

Шао Гоянь

Магистр

Северо-западный педагогический университет

Ланьчжоу, Китай

**ОТВЕТСТВЕННОСТЬ ПЕРЕД ДРУГИМ И САМОПОЗНАНИЕ В  
ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИИ НАКАДЗИМЫ АЦУСИ «ДИВНЫЕ ДЕЯНИЯ  
БОДХИСАТТВЫ»**

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается проблема формирования субъективности через категорию Другого в произведении Накадзимы Ацуси «Дивные деяния бодхисаттвы», входящем в цикл «Моё путешествие на Запад». Особое внимание уделяется образу Ша Сэна, который выступает как посредник, наблюдатель и интерпретатор отношений между «я» и Другим. Цель исследования заключается в выявлении роли ответственности перед Другим в процессе самопознания героя и в раскрытии этического содержания художественной концепции Накадзимы. На основе сравнительно-литературного, герменевтического и философско-антропологического анализа рассматриваются оппозиции «я — Другой», «человек — демон», а также связь идей Накадзимы с философией Э. Левинаса, Б. Спинозы и И. В. Гёте. Делается вывод, что подлинная субъектность в произведении формируется не через отрицание или подчинение Другого, а через признание его инаковости, принятие необходимости и готовность нести ответственность за иное бытие.

**Ключевые слова:** Накадзима Ацуси, «Дивные деяния бодхисаттвы», Другой, субъектность; ответственность.

**Shao Guoyan**

Master

Northwest Normal University

Lanzhou, China

**RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE OTHER AND SELF-EXPLORATION IN  
ATSUSHI NAKAJIMA'S *THE WONDROUS DEEDS OF THE BODHISATTVA***

**Abstract.** This article examines the problem of the formation of subjectivity through the category of the Other in Atsushi Nakajima's *The Wondrous Deeds of the Bodhisattva*, which belongs to the cycle *My Journey to the West*. Special attention is paid to the image of Sandy, who acts as a mediator, observer, and interpreter of the relationship between the "Self" and the Other. The purpose of the study is to identify the role of responsibility for the Other in the protagonist's process of self-exploration and to reveal the ethical content of Nakajima's artistic conception. Using comparative literary, hermeneutic, and philosophical-anthropological methods, the article analyzes the oppositions "Self — Other" and "human — monster," as well as the connection between Nakajima's ideas and the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, Baruch Spinoza, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The article concludes that genuine subjectivity in the work is formed not through the denial or subordination of the Other, but through the recognition of alterity, the acceptance of necessity, and the willingness to assume responsibility for another being.

**Keywords:** Atsushi Nakajima, *The Wondrous Deeds of the Bodhisattva*, Other, subjectivity; responsibility.

### **Introduction**

Atsushi Nakajima occupies a distinctive position in Japanese literature of the Shōwa period, as his works combine classical Chinese literary sources, Western philosophical thought, and a sustained reflection on the crisis of the modern subject. In this regard, *The Wondrous Deeds of the Bodhisattva*, included in the cycle *My Journey to the West*, is of particular significance. Reworking the narrative and character system of the classical Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, Nakajima shifts the focus from external pilgrimage to the inner process of self-exploration.

This article focuses on Sandy, who functions in the story as a mediator, adviser, and observer in the relationship between the "Self" and the "Other." His subjectivity is not formed in isolation, but through constant encounters with different modes of existence: the compassion and tolerance of Tang Monk, the active freedom of the Monkey King, and the opposition between the human and the monstrous. In this context, the problem of the "Other" acquires not only psychological but also

ontological and ethical significance. Emmanuel Levinas's concept of responsibility for the Other, together with the philosophical motifs of Spinoza and Goethe concerning necessity, freedom, and moral self-perfection, provides an important theoretical framework for interpreting Nakajima's work.

The relevance of this study lies in the fact that previous research on Atsushi Nakajima has mainly concentrated on source studies, intertextual relations, comparative perspectives, and the reception of philosophical ideas. However, the construction of subjectivity through the figure of the Other has not yet been sufficiently examined. An analysis of the Self–Other relationship makes it possible to understand more precisely the ideological structure of *The Wondrous Deeds of the Bodhisattva* and to reveal the ethical orientation of Nakajima's conception of the human being.

The purpose of this article is to examine how Sandy's self-consciousness is formed through interaction with the Other and to clarify the role of responsibility for the Other as the foundation of human subjectivity in Nakajima's literary world. To achieve this purpose, the article analyzes the oppositions between "Self" and "Other," "human" and "monster," as well as the philosophical and literary resonances among Nakajima, Spinoza, and Goethe. The methodological basis of the study consists of comparative literary analysis, hermeneutic interpretation, and philosophical-anthropological analysis.

### **The Construction of Sandy's "Self" in the Oppositional Landscape of "Self —Other"**

"The self is a kind of object, a virtual entity continuously created to satisfy the requirements of the subject's unity." In *My Journey to the West*, Sandy consistently harbors doubts about the self and suffers from psychological illness. "The Birth of the Monk Wujing" describes: He alone did not agree with the notion of reincarnation [1]. According to Lacan, the self is constituted through continuous identification. Influenced by the gaze of the Other, Sandy believes he is ill and begins to seek a cure. Lacan holds that only by recognizing the presence of the Other and identifying with them can the subject's speech be acknowledged. Atsushi Nakajima realizes that the

gaze of the “Other” threatens the “self”, and the construction of the self cannot escape the paradox of the Other’s recognition. Conversely, Sandy, as a heretic, is also the Other to be rejected. French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas proposed that “the Other, like God, possesses an absolute alterity, which makes the Other exist absolutely and infinitely beyond the awareness of the self.” In other words, the self and the Other can never fully understand each other, which also explains why, despite Sandy’s many efforts in Atsushi Nakajima’s writing, he ultimately cannot deal well with the outcome of “existential doubt”.

If the self and the Other cannot understand each other, the relationship between the self and the Other is inevitably unbalanced. As Foucault argues: “The formation of subjectivity is in some way determined by the discourse of a particular historical period, that is, the speech or writing concerning beliefs, values, and categories that is continually repeated during that period.” In other words, verbal violence occurs during the formation of every subject, constrained by discourse, leaving the self with no choice but to compromise or to become an excluded heretic. Sandy is constrained by the wisdom embedded in the specific context carried by text and cannot transcend linguistic discipline, resulting in the repression of the self and eventual descent into madness.

However, Sandy did not accept this fate. He found a part of his “self” identification in the Tang Monk. “The master always has the insight into the eternal... It seems that a warm flame has been kindled deep in my heart [2].” The Tang Monk offers boundless tolerance towards “the other”. Atsushi Nakajima described him as “not seeking a way to escape outwardly, but exploring inwardly”. According to Levinas, subjectivity is primarily for the other, and a responsible subjectivity is more authentic than an appropriative one. The self of the Tang Monk is established precisely through his compassion for all the others.

Nakajima believes that both Tang Monk and the Monkey King are geniuses because they achieved the “equivalence of necessity and freedom”. The Master Tang Monk constructs his self by taking responsibility for others. He regards everything given by the world (the “given”) as something that must be accepted, and thus his

heart does not have “existential doubt”; it is this acceptance of necessity that enables him to obtain true freedom. The Monkey King always centers on himself and is also free. The Monkey King is the “seed”, and the world prepares the firewood for him. When he meets the Buddha, he first realizes the otherness and unknowable of the other, and begins to re-examine the self, and thus becomes extremely fearful. Lacan once said: “In fact, the virtual subject, as observed by the fictional eyes, that is, what we call the other, the other is here. In the eyes of the other, we first see our self [3].” Although the Monkey King is an “actor”, Sandy admires him but cannot learn his essence. He laments: “Can one never become an actor?” However, Sandy eventually finds his home in Tang Monk. The Monkey King is a “self-centered person”, while Sandy’s self is constructed by the “other” and is in an excluded position. Unable to change the verbal environment, he can only seek another way out - to be responsible for the “other”.

### **The Formation of the “Self” of “Human beings” from an Unconventional Perspective**

In *The Wondrous Deeds of the Bodhisattva*, there is another pair of opposition between “self” and “other”, namely the opposition between “monsters” and “humans”. Sandy described the differences between the two as follows: “Perhaps it is precisely because we are attracted by the seemingly weak nature of the master that we also sense a certain tragic element within it... But once we realize the tragic nature of our own position, it will be extremely difficult for us to hold fast to the righteous path and the beauty as the master does.” Master Tang Monk, being a human, is well aware of his humble and precious position in the vast world; even after understanding the tragic essence of life, he still bravely pursues truth and beauty. However, these “monsters who have been transformed into beings” like Sandy lack this quality.

Nakajima deliberately revised the draft to allow Sandy to retain the experience of being a monster while also giving him the ability to understand human nature [4]. The most fundamental difference between monsters and humans lies in the fact that monsters have great power and can transform, while humans have weak power and cannot transform. Monsters (including Sandy who has transformed into a human) can

change into any other species by concentrating their minds. Therefore, the opaque barrier that should exist between the “self” and the “other” does not exist for monsters. They can easily transform from “self” to “other”, so they cannot clearly realize the fixed position of “self” in the universe like humans can, nor can they experience the “sadness” and “nobility” that humans feel when resisting the unpredictable events with their fragile and unchangeable bodies. As Rina Fujida said, the “tragic element” of Tang Monk is “the compassionate heart of realizing the impermanence of all phenomena, the non-existence of the self in all things, the existence of Buddha nature in everything, and the possibility of becoming a Buddha.” This tragedy is something that monsters can never truly understand.

Precisely because he couldn't clearly define the self, Sandy traveled to various philosophers in search of answers to the meaning of existence. However, this quest not only failed to dispel his doubts but instead plunged him into deeper “dejection” and “despair”. Eventually, he joined Tang Monk's group and headed to India. At the end of *The Wondrous Deeds of the Bodhisattva*, Sandy, in his human form, suddenly comprehended the perspective that Tang Monk possessed, which was completely different from that of the monsters, and felt Tang Monk's compassion and “warmth” - this was precisely the awakening of “humanity” within him. Before this, the monsters regarded the self and the other equally and did not consider the “other”; but now, because Sandy had understood “humanity”, he finally realized that the “self” has responsibilities towards the “other”. Only when this responsibility is recognized does the world become tender, and he thereby broke free from the long-term “demonize” state.

From this, it can be seen that in *The Wondrous Deeds of the Bodhisattva*, Nakajima uses the special perspective of Sandy, who is between monsters and humans, to depict the arduous journey of how the “self” is demonized and then how it overcomes this demonize by awakening humanity. Throughout this process, the other always plays a crucial role. Nakajima's novels often present non-human otherworldly realms, which stems from his acceptance of Jakob von Uexküll's “Umwelt” ideology - he constantly depicts the severance and changes in the relationship with the other

[5]. Ultimately, through the mutual influence of the self-other relationships between Sandy as an individual and others, as well as between the monster group and the human group, Nakajima finds the foothold for the construction of the human self: the subjectivity proved by the “responsibility of the other”. He accepts the unknowable of the other, but opposes the self bullying the other, and agrees that the “self” should be responsible for the “other” after understanding it, thereby reconciling the conflicts in the self-other relationship.

### **.Atsushi Nakajima and Goethe and Spinoza: The Resonance of “the Responsibility of Others” across Time and Space**

Atsushi Nakajima created the *My Journey to the West* series, possibly inspired by the then popular light opera *Enomoto Kenichi’s Journey to the West*. However, the “Journey to the West craze” was just a trigger for him. What truly touched him was the intrinsic connection between the *Journey to the West*, Spinoza’s philosophy, and *Faust*. In a letter to Seijirou Tanaka, he wrote: “The world’s ignorance of Spinoza is a tragedy... I will use this idea as my motivation to create a *Journey to the West*, and I will devote myself to the creation with the same enthusiasm as I would have for making it my *Faust*.” It can be seen that Nakajima was highly perceptive of the high degree of similarity among these three.

What is this commonality? Wang Li once pointed out that “*Faust* is the Chinese *Journey to the West* of the West.” Both explore “the confusion about the ultimate goal of life and the pain it brings to people” and present a development line from the opposition between man and nature to harmony and unity. The nature mentioned by Wang Li here, in Zhang Deming’s words, has become God or Buddha. He believes that what they represent is “the deepest desires and impulses of the human soul”, which is to return to God or Buddha. In order to achieve this unity, the four disciples in the *Journey to the West* constantly undergo tests of desires, while Faust in *Faust* constantly explores and experiences failures. Just as Spinoza said, the highest satisfaction of man lies in cultivating rational love for God (nature, truth), which is the key to freedom and immortality. Goethe studied Spinoza three times in his life and deeply understood the “necessity of nature”, so his *Faust* constantly pursued

truth.

However, unlike the *Journey to the West*, Nakajima's *My Journey to the West* is told from the perspective of Sandy. Researchers have found that Sandy is "the most ambiguous... but is the closest to the story's author". Nakajima chose this most confused yet most similar character to himself, observing the world through his eyes. In *The Wondrous Deeds of the Bodhisattva*, Sandy eventually realized from the Tang Monk: Only by having compassion for all things and regarding what the world "has" as "inevitable", and striving to understand it, tolerate it, and be responsible for it, can one see one's own value. And in *Faust*, Faust also "affirmed the role of human beings, believing that the purpose of life lies in action and in making beneficial practices for society" [6]. Both ultimately fall on the broader "responsibility towards others" - in order to gain freedom, one must undertake the responsibility towards others, unify the unconditional love for nature (or gods) with the inevitability of personal development, which is precisely the path to "perfection" as Spinoza said.

Although Nakajima, Goethe, and Spinoza lived in different eras, they all lived during periods of social upheaval and transformation, and had sharp conflicts with the other of society. Spinoza was expelled from the church for his heretical ideas, but still "persisted in the struggle for freedom of thought and speech" with the spirit of "living for truth and dying for truth". Goethe lived throughout his life criticizing the feudal system and the drawbacks of capitalism, "expanding my self into the self of humanity, even though ultimately it was the same failure and downfall". Nakajima's literary career overlapped with the invasion of China, and was regarded as an "artistic resistance group". When he was at the First High School, he published a work criticizing the Japanese police's massacre of Koreans. During his colonial experiences, he witnessed the violence of the colonial power towards the colonies, and throughout his life, he thought about other ways of coexistence between the self and the other in addition to violence and exclusion. When he was the secretary of the Japanese language editor in Southeast Asia, his life was painful. In a letter to his wife, he vehemently criticized the meaningless of textbook compilation and the cruelty of the education in Southeast Asian schools. He understood that the other of society

could not be changed overnight, but he still took on the “responsibility of the other” through sincere writing. As Levinas said: “When others appear, it is difficult for a person to remain silent about this; one must say something to him... This speaking is a response, an answer for him, and it is to be responsible for him.” Nakajima precisely understood this, and thus did not want to remain silent, constantly speaking for “the other”. Also because he still wanted to be responsible for this society despite all the obstacles, he found resonance across time and space with Goethe and Spinoza.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis demonstrates that in *The Wondrous Deeds of the Bodhisattva*, Atsushi Nakajima reinterprets the traditional plot of *Journey to the West* as a narrative of subject formation under the conditions of existential crisis. Sandy, who constantly doubts his own existence and cannot achieve a stable understanding of the self, becomes the key figure through whom Nakajima reveals the complex relationship between the “Self” and the “Other.” His spiritual journey shows that the self is not an originally complete and independent entity, but is formed through gaze, speech, recognition, and ethical interaction with the Other. In this process, the opposition between the human and the monstrous is especially significant. Monsters, who can transform themselves and freely cross the boundary between self and other, are unable to fully understand the tragic limitation of human existence. Human beings, by contrast, become capable of compassion, moral responsibility, and the pursuit of truth precisely because of their weakness, finitude, and inability to arbitrarily change their place in the world. In this sense, Tang Monk becomes for Sandy an ethical model of existence based on the acceptance of necessity and responsibility for all living beings.

The comparison between Nakajima’s artistic conception and the ideas of Levinas, Spinoza, and Goethe further shows that “responsibility for the Other” in the story is not a secondary moral requirement, but the foundation of genuine subjectivity. Freedom is achieved not through the denial, assimilation, or domination of the Other, but through the recognition of alterity, the acceptance of the world as necessity, and the willingness to respond to another being. It is through this ethical awakening that

Sandy gradually overcomes his alienation and “demonized” state. Thus, *The Wondrous Deeds of the Bodhisattva* may be regarded as a philosophical and literary exploration of human self-consciousness in a time of historical and existential crisis. Through the image of Sandy, Nakajima shows that the path to self-realization passes through the Other, and that the highest form of self-knowledge presupposes not the subject’s closure within itself, but its ethical openness to the world. This perspective allows us to reassess the place of Nakajima’s work in Japanese modernist literature and to reveal its connection with universal questions of responsibility, freedom, and human dignity.

### **References**

1. Kiire F. *The Complete Works of Atsushi Nakajima*. Vol. 2. Tokyo: Chikuma Bunko, 2022. P. 116.
2. Kiire F. *The Complete Works of Atsushi Nakajima*. Vol. 2. Tokyo: Chikuma Bunko, 2022. P. 167–168.
3. Lacan J. *Écrits*. Shanghai: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2001. P. 198.
4. Sugioka A. *A Study of The Wondrous Deeds of the Bodhisattva and The Birth of the Monk Wujing: Atsushi Nakajima and His “Journey to the South Seas”* // *Doshisha Literature*. 2004. No. 60. P. 67.
5. Ishii K. *A Study of Atsushi Nakajima’s Literature: From the Perspective of Representing Consciousness: Doctoral dissertation*. Tokyo: Waseda University, 2022. P. 7.
6. Fu S. X. *The Rational Tragedy Faust: A History of the Human Soul and the Spirit of the Age* // *Foreign Languages Bimonthly*. 2004. No. 2. P. 92–93.