, who survived an accident, were interchangeable. Rather than being thankful for being alive or feeling sorry for the newt, he had the strong feeling that he was integrated with the dead one. He then concludes as follows:

The light at the end of the town began to be seen. What happened to the dead bee? The rain at night may have put it under the ground. What happened to that rat? It may have flown into the sea, and the water-swelled body has been dashed against the shore together with other trash. Not having died, I am walking like this. I cannot help but be thankful for being alive. Even so, the emotion of joy has not surged from within myself. The facts of being alive and being dead are not two extremes, but I felt there was not much difference between them. (Shiga 2008, 326)

Shiga coolly tells his view on death-and life after having been faced with death in an accident while depicting the deaths of animals he observed in daily life in "Kinosaki nite". The work was evaluated as an essay or a novel describing his state of mind. He gained a certain type of view on death and

life through his life-risking experience, overcame the fear of death, and came to accept death as a phenomenon that happens around him. In short, the idea that the process that he has undergone is a certain kind of enlightenment, or that he has discovered the truth of death and life is suggested.

#### 4 View on Death-and-Life and the Awareness of Enlightenment

At least for Shiga, the fact that he crystallised the experiences depicted in “Kinosaki nite” in a book was a great turning point in his life that allowed him to overcome his anxiety and conflict, and to live with a solid emotional mainstay. In the process of overcoming his perplexity, he seems to have been concerned about ethical problems and social ideological problems, and dealt with them as themes in other novels. Along with these concerns, overcoming the fear of his own death was more important. By writing “Kinosaki nite”, it seems that he thought he had approached the quintessence of life enabling him to overcome the fear of death. This process becomes clearer by looking into “Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi”.

This novel illustrates the conflict between Shiga and his father after the occurrence of the incident contained in “Ôtsu Junkichi” as observed by the hero’s younger brother. In “Wakai” the process of Shiga’s reconciliation with his father is told. In the former work, the focus is placed on his sexuality and it is hard to understand why the conflict with his father has developed to such a serious point, as little reference is made to his father. In “Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi”, the conflict between Shiga and his father is depicted more clearly. The conflict between the father and the hero (the elder brother Yoshiyuki) and the accident that made him face death are included among the various events that occurred in the hero’s maturing process.

The elder brother left home, and he and the narrator (the younger brother Yoshizo) meet nine years later, on the occasion of their elder sister (Tokiko)’s death, who had left home in a small village in the mountains of Nagano Prefecture. The narrator is surprised to see that his elder brother with whom he is meeting after nine years has become a greatly mature person.

Brother stared at my face with a nostalgic look. His eyes looked gentle and warm, even so, I felt a strange pressure being looked at in such a way. The look was far different from the timid way of walking with no confidence in himself that I saw when he left home. (Shiga 1960, 268)

The two brothers approach their sister’s bed and then her dying process is described by the author. The author refers to the ‘fear of death’ and suggests that the elder brother has already overcome that fear.

I felt it awful, more than fearful, that the whole life of a person would end like this. Anyone's death might be the same after one dies, but in this sooty wide room with a dark hanging lamp, there was no bright colour, and no colour or warmth was felt from her husband or mother-in-law. I felt the scene itself was a part of the land of the dead. (Shiga 1960, 271)

In the following passages, environmental differences between the rural house and the city hospital are described. Thereby, Shiga appears to suggest that they face the full reality of death because the environment is not artificial.

But here, there was nothing artificial. I felt the fear of death as if I was going into infinite darkness, something that I feel when I go into sleep. Birds singing, insects flying, the sun shining, winds blowing, flowers blooming, dogs running, or children making noise: nothing came into mind which may happen again tomorrow. If death were eternal darkness, I felt that a human life would be dusk on a cold day on a height. At least, I felt that this was true with my sister. (Shiga 1960, 272)

However, the 'elder brother' is not possessed by the fear of death at all. For the narrator, who is the 'younger brother' stricken with the fear, the 'elder brother' began

to be the only person he felt he could depend on. [...] Particularly, his eyes looked as if he would not resist death nor would he be defeated. [...] As a matter of fact, my brother looked at my sister, but he did not seem to be involved in the mood that held me captive. (Shiga 1960, 272)

Before the wake, the 'elder brother' leaves the place without any words. In the end of the novel, the whereabouts of the 'elder brother' are unknown. Learning that a person certainly considered to be the elder brother was in Mt. Daisen in Hoki (Tottori Prefecture), the narrator went there to find that it was not him. This episode reminds us of the end of *An'ya Kōro*. Its hero, Tokitō Kensaku, climbs Mt. Daisen and undergoes a mysterious experience. Being exhausted, Kensaku soon is laid up with serious illness. Just before that, he feels 'strange ecstasies':

He felt that his mind and body were going to melt into this great nature. The nature is like an invisible vapour that embraces him as if he were as small as a poppy seed with its endless greatness. The feeling of being melted into nature, and the feeling of being reduced into nature gave him indescribable comfort. (Shiga 1967, 494)

It is implied that the ecstasies have an ideological meaning that would lead him to the state of mind able to overcome the fear of death:

It was a quiet night, and no voice of night birds was heard. A thin mist covered down the mountain, and no light from villages was seen. What could be seen were stars and the line of the mountain that looked like the back of a huge animal. He was thinking that he had just stepped into a path leading to eternity. He did not feel any fear of death. He thought he would not have any regrets if he were to die in the next moment. But he did not think that stepping into eternity would mean death. (Shiga 1967, 494)

In *An'ya Kōro* the reason for Kensaku's visit to Mt. Daisen after being troubled with his wife's misconduct is like "leaving home to enter the priesthood" (Shiga 1967, 444). He is profiled to have a strong motivation to attain enlightenment. In "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi", a narrow-minded 'father' is contrasted with a 'grandfather' as a person of integrity. This grandfather is depicted as becoming interested in Buddhism, especially in Zen Buddhism in his latter days (Shiga 1960, 204). The grandfather had "good eyes, calm and powerful eyes" and "he has never been seen with intensely shining eyes" (Shiga 1960, 205).

## 5 Lineage of Literature Describing Views on Death-and-Life

It was Itō Sei, a critic and writer, who presented an eminent interpretation of the views on death-and life contained in "Kinosaki nite". In his *Bungaku Nyūmon* (Introduction to Literature) (first print in 1954), he classifies novels into 'vertical' and 'horizontal' types, from the viewpoint of whether a novel intends to describe social relations or inner life. For the vertical type he further sees two sub-types, a descending type to shed light on life by depicting a downfall to death, and an ascending type to illustrate the light of life by placing oneself on the point near death or nothing. Itō discusses "Kinosaki nite" in detail as a work typical of the vertical-ascending type.

Considering a person's life from the difference between dying and living as shown in this work, gives us an impression such as this: if we likened our life to the sea, a hero would go down to the bottom of the sea of 'death' and from there he would peep into the actual life of fish and seaweed under the sea and the shining water surface. Floating on the surface, we are concerned about the waves on the sea, and live trying to go faster than others and elbowing others out of the way in our horizontal relations, or condemning people who are behaving as they please in the name of morality. We forget what is at the bottom of ourselves floating

on the sea or living in this world. By reading this kind of work, I feel that I can understand the fundamental state of life. (Itō 1986, 174-5)

Itō considers the novels of this vertical-ascending type as a method to “understand life and perceive our presence clearly when one is conscious about death or nothingness” (Itō 1986, 184). He says that this is frequently used by Japanese artists. He then lists “Aru Gakeue no Kanjō” (Emotion on the Top of a Cliff) (1928) by Kajii Motojirō, “Kaze tachinu” (The Wind has Risen) (1936-38) by Hori Tatsuo, “Mushi no iroiro” (Various Kinds of Bugs) (1948) by Ozaki Kazuo, and “Aka Gaeru” (Red Frogs) (1946) by Shimaki Kensaku. In these short stories, the scenes of death of people or animals are depicted, or the hero is assumed to be dying. The common point in these works is the reflections made by authors about their own life and the consciousness of being in an uneasy state, while they were going through an illness (Itō 1986, 185).

Itō argues that these works are based on relatively simple matters that many people may experience.

Even a person who lives a profit seeking life, once he gets ill and is in bed with an idea of approaching death, he would think as follows. “I will leave this world before long. I will no longer be able to see the cloud, or leaves on the trees”. Looking at a bug crawling, he would watch how it crawls and consider what the bug lives for. Or he may think that his life is as momentary as that of this bug, and that he may die on the next day, or the day after just as the bug.

Then the way one bug moves is no longer a problem which does not leave him unconcerned. All his attention is focused on its movement. At this moment, he becomes aware of a bug, or a leaf with a sense of their presence. (Itō 1986, 165-6)

When we have to withdraw ourselves from our activities and human relations in this world because of fatal diseases or injuries, we attain the peace of mind based on resignation. Itō comments that “Kinosaki nite” and other series of works are works that illustrate this psychology with artistic sophistication and give expression to the peace of mind based on resignation as well as the perception of the brilliance of life.

Itō further comments that this psychology corresponds to the ideological tradition of withdrawal from ordinary life in the East. Europeans excel in literary expressions to illustrate horizontal human relations and to enhance the relations into an ideal state, which corresponds to Christian morality focusing on ego and love for others. On the other hand, thoughts in the East lack social morality and tend to idealise people who have withdrawn from and lived away from ordinary life. In the tradition of secluded people and wanderers as observed in Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism or Japanese

religions and poems, no standpoint has been taken to give insight into horizontal social relations to pursue an ideal. Because of this, “people in Japan have developed over a long time vertical type emotions, or a perception based on the consciousness of nothingness and death” (Itō 1986, 191).

Yet, Itō also says that “I do not mean that western writers are not capable of perceiving presence by means of nothingness” (Itō 1986, 191). As an example, in *War and Peace*, Tolstoy illustrates the peace of mind that Nicolai Rostov has attained by being faced with death on a battlefield. Tolstoy makes many people appear in his works and capably draws complicated horizontal human interactions, while at the same time, “he expresses the presence of life based on the fundamental consciousness of nothingness” (Itō 1986, 194). Because of this, Tolstoy is a great writer.

Itō’s analysis grasps the distinctive feature of “Kinosaki nite” as a novel depicting the view on death-and-life. As Itō points out, poets in the past including Saigyō (1119-1190), Kamo-no-Chōmei (1155-1216) and Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) were always conscious about humans as beings destined to die, and trying to express delicate emotions in the depths of people living under the shadow of death. It can be said that facing death along with a view of life as something transient and empty has long existed in the mainstream of Japanese literature. In modern literature, the traditional expressions of transiency on the premises of lamenting the shortness of life have little appealing power. As Itō indicates, there was the self-destructive personal novel style in which the author is nearly in the state of seclusion. However, this style differs from the lineage of emptiness’ view of life. Conversely, describing situations closed to death due to illness or injury, it shows the brilliance of life in comparison with transiency and a perspective of a short life.

“Kinosaki nite” is positioned at the initial stage of this lineage of literature. As mentioned before, Shiga Naoya later attempted to associate the state of mind that he had attained in writing this novel with Buddhism, in particular Zen Buddhism. It may show that he intuitively realised that the state of enlightenment by withdrawing from this world would be linked to Oriental or Japanese religious tradition. It is also interesting to note that among the drafts before publishing “Kinosaki nite”, there was one titled “Inochi” (Life). The term *inochi* is used when life is understood in relation to a transcendental dimension, hence this novel is a good early example whereby this use of the word was attempted.

## 6 Inner Life-Oriented View on Death-and-Life

The feature of Shiga Naoya’s view on death-and-life that was established in “Kinosaki nite” has been developed through “Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi” and *An’ya Kōro*. These two novels are the stories of the heroes’ growth as well as the stories of heroes involved in the attempt of establishing their

self-identity. They embody the Shiga's endeavour to overcome serious crisis risen in his youth, finding the guiding principle of his life and coping with the problem of achieving spiritual independence from his parents, which ultimately results in attaining a firm social and mental position. Although it is not clearly expressed in these works, it is implied that by social independence Shiga means the stable married life and that social position he has become able to reach as a writer.

Spiritual independence includes overcoming the conflicts in human relations centring on one's family and accompanying moral questions, and searching to find one's proper position in relation to a lofty ideal and a transcendental dimension. In the process, the experience of attaining a view on death-and-life and the creation of literary expressions related to that view played a great role. In the three novels the heroes confront death experiences and allay the fear of it. Through this process, they acquire hints to come close to the ideal and something like transcendence. The result shows up through either the calmness of their minds or their confident attitudes. Therefore, the acquisition of a view on death-and-life is an important indicator of spiritual independence.

In "Kinosaki nite" only the experiences of facing Shiga's own death and its overcoming are described. For this reason it is said to be a novel about a view on death-and-life. However, in the other two novels, "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi" and *An'ya Kōro*, the experience of achieving the view on death-and-life and the expression of that view are contained in the framework of the story, which pivots on the establishment of one's selfhood. In other words, the view on death-and-life is treated as a component of growth stories or selfhood establishment stories. Supposedly, there is an inclination to establish one's own identity through 'philosophy', 'literature' and 'art' in modern education-oriented culture. Shiga Naoya attained a serious experience of death-and-life and gave shape to that experience against the cultural background.

In education-oriented culture, the self-identity of modern intellectuals (literary élites) is considered to be important and developed on the basis of one's inner self. The inner self is developed, most typically, through reading, religious experience and art experience. In "Kinosaki nite", "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi", and *An'ya Kōro*, the author's serious death-and-life experience and its expression are playing more important roles while the firm self-identity based on his inner self is taking shape. It is observed here that views on death-and-life, as well as their expressions, have found suitable roles to play as elements for selfhood formation based on intellectuals' inner selves.

As Itō notes, the death-and-life experience that Shiga shaped is not limited to an experience of intellectuals pursuing their inner selfhood, but rather it is an experience that can be widely sympathised with by many people of different social status. This is particularly true of "Kinosaki nite"

in which the framework of the growth story is least visible. Itō comments, “a seriously sick person lying in bed looks up at clouds, the sea, flowers, or tree leaves while thinking he would die before long, he may find these things to be extremely beautiful” (Itō 1986, 164). This comment comes home to everyone. However, it depends greatly on the social relations, or the horizontal element in Itō’s words, of the author as to what he picks up from the experience of facing death and what elements he emphasises.

In the works of Shiga Naoya, tranquillity and a calm mood are keynotes, and also the overcoming fear of death is stressed. Hence, a optimistic idea, since the misery of death and the reality of death that are beyond the control of living persons are slighted. It is implied that there is a transcendent meaning in his works that is common to Zen Buddhism. Shiga’s social position as a person who experienced suffering and finally developed his individuality after a great deal of struggle is inseparable from his literary work’s contents.

Then, can Shiga’s novels be said to be pursuing the realities of death and life and overcoming the restriction imposed by his social status as mentioned above? Does he describe a dimension where various kinds of death and life can be compared, while relativizing his own death-and-life experience in relation to others? Perhaps, he does not do this. Let us put it another way: does Shiga’s death-and-life expression have an aspect that suggests expansion into various death-and-life experiences of people in those days, beyond individuals in a specific social position? It must be said that something is missing in Shiga’s works to ask the broad meaning of his own death-and-life experience as an educated person or an intellectual, in comparison with death-and-life experiences of people in other social strata or any individuals in the wider society.

As Itō Sei says, he repeatedly illustrates individuals facing death and puts them in a tapestry of various people with different ways of thinking at diverse positions in society. As shown in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, many people living in modern society can hardly overcome tragic deaths, even with the support of Christian faith (Tolstoy 2008). Allegedly, Shiga Naoya’s discourses on death-and-life have been formed under the influence of Tolstoy (Abe 2008). Both social elements and comparison with other people are incorporated into death-and-life discourses later on in modern Japan. The works by Miyazawa Kenji and Yoshida Mitsuru are examples, which will be examined on other occasions.



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