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СРАВНЕНИЕ «ОДИНОЧЕСТВА» ИНТЕЛЛЕКТУАЛОВ В РОМАНЕ НАЦУМЭ СОСЭКИ СЕРДЦЕ И ПОВЕСТИ ЛУ СИНЯ ОДИНОКИЙ

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается проблема одиночества интеллектуала в романе Нацумэ Сосэки Сердце и повести Лу Синя Одинокий. На основе сравнительно-литературного, историко-культурного и текстуального анализа выявляются общие и специфические черты изображения духовного кризиса интеллектуалов в условиях модернизации Китая и Японии. Показывается, что одиночество Сэнсэя в Сердце имеет исповедальный характер и связано с чувством вины, эгоизмом и невозможностью нравственного самооправдания. Одиночество Вэй Ляньшу, напротив, определяется как форма сопротивления, возникающая из конфликта между пробудившимся интеллектуалом и враждебным, косным обществом. Особое внимание уделяется мотиву смерти как предельному выражению духовного распада и исторической безысходности. Делается вывод о том, что обе работы отражают не только личную трагедию героев, но и более широкий кризис духовной самоидентификации интеллектуалов в переходную эпоху.

Ключевые слова: Нацумэ Сосэки, Лу Синь, Одиночество Интеллектуала, Модернизация, Духовный Кризис.

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A COMPARISON OF INTELLECTUALS' "LONELINESS" IN NATSUME SŌSEKI'S KOKORO AND LU XUN'S THE LONER

Abstract. This article examines the problem of intellectual loneliness in Natsume Sōseki's novel *Kokoro* and Lu Xun's short story *The Loner*. Based on comparative-literary, historical-cultural, and textual analysis, the study identifies both the common and specific features in the representation of the spiritual crisis of intellectuals under the conditions of Chinese and Japanese modernization. It shows that Sensei's loneliness in *Kokoro* is confessional in nature and is connected with guilt, egoism, and the impossibility of moral self-justification. Wei Lianshu's loneliness, by contrast, is defined as a form of resistance arising from the conflict between an awakened intellectual and a hostile, stagnant society. Special attention is paid to the motif of death as the ultimate expression of spiritual disintegration and historical hopelessness. The article concludes that both works reflect not only the personal tragedy of their protagonists, but also the broader crisis of intellectuals' spiritual self-identification in a transitional age.

Keywords: Natsume Sōseki, Lu Xun, Intellectual Loneliness, Modernization, Spiritual Crisis.

Introduction

The problem of the intellectual's loneliness occupies an important place in modern East Asian literature, especially in works created during periods of rapid social transformation. The modernization of China and Japan was accompanied not only by institutional reforms and the introduction of Western ideas, but also by a profound crisis of values, identity, and individual consciousness. In this context, intellectuals became one of the most sensitive social groups: they were the first to perceive the contradictions between tradition and modernity, yet they were often unable either to reconcile these contradictions within themselves or to find a stable position in society.

Natsume Sōseki's *Kokoro* and Lu Xun's *The Loner* provide two representative literary examples of this spiritual predicament. Although the two works were created in different national and historical contexts, both focus on intellectual figures who experience deep isolation in the process of modernization. In *Kokoro*, the loneliness of Sensei is mainly rooted in guilt, egoism, and the conflict between traditional

morality and modern individualism. In *The Loner*, Wei Lianshu's loneliness arises from the confrontation between an awakened intellectual and a dark, oppressive society that refuses enlightenment. Thus, the comparison of these two works makes it possible to reveal both the common dilemma of modern intellectuals in East Asia and the specific differences between the Japanese and Chinese experiences of modernization.

The relevance of this study lies in the fact that the theme of intellectual loneliness is not merely a psychological motif, but a literary expression of the broader spiritual crisis caused by modernization. By analyzing the different forms of loneliness in Sōseki's and Lu Xun's works, the article seeks to clarify how modern literature reflects the transformation of individual consciousness under historical pressure. The object of the study is the representation of intellectuals in *Kokoro* and *The Loner*, while the subject of the study is the different forms, causes, and meanings of their loneliness.

The purpose of this article is to compare the images of lonely intellectuals in Natsume Sōseki's *Kokoro* and Lu Xun's *The Loner* and to reveal how their loneliness reflects the distinct spiritual dilemmas of Japanese and Chinese modernization. To achieve this purpose, the article examines the historical backgrounds of the two works, analyzes the forms of "confessional loneliness" and "resistant loneliness," explores the significance of death as a narrative ending, and considers the relationship between the characters' fate and the authors' own spiritual experiences. The study adopts comparative-literary, historical-cultural, and textual analysis methods. Its scholarly significance lies in deepening the understanding of modern East Asian intellectuals as literary figures situated between tradition, modernity, individual ethics, and social enlightenment.

The Modernization of China and Japan and the Historical Backgrounds of the Two Works

Natsume Sōseki and Lu Xun are both highly representative writers in modern East Asian literature. Both had experience studying abroad, and both developed a strong critical awareness during the process in which Western thought entered their

respective societies. Sōseki went to Britain to study English literature, yet the impact of a foreign culture led him to reconsider the spiritual cost of Japan's modernization. Lu Xun studied in Japan and, after experiencing the "slide incident," shifted from medicine to literature, attempting to awaken the national spirit through literary writing. Their similar cross-cultural experiences enabled both writers to direct their literary creations toward the spiritual predicament of modern intellectuals in a period of transition between the old and the new.

The modernization of both modern China and modern Japan bore an evident "externally driven" character. After the Opium War, China was forced to open its doors to the outside world. Reform and revolutionary movements such as the Self-Strengthening Movement, the Hundred Days' Reform, and the Xinhai Revolution were all driven by the practical pressure of national salvation and survival. Japan, meanwhile, ended its policy of national isolation after the arrival of the Black Ships and rapidly promoted "civilization and enlightenment" and "enriching the country and strengthening the military" through the Meiji Restoration. Natsume Sōseki once distinguished between "internally driven enlightenment" and "externally driven enlightenment," contrasting spontaneous internal development with transformation undertaken under the pressure of external forces. From this perspective, although China and Japan followed different paths toward modernization, both were compelled to embark on this process under the impact of the West.

Kokoro was written in 1914, shortly after the end of the Meiji era. The individualism, sense of freedom, and utilitarian values brought about by the Meiji Restoration powerfully challenged traditional ethics, causing intellectuals to fall into conflicts between the self and morality, and between desire and responsibility. The Loner was written in 1925. In China after the May Fourth enlightenment, society was still oppressed by warlord rule and old feudal ethics. Awakened intellectuals could neither transform society nor fully integrate themselves into reality. Both works turn their attention to intellectuals who were "the first to awaken and also the deepest trapped in loneliness," yet the sources and orientations of their loneliness are not the same.

Different Forms of Intellectuals' "Loneliness"

The loneliness of "Sensei" in *Kokoro* can be summarized as a form of "confessional loneliness." In his youth, Sensei lost his trust in others after his uncle misappropriated his inheritance. Later, when he and K fell in love with the landlady's daughter at the same time, Sensei, driven by selfish motives, concealed the truth and secured the engagement first, indirectly leading to K's suicide. K's death became a moral debt from which Sensei could never free himself. Although after marriage he obtained happiness in a worldly sense, he was never able to confess his past to his wife. He could only isolate himself from the world in self-reproach and silence. Sensei's loneliness is not caused by external social exclusion, but by self-judgment: he cannot forgive himself, nor can he achieve reconciliation within the conflict between traditional morality and modern individualism.

K's loneliness, by contrast, arises from the rupture between belief and reality. Born into a temple family, K upholds the ideal of "spiritual discipline" and has a rigid, uncompromising character. For the sake of his spiritual pursuit, he breaks with both his adoptive parents and his biological parents, revealing a strong sense of self. However, after he falls in love with the landlady's daughter, his emotional desire comes into conflict with his belief in "spiritual discipline." Sensei then takes advantage of K's character weakness, pushing him further into a spiritual dead end. On the surface, K's death seems to result from romantic failure, but at a deeper level, it is the result of his idealized self being unable to accommodate real human desire.

Unlike Sensei's inward-facing confessional loneliness, Wei Lianshu's loneliness is a form of "resistant loneliness." In *The Loner*, he is regarded by the villagers as a "New Party" member who has "embraced foreign religion" and as a "monster." At his grandmother's funeral, he lets out a long howl "like a wounded wolf," revealing the irreconcilable opposition between the awakened intellectual and an ignorant society. Wei Lianshu sees clearly the hypocrisy of old feudal ethics, yet he is unable to change the indifference and hostility of those around him. He is dismissed from his post, ostracized by others, and cursed by children; in the end, he moves from resistance to compromise, becoming an adviser to the very warlords he once detested.

The narrator “I” in *The Loner* also embodies the lonely condition of the petty intellectual: he struggles from place to place for a livelihood and is subjected to rumors and exclusion because his thoughts and behavior differ from those of the masses. Therefore, Wei Lianshu is not an isolated individual, but rather a concentrated embodiment of the enlightened intellectuals after the May Fourth Movement. In summary, Sensei’s loneliness points to the question of “how the self faces guilt,” while Wei Lianshu’s loneliness points to the question of “how the awakened intellectual faces a dark society.” The former is the self’s despair toward itself, whereas the latter is the self’s despair toward society.

Death as the Ending and the Writing of “Ruin”

Both works ultimately use death to point to the extremity of the intellectuals’ spiritual predicament. When discussing the “modes of conception” in modern literature, Guo Erya mentions the idea of a “ruin-oriented” mode, in which characters move toward the destruction of both spirit and body amid irreconcilable contradictions.² The deaths of Sensei, K, and Wei Lianshu precisely embody this logic of “ruin”: they are not defeated by a single event, but lose the possibility of continuing to live amid historical transformation, ethical fissures, and inner division.

In *Kokoro*, Sensei recounts in his testament the circumstances of K’s suicide and his own long-term spiritual torment, and describes himself as having “died for the spirit of the Meiji era.” The death of the Meiji Emperor and General Nogi’s junshi make Sensei feel that an entire era has come to an end; meanwhile, his own guilt and loneliness are also pushed to their endpoint at this historical moment. Sensei’s suicide is both a belated repayment for K’s death and a final judgment upon his own egoism. He hopes to leave his past, “whether good or evil,” as a reference for later generations, which gives his death a cautionary significance.

Wei Lianshu’s death, by contrast, is not an act of confession, but a final form of resistance. In his letter, he writes, “I have truly failed, and yet I have triumphed.” “Failure” refers to the fact that, as an enlightener, he is overwhelmed by reality and forced to bow to a dark society; “triumph,” however, means that through self-destruction he refuses to be truly assimilated. The loneliness in Lu Xun’s writing

carries a sense of revenge: after the loner has no more tears to shed, he expresses anger and contempt through silence, disguise, and even death.⁴ Therefore, Wei Lianshu's death is not self-judgment, but the final accusation against the darkness of society.

Thus, although both works end in suicide, Kokoro places greater emphasis on moral guilt and the self-reckoning of the individual soul, whereas *The Loner* emphasizes the resistance and failure of the awakened intellectual in the face of oppression by the old society. Both deaths occur within the fissures of modern transformation, yet they respectively reveal the predicament of "self-ethics" among Japanese intellectuals and the predicament of "social enlightenment" among Chinese intellectuals.

The Fate of the Characters and the Authors' Self-Projection

The images of intellectuals in *Kokoro* and *The Loner* both contain projections of the writers' own experiences. Natsume Sōseki lived in Japanese society after the Meiji Restoration and keenly perceived the spiritual crisis brought about by wholesale Westernization, utilitarianism, and individualism. The loneliness, egoism, and confession embodied in "Sensei" reflect Sōseki's anxiety over the transformation of values in modern Japan. The difference is that Sōseki himself ultimately sought self-reconciliation through ideas such as "following Heaven and abandoning the self," whereas Sensei is unable to escape his inner predicament and can only end his divided self through death.

Wei Lianshu in Lu Xun's writing, by contrast, is closely related to the real-life condition of "marginal intellectuals." Modern new-style education produced a group of lower- and middle-level intellectuals who had some knowledge of both old and new learning, yet society could not provide sufficient occupational positions or spiritual space for them. After leaving school, they often became "marginal people," finding it difficult both to make a living and to be understood by the old society.⁶ Lu Xun's early experience after returning from study in Japan, as well as his memories of the fates of figures such as Fan Ainong, were transformed in *The Loner* into the existential predicaments of Wei Lianshu and the narrator "I."

Therefore, the loneliness in the two works is not an abstract psychological state, but a literary response by the writers to the spirit of their times. Sōseki writes the fragmentation of the modern self from within individual morality, while Lu Xun writes the isolation of the enlightener from the external pressure of society. Together, the two works demonstrate that modernization means not only the renewal of institutions and technology, but also the reconstruction of the individual's spiritual order; and intellectuals are often the first to bear the pain of this reconstruction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Natsume Sōseki's *Kokoro* and Lu Xun's *The Loner* both reveal the profound loneliness experienced by modern intellectuals during periods of historical transition. Sensei's loneliness is a form of inward-facing confessional loneliness: it originates from moral guilt, egoism, and the inability to achieve self-reconciliation. Wei Lianshu's loneliness, by contrast, is a form of outward-facing resistant loneliness: it stems from the conflict between the awakened intellectual and an ignorant, oppressive society. Their deaths both embody the logic of "ruin," yet they point to different dimensions of the modern intellectual crisis. Sensei's suicide represents the collapse of the individual soul under the burden of ethical guilt, whereas Wei Lianshu's death becomes a final accusation against social darkness. Through these two figures, Sōseki and Lu Xun transform their own historical experiences and spiritual anxieties into literary images of intellectual solitude. The comparison shows that modernization is not merely a process of institutional or technological change, but also a painful reconstruction of the individual's spiritual world. In this sense, the loneliness of intellectuals in the two works becomes a symbolic expression of the shared yet divergent dilemmas faced by China and Japan in the modern age.

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