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## Literature and the Remnants of Feudal Ideology in the Meiji Period: An Analysis of Ogai, Ichiyo, and Soseki

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Literature and the Remnants of Feudal Ideology in the Meiji Period:  
An Analysis of Ogai, Ichiyo, and Soseki

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by  
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## **Introduction**

In the late feudal era, political corruption of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1600 – 1868) led Japan to a great national crisis: Japan was unable to resist the coercion of America, Britain, France, and Russia and signed unequal treaties. In Japan, it became impossible to control the feudal state, and the social contradictions escalated, as uprisings of poor farmers and the urban poor grew restless. In order to fix the serious political and economic crisis, Japan's new rulers implemented a political reform -- the Meiji Restoration, which established the political system of a monarch and ended the feudal rule of three hundred years of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

The Meiji Restoration was a half bourgeois-democratic revolution, and after the reform, feudalism remained a powerful force in society resulting in two prominent phenomena in the social development of modern Japanese capitalism. The first was the joint rule of the feudalistic aristocracy and the powerful bourgeoisie of industry and commerce. Then there was the extreme imbalance of economic development, and the coexistence of capitalistic urban economy and the feudal backward rural economy.

Japan's modern literature also developed along with the evolution of modern capitalism. It was strongly influenced by western culture, and in only a few decades (from the Meiji Restoration to 1920s), matched the progress that European modern literature experienced from the Renaissance to the beginning of twentieth century. The weakness of the modern Japanese bourgeoisie was expressed through reliance on a feudal emperor system. The rapid development of modern Japanese society resulted in modern

Japanese literature presenting two distinct phenomena: on one hand there were multiple factions and diverse contents; on the other hand is progressive, democratic literature could not gain strength due to weak political power under rapidly developing and changing social conditions. However, Japan's modern progressive democratic literature still developed in the social struggle of anti-feudalism and anti-capitalism became a pioneer in modern revolutionary literature. (Keene, Dawn to The West 5)

Japan's modern literature experienced a period of enlightenment in the Meiji era. In this period, the fields of politics, academics, social thought, and scientific culture developed in order to cater to the Meiji Restoration and meet the requirements of the enlightenment. But literature itself had not yet been greatly developed, and many literature and translated works served as the tools of enlightenment. Before and after the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (1877- 1884), modern literature began to rise. In 1890, Mori Ogai published the story *Dancing Girl (Maihime)*, which describes the weakness of intellectuals. In the last part of the work, the protagonist, a young overseas student named Toyotaro abandons his German lover Elise under the temptation of high official positions and riches, and returns to his country from Berlin, through reaching a compromise with reactionary forces. The work shows the sorrows of the person pursuing personal freedom after the romantic failure. *Dancing Girl* opened the way for Japan's modern romantic literature. (Keene 7)

After the First Sino-Japanese War, Japan's modern literature completed its change from romanticism to realism. This transformation is reflected in the prose. (Keene 6) The

young female writer Higuchi Ichiyo (1872-1896) is famous for short stories; her representative works include *Umōre ki*(1892), *Nigorie*(1895), *Jūsan'ya*(1895) and *Takekurabe*(1896). Ichiyo was from the lower classes and experienced the bitterness and suffering of the lower classes in Japan's modern society. She sympathetically described the sorrow of prostitutes, maids, vendors and small craftsman at the bottom of Japan's capitalist society, especially the tragic fate of low-status women torn and trampled by that society. They struggled in the dark, and suffered oppression and humiliation. Ichiyo has used sincere feeling, delicate and fine writing style, and her works emit a feeling of strong lyric. She is a writer with her own unique features in Japan's modern literature.

After 1900, Japan's modern literature continued to mature. Victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904 – 1905) accelerated the development of Japan's capitalist economy, but the increasing social gap between the rich and poor and sharpening class contradiction deepened the gap between the individual and society. This prompted writers' reflections on social issues, as they explored personal status and prospects in social life, and to calmly observe and analyze social problems. Under this social background, Japan's modern naturalistic literature movements rose. On the one hand, it accepted the negative aspects of Western European naturalistic literature, advocating the display of human instinct, to expose all the ugliness of the world. These works have much vulgar content, and created great harm to Japan's modern literature; on the other hand, because the writers were in dark society, they inherited the spirit of personal freedom advocated by the romanticism, and created literary works not satisfied with reality, that revealed the

darkness of the society, with vivid tendency of realism. (Keene 7)

A man who rose abruptly in Japanese literature and developed his own discipline was Natsume Soseki. He wrote *I Am a Cat* (*Wagahai wa neko de aru*), *Kokoro* and other works, to reveal the social evils of the Meiji period in acrid and satirical style. Natsume Soseki's works with strong criticism and naturalistic writers' works of the realistic tendency, all accumulated the trend of Japanese modern critical realism literature, which promotes the development of Japanese modern literature.

In brief, Japan's modern realistic literature achieved prosperity in this period. This project is aimed at analyzing three representative works by Mori Ogai, Higuchi Ichiyo and Natsume Soseki to reflect the bitterness of lower people's lives in Meiji society, and to describe the anguished lives of the petty bourgeois intellectuals, who manifested Japanese people's dissatisfaction and revolt in the dark reality of Japan's modern society. However, due to the lack of a clear social consciousness, these novels only reflect the darkness of people's lives, without solutions, their social protest is also negative and hopeless.

This project will be divided into three chapters. In Chapter One, based on the novel *Dancing Girl*, first presents the social background and life experience of the author Mori Ogai at the beginning. With the history of the great interfusion of feudalism and modern times as the historical background of this novel, I analyse the social significance of the protagonist Toyotaro's life in such background. In addition, this chapter analyzes on the heroine Elise's character and image as well as her values, discusses her courageousness

and resoluteness, her aspiration to freedom, pursuit of knowledge, enlightenment, and efforts to change her own destiny, and highlights Elise's staunch heart in love under her weak appearance. In comparison with Toyotaro, who is an obsequious representative of the feudal ruling class, Elise can be regarded as a symbol of the modern liberalism.

In Chapter Two, through analysis of the female role in the *Child's Play* and integrating the background of transition towards the commodity economy in early Meiji Period, the inner world of Higuchi Ichiyo in a specific stage is explored from the perspective of feminism. Under such specific transition stage, this chapter carries out the awakening and liberation issues of Japanese female. Based on the female role analyses in *Child's Play*, when the old feudal system did the last struggle in the early Meiji Period and the society transitioned to the commodity economy, regardless of which situations female stay, who had one thing in common—they were unable to master their own destinies independently. In addition, they were lack of ideological modernity, for tolerated the existence of prostitution law system, and they were at their husbands' beck and call and paid more attention to money rather than moral constraints. Accordingly such situation derived from the social norms that money and patriarchal system dominated.

In Chapter Three, I introduce three definitions of Natsume Soseki's individualism for clarifying that Natsume Soseki's literary ideas in Meiji era are taking egotistic thinking as the center, to form independent individualism, deny blindly follow "others-centered" thinking, and advocate "I was an independent Japanese, not a slave to England, and it was

incumbent upon me as a Japanese to possess at least this degree of self-respect.” (Soseki, Soseki on Individualism ‘Watakushi no Kojinshugi’, 34) so that individual’s dominant position could be established.

This chapter seeks to analyze the relationship between Sensei’s uncle and Sensei, the relationship between Seisei and K, and the relationship between the foster parent and K. We could easily find that everyone should assume the corresponding obligations and responsibilities and respect others while exercising the power and financial resources. However, people regard *Kokoro* as tragedy, because the characters in the article do not perform their obligations and responsibilities and their behaviors violate the Natsume Soseki’s individualism. The tragedy of *Kokoro* is caused by the collapse of individualism.

Through analyzing these three chapters, we can see that how Japanese people developed and behaved in the feudal society, and observe the change of people’s inner world in the dark reality of Japan’s modern society.

## **Mori Ogai and his *Dancing Girl***

Mori Ogai was a novelist, translator, critic, and thinker in the Meiji period, and a literary giant along with the critical realist writer Natsume Soseki. In 1884 Ogai traveled to Germany to continue his medical studies and learn military hygiene, and he remained in Europe until 1888. Through the experience of four-year of study in Germany, Ogai read widely in European literature and philosophy that exerted a far-reaching impact on his literary creation, and even on his philosophy and values. After his baptism in modern European civilization and the spirit of art and literature, the traditional ideas and educational philosophy accepted in his childhood began to shake. (Keene, Dawn to The West 356)

After the Meiji Restoration, Japan broke its national seclusion, and actively learned humanistic spirit and advanced science and technology from Europe; civilization had a great impact on the spirit and the material worlds of that time. The government, intellectuals and businessmen began to follow the advanced examples in the fields of economy, politics and culture in Europe. But all these were only superficial phenomena; feudal consciousness was not so easy to be civilized.

The background of the writing of the novel *Dancing Girl (Maihime)* is in the maelstrom that resulted from the impact of Eastern and Western cultures. Toyotaro was brought up in such a social environment, so we can say that the feudal official career values and rank consciousness was forged in his blood and remained in his mind.

His German girlfriend Elise lives in a free and open Western world. The

consciousness of democracy and freedom has been involved in each aspect of German society. Such environment also brings up Elise's freedom and bravery, with more openness and nature in character. We can learn from Ogai that in such a conservative environment, freedom was prohibited at that time, and so is the combination of two persons with uneven identity status. Thus the freedom to choose their own spouse for the feudal bureaucrat and a dancing girl must become a tragedy. Through *Dancing Girl*, I investigate how Toyotaro and Elise suffer and change under the pressures of different social environments, studying Elise's individual character and image from different aspects have an important value to comprehensively understand the purpose of *Dancing Girl*.

### **Toyotaro, A Japanese Student in Germany**

Toyotaro had no choice to do what he wanted, and so he could only listen to his mother and superiors. "Thanks to a very strict education at home since childhood, my studies lacked nothing, despite the fact that I had lost my father at an early age. When I studied at the school in my former fief, and in the preparatory course for the university in Tokyo, and later in the Faculty of Law, the name Ota Toyotaro was always at the top of the list. Being especially high in the estimation of the head of my department, I was then given orders to travel to Europe and study matters connected with my particular section. Stirred by the thought that now I had the opportunity to make my name and raise my

family fortunes, I was not too sorry to leave even my mother, although she was over fifty.”

(Ogai, *Dancing Girl* 152) Toyotaro was born in a scholarly traditional family, and comprehensively studied the Confucian classics since childhood, and was deeply influenced by Confucianism. This family education formed his values of pursuing reputation and status. Before Toyotaro went abroad to Germany, his mother had big hopes for him to be great, and he was highly valued by his superior. Toyotaro thus had no choices; in order to live up to his mother and superiors, he always studied extremely hard to become successful.

At that time, after two industrial reforms from the 1830s to the 1870s, Germany went through a rapid economic development. The huge indemnity in the Franco Prussian War greatly stimulated the further development of the capitalist economy in Germany.

When Toyotarō went out from the seclusion of Japan, his life came to the colorful metropolis of Berlin with a feudal consciousness, but when he began to experience the modern city, his thoughts and ideas began to subtly change. The respect for human nature and the enlightenment of rational thinking tried to break and change people's old and imprisoned thinking, advocated people's understanding of their own enlightenment, which induced Toyotaro's desire for himself at that time, which resonated with Toyotaro “My eyes were dazzled by its brilliance, my mind was dazed by the riot of color. The tall, broad-shouldered officers in their colorful dress uniform, and the attractive girls, their hair made up in the Parisian style, were everywhere a delight to the eye.” (Ogai 152) As a result of material development, national democratic freedom and scientific and cultural

thought were been unprecedentedly liberated, and the spiritual civilization of capitalism was developed. As a foreign student living in Germany, Toyotaro saw and experienced the splendid civilization and colorful life in this foreign country. Local people talked about things totally different from the people in Japan. Different visions and sound of a new environment made Toyotaro have a sense of assimilating his customs and behaviors to the new environment, and start to doubt him self.

After being sent to Berlin for further studies, Toyotaro studied politics at school, and worked in the Ministry of Justice. “But among the students studying at Berlin at the time was an influential group with whom I did not see eye to eye. Attributing the fact that I neither drank nor played billiards with them to apparent stubbornness and self-restraint on my part, they ridiculed and envied me.” (Ogai 153 154) He blamed his circumstance on all the people around him; sights, sound, smells that surrounded him were new and liberal and influenced him a great deal; Toyotaro gained a great sense of his self-awareness, and decided to cut him off from the assaults of the outside world, instead of being a “mechanical man”.

Toyotaro came to Europe in search of new knowledge and finally awakened. “My mother, I thought to myself, had tried to make me into a walking dictionary, and my department head had tried to turn me into an incarnation of the law. The former I might just be able to stand, but the latter was out of the question. Up to then I had answered him with scrupulous care even in quite trifling matter, but from that time on, I often argued in my reports that one should not be bothered with petty legal details. Once a person

grasped the spirit of the law, I grandly said, everything would solve itself.” (Ogai 153)

His value system was shifted by the powers of capitalism, and he realized that he himself was just a tool ordered by his superior, and was nothing more than a living dictionary. Now, he wanted to be a real person with flesh and blood. However, identity and position was a measure of being successful at that time in Japan. Under this sort of social order never allowed the Toyotaro to judge between the different value systems. Since his value of personal pursuits conflicted with his old values, his weak will started to change.

The liberal atmosphere of Berlin aroused his aversion to feudalistic thoughts and bureaucracy. “Ever since my youth I had followed the advice of my elders and kept to the path of learning and obedience. If I had succeeded, it was not through being courageous. I might have seemed capable of arduous study, but I had deceived not only myself but others too. I had simply followed a path that I was made to follow.” (Ogai 154)

He didn’t know precisely what would do in the future. However, he realized that whatever he does, it’s going to be his decision. Furthermore, this sort of discovery of deciding for yourself of how you’re going to live your own life is something that is a common problem among young Japanese intellectuals like Mori Ogai in his generation.

Gradually, Toyotaro found his “true self” with his own desire and decision and began to emerge from beneath his political persona. “I realized that I would be happy neither as a high-flying politician nor as a lawyer learning statutes off by heart and pronouncing sentence.” “In the university I abandoned the law lectures, and became more interested in history and literature; eventually I moved into the world of the arts” (Ogai 153) He was

led to immerse himself in history, literature and the arts. What is more, he came across a dancing girl at an old church at Klosterstrasse.

Toyotaro met a German dancing girl, Elise, and fell in love with her after helping her out of her financial problems and he takes up lodgings in her home. He was attracted by a sobbing girl's appearance the first time he met Elise at an old church, as his description: "Only a poet could really do her justice. Her eyes were blue and clear, but filled with a wistful sadness." (Ogai 155) Soon he walked slowly up the path, inquiring what is wrong with her, and learns that her father had recently passed away and that her employer was trying to force her into marriage with the condition that he will pay off her family's debt, and the girl's mother was extremely unhappy, who scolded and beat her for refusing the proposal. Toyotaro expressed his sympathy, and formed a relationship with Elise with sort of compassion.

Freedom for love was a kind of luxury, and it would become a victim of feudal social order. "My superior was in any case resentful that I was neglecting my proper studies, and so he eventually told the Legation to abolish my post and terminate my employment. The Minister at the Legation passed this order on, advising me that they would pay the fare if I returned home immediately, but that I could expect no official help if I decided to stay on." (Ogai 157) The relationship between them both offended Toyotaro's mother and her love for education, and also the ancient institution of marriage. Both his mother and superior objected to Toyotaro and Elise's relationship, and pressured him to leave her by persuading him with old-fashioned thinking. His mother even forced him to break off

with the dancing girl with threats. "The death of the mother who was so dear to me. I cannot bear to repeat here what she wrote. Tears prevent my pen from writing more." (Ogai 157) Silence means more than words at this moment. The author does not narrate the content of letter that doesn't mean the letter is not important. Instead, Mori Ogai would like to leave readers infinite space to image and realize how did Toyotaro offended his mother's love for education and feels shame and pain toward to his mother due to his relationship with German dancing girl.

When Toyotaro was engaged in the relationship with Elise, he was extraordinarily cautious. He did not want to reveal his relationship to people around him due to the disparaging remarks and misunderstanding. In addition, Toyotaro was in a weak position; in the capital as an Asian person, there was prejudices to some extent. After his employer found out about this relationship, he felt Toyotaro's behavior was unacceptable, and fired him. Elise was shocked and frustrated when she found out Toyotaro's untimely dismissal. Since she was afraid that if her mother knew he had lost financial support for his studies she would want nothing more to do with him.

The feudal social order cannot be violated by anyone; the consequences of challenging the law personally were isolation by society. People assumed that Toyotaro was seeking pleasure with the actresses from the theater, and reported him to his superior; afterwards, his employment was terminated, which meant that he lost his mainstay for living. Meanwhile, he found out about his mother's death, which was extremely painful.

## **Elise, A Young German Dancer**

Mori Ogai spent a lot of work on describing and making the female image of Elise. This section will center on the dancing girl Elise, analyze her image, love and values, extend her historical stage and the social class represented by her through analysis on a figure, and present it in the society that the female did not have right to speak, as well as the lady's precious sincerity and loyalty. Under the beautification of Mori Ogai, Elise does not seem to be from the poor family. She had an extraordinary refined and beautiful face, and was obsessed with Toyotaro. Finally, she became mad. Her unfortunate destiny makes the readers show deep sympathy towards Elise. Elise also has left the impression of perfect image but miserable destiny to people.

The first presence of Elise was standing in front of the old church. She caught Toyotaro's attention when he was walking in the dark road. The man is a bureaucrat who was expected to stand out was from nobility with outstanding family. Although the lady was beautified to be delicate and pure, she was still a daughter from the poor family, who was worried about the bread tomorrow. Such persons with completely different backgrounds encountered each other quite unexpectedly. Therefore, the author has laid sufficient bedding.

Elise was born in a poor family; her father is a tailor, her mother: "She had hardly finished speaking when the door was roughly pulled open by an old woman. Although her hair was graying and her brow clearly showed the traces of poverty and suffering, it

was not an evil face. She was wearing an old dress of some wool and cotton material and had on some dirty slippers.” (Ogai 155) We can imagine how poor they were. Elise didn't have formal schooling from youth, and went to study with dancing teacher when she was only fifteen. Afterwards, she entered into the Viktoria Theater and officially became a dancing girl. By means of hard work and her menial job to earn very little money she could give financial support to her family.

Her parents were likely to come from the countryside; they had a humble life in Berlin as workers at the bottom of the society. In Berlin, they had no relatives; no financial support could be given to her by relatives or friends. “I suppose you don't know Schaumberg, the man we were relying on for my father's funeral tomorrow. He's the manager at the Viktoria Theater. I have been working for him for two years so I thought he was bound to help us; but he took advantage of our misfortune and tried to force me to do what he wished.” (Ogai 156) The death of her father was probably due to a long illness; “My father has just died and we have to bury him tomorrow. But we don't have a penny in the house.” (Ogai 155) Elise could not even afford her father's funeral expenses. She eagerly would like to find a noble person who could give her family financial support to have a secure life. In desperation, Elise had to turn to the boss of the ballroom for help; the manager at Viktoria Theater wanted Elise to give her body as an exchange. In the eyes of her mother who experienced all the hardship, giving up her daughter's chastity was a decision to lose a pawn to save a castle. In addition, Elise was not only at the bottom of society, but also without good education.

However, the difficult environment makes Elise stronger; adhere to her self, and the pursuit of freedom. In contrast, Toyotaro does not need to worry about clothes and food at all from an early age. He has outstanding knowledge and literacy and the experience of studying abroad. However, his heart was full of a variety of luxury contradictory hesitation and uncertainty, and even irresponsible despicable thoughts. Compared with the submissive representative of the feudal ruling class, Toyotaro and Elise can be said to be a symbol of modern liberalism.

As Elise's mother, she took Elise's beauty as a tool to obtain benefits; she seemed to take it for granted. "My mother beat me because I did not agree to his proposal" (Ogai 155) The aged mother, who knew hardships in the world, thought it was also a good choice for Elise to choose the manager of the theater, to have a secure life although Elise couldn't be legally married to him. The difference in opinions between Mother and daughter resulted in subsequent quarrels. Although Elise was very obedient to her mother, she firmly resisted on this issue, no compromise reached on both sides. Finally, her mother took out the authority of the parents to force Elise with violence so she had to surrender.

Elise was standing in front of the church, and later she brought Toyotaro home. "On the table in the middle of the room was spread a beautiful woolen cloth on which were arranged two books, a photograph album, and a vase with a bunch of flowers. They seemed somehow too expensive for the place." (Ogai 156) The first scene Toyotaro saw is Elise's mother was cleaning the rooms and preparing for the manager of the theater's

visit. Apparently, Elise obeyed her mother's decision, she was still unbearable, and so she got out of her family. The girl who loved reading and fantasy came to pray for God's help in front of the Mother of God. Desperately, the girl asked God to help her out from the despair. Therefore, the presence of Toyotaro was like God's tender care for the poor girl.

The situation when Elise blurted out "Help me!" (Ogai 155) Toyotaro asked: "Why are you crying." (Ogai 155) sounds more natural to reader. In Elise's eyes, the presence of Toyotaro was like the Prince Charming in the fairy tales, rescuing a damsel in distress. Elise trusted Toyotaro and bet her fate on this savior, so to speak, Elise felt grateful who expressed her gratitude with love and affection. "You look a kind sort of person." (Ogai 155) This was Elise's intuition, it was a kind of subjective one-sided wishful intuition, or it was a strong expectation for her bets, she had no other choices except believing this man.

It is inconceivable to believe that Toyotaro would take the initiative to strike up a conversation with Elise. "Her eyes were blue and clear, but filled with a wistful sadness. They were shaded by long eyelashes which half hid her tears. Why was in that in one glance over her shoulder she pierced the defenses of my heart?" (Ogai 155) This is indeed affection with sympathy and compassion, in which we can detect that a sense of adventure Toyotaro have. When Elise was crying for assistance: ""She dissolved into tears again. I gazed at her as she hung her head and trembled." (Ogai 155) This is a mental activity that shows Toyotaro's sympathy and a curiosity to female.

Toyotaro looked at Elise again when they arrived her home, he seemed to have lost

all will as he was drawn to her: “In the lamplight her pallid face had a faint blush, and the slender beauty of her hands and feet seemed hardly to belong to the daughter of a poor family.” (Ogai 156) Elise’s appearance stimulated Toyotaro’s senses. Although Toyotaro liked Elise due to her charm, in fact this sort of affection comes with a sense of sympathy.

Elise’s mother left Elise and Toyotaro alone in a room, which might be better to work Elise’s charm to Toyotaro. Because her mother did not want to cry with Elise for helps. Elise stand by the table, and started to ask Toyotaro for help: “I promise to pay you back from the little I earn, even if I have to go hungry.” (Ogai 156) To show her sincerity of borrowing money, Elise had to gain sympathy and beg for help. Toyotaro generously gave the only two or three Marks and his pocket watch to Elise. It was this pocket watch that linked the two lost souls together. From the behavior, we can see the humble identity of the redeemer, at the same time; we can feel Elise’s gratitude for Toyotarō.

Elise met with Toyotaro, and gradually came out from the world of ignorance through the bridge of education; she accepted knowledge, and pursued progress and freedom. Toyotaro becomes Elise’s teacher in Germany, and wants to make her a better person. Not receiving good education because of poverty since her childhood, Elise had a sharp gap in parentage, cultural background with Toyotaro. “But the life of a dancer is precarious. As the writer Hacklander has said, they are today’s slaves, tied by a poor wage and driven hard with rehearsals in the daytime and performance at night.” (Ogai 157) Toyotaro did not abandon Elise for her humble identity of as a dancer, and became

guided her on the way to become a girl who could match him. Elise liked reading from her childhood, but what she read were the vulgar novels rented from the bookstore. Toyotaro lent the books to her, making her gradually appreciate the fun of reading; corrected her errors in speech, not long after, the wrongly written or mispronounced characters also reduced. With their interaction and communication became more frequent, their friendship between teacher and student became the relationship.

Elise lived under German capitalist society, society and her family did not give Elise to display their own stage, did not have a good education without economic security and even food and clothing was not guaranteed. Precisely these difficult environments so that these women are stronger, adhere to the self, the pursuit of freedom. In *Dancing Girl*, Elise represents poor women who did not have the right of speech in capitalist society, but with sort of real love and loyalty. Elise was a girl who dared to hate and love, her love for Toyotaro was very loyal, her concept of love was involved in her life; the denial of her love was to deny the meaning of her life. “The salary they offered was a pittance, but by changing my lodgings and eating lunch at a cheaper restaurant, I would just be able to make ends meet. While I was trying to decide, Elise showed her love by throwing me a lifeline. I don’t know how she did it, but she managed to win over her mother, and I was accepted as a lodger in their rooms. It was not long before Elise and I found ourselves pooling our meager resources, and managed, even in the midst of all our troubles, to enjoy life.” (Ogai 158) After Toyotaro helps her out of her financial problems takes up lodgings in her home, they fell in love. Elise must was willing to do whatever it takes to

love Toyotaro due to his kindness and help.

During his most difficult times in life, instead of leaving him alone, Elise doubly cared for him and gave him favors, even convincing her mother to have a place for Toyotaro to live, who was caring for him just as family with no doubt. When Toyotaro was fired, Elise told him to hide this fact and not tell her mother, because Elise was afraid that if her mother knew Toyotaro had lost financial support mother would distance Elise from him.

Elise's gentleness gave Toyotaro power and support on both mentally and materially, which brought him great comfort. She even convinced her mother to allow she going to Russia with Toyotaro when necessary. "I quarrel a lot with Mother. But she has given in, now she sees how much more determined I am than I used to be. When I travel home with you, she's talking of going to stay with some distant relatives who live on a farm near Stettin." (Ogai 162) This kind of courage and daring which captures Elise's good nature and her concept of love of being considerate for others. When betrayed by love and promise, pain swept her soul like a storm, when her love and her lover fled away without her, what was left behind was the permanently non-healed scar.

From the aspect of the plot in *Dancing Girl*, Elise's love seems to be helpless for Toyotaro's career development and even became a political career barrier, because Toyotaro was a person who was keen on fame. Because of his interaction with Elise, Toyotaro had been criticized by others, and could not put down the burden to pursue his career because of the presence of Elise. However, from the perspective of tasting of the

original text, we will find that Elise had a positive and favorable impact on Toyotaro's future career development.

After Toyotaro lived in Elise's house, he became a newspaper reporter and was responsible for news coverage of politics, literature and art, which was quite different from the former dull and boring laws and regulations. "Yes, I neglected my studies. But I did become expert in a different sphere-popular education, for this was more advanced in Germany than in any other European country. No sooner had I become a correspondent than I was constantly reading and writing about the variety of excellent discussions appearing in the newspapers and journals, and I brought to this work the perception gained from my studies as a university student. My knowledge of the world, which up to then had been rather limited, thus became much broader, and I reached a stage undreamed of by most of my compatriots studying there." (Ogai 159) Now he dealt with the changing political trends and the analysis and comprehensive report on the new ideological trend of literature and art. In this process, he understood the German political economy, his interest, through this experience, Toyotaro had a new understanding of the German political and economic views, broadening his horizons.

As we can see, different from the life of ordinary foreign students, Toyotaro's study life abroad not only improved his professional level, but also increased the sense of the mind of being a person with own desire. It was Elise's love that played a role of adding fuel to the flames in the later political career of Toyotaro. On the other hand, we also can subjectively see Elise's paranoia and blindness in love. She put her whole heart into love,

excessive reliance on Toyotaro, felt Toyotaro was everything for, and almost did not leave any retreat for her own. She lived in the ideal and romantic world. “ ‘You cannot imagine how happy I am!’ She said. ‘I wonder if our child will have your dark eyes. Ah, your eyes that I have only been able to dream about.’” (Ogai 164) In preparing swaddling clothes, she imagined the child's black eyes, she thought she would be happy to go to church with Toyotaro for the child's baptism, she put all her future hope on Toyotaro, and she even betted their child's fate on Toyotaro. Elise thought Toyotaro could return her love because she loved him so much, but she didn't know what Toyotaro thought, nor did she have a deeper understanding of him. She found she did not understand Toyotaro's true feelings until she finally found Toyotaro did not love her as she imagined.

In the normal love relationship, the two persons should be independent, giving each other more living space. Otherwise, when life suffered setbacks, excessive dependence was just like putting salt on the wound, the blow would be infinite, eventually completely defeating the couple. It is true that, in love, to love a person with full energy is a noble character, but when encountered abandoning or betrayal, Elise would lose her way and the collapse in spirit was also an inevitable result. We cannot deny that Elise was a striking self, conscious woman, resisting in the temptation from the boss and high pressure from her mother, she dared to make her own decision for her destiny. She was faithful to the true voice of her heart, had the courage to love from the heart.

Elise made her own choice to be with Toyotaro by herself, which means she would like to make her own decision, striving for independence. In the traditional patriarchal

society, women did not have the right of speech and social status. However, Elise was able to act according to her will that is admirable to readers. At the end of *Dancing Girl*, She had jumped up from her chair, her face ashen pale, and cring out, “ ‘Toyotaro! How could you deceive me!’” she had suddenly collapsed.” (Ogai 165) Even the paranoia and blindness in love also underlined her absolutely pure love. It is not difficult to find a staunch heart in the weak appearance.

### **Aizawa, Toyotaro’s Friend**

When Toyotaro moved into Elise’s home, they started to have their own beautiful life, and Elise was pregnant. However, he received a letter from his friend Aizawa Kenkichi urging him to return to Japan. Toyotaro experiences the most privileged echelons of society, through Count Amakata forces Toyotaro's fate to turn, by doing translation work for the Count, which took him to Russia.

Aizawa convinced Toyotaro to abandon Elise for Japan: “As for the girl, she might be sincerely in love with me and our passions deeply involved, but there was certainly no meeting of minds. I had merely allowed myself to slip into what was an accepted practice. I must decide to give her up, he urged.” (Ogai 161) In Aizawa’s opinions, the free love between man and woman is not worthy of lingering. Orthodox love should be originated from great capability. Toyotaro’s love for Elise resulted from momentary feeling and laziness, which is not true love. Toyotaro, who grew up under strict family education,

listened to Aizawa's suggestion, re-started to make contributions and showed scholarly honor.

In a winter of 1888, Elise was fainted on stage, and was helped home by her friends. But she felt sick and couldn't able to eat. For this situation, Toyotaro shows that he is very upset, and what we can see from his icy chagrin are helpless and regret. "Even without this my future was uncertain. What could I possibly do if it were true?" (Ogai 159) He treats Elise who has become his wife as a burden, an awkward trouble, and he thinks that her pregnancy drags him, or he does not intend to share joys and sorrows with Elise as a couple, so as to it appears to be no wonder that he promises to cut off their relationship after listens to the advice of his friend Aizawa.

The flabby Toyotaro holds the equivocal attitude towards his friend and Elise, and this is very irresponsible for others and himself. "Life was pleasant even in the midst of poverty and Elise's love was hard to reject. Being so weak-wiled I could make no decision there and then, so I merely promised to follow my friend's advice for a while, and try and break off the affair." (Ogai 161) He called "Elise's love", which shows the love of Toyotaro to Elise was produced under special circumstance, so when they are faced with difficulty or the circumstance is changed, this passive and malformed love will lose its foundation and is easily shaken.

Afterwards, Toyotaro traveled to Russia with the Count. When he received a letter from Elise "But I had not forgotten Elise. How could I? She sent me letters every day." (Ogai 162) When he came back from Russia, Elise met him and cried out and gave a hug

to Toyotaro. “Up to now I had prevaricated. At times the thought of Japan and the desire to seek fame seemed to overcome my love, but at this precise moment all my hesitation left me and I hugged her.” (Ogai 163) The heart of high position identity and fame that has infiltrated into Toyotaro’s bones will depress no longer when meets chances, and this drives him to step into his career again. The wavering Toyotaro who is worrying about his gain and loss cannot live for himself as his flabby and selfish personality. Even though it will leave lifelong regret, he cannot decide his future according to personal will. The decision he made between living together with Elise and even leaving Elise to come back Japan finally is not the embodiment of his real will.

At last, faced with Elise who was pregnant, the cowardly Toyotaro has no courage to directly tell her the truth, but tells Elise that he has decided to go back Japan with his friend Aizawa. Whether cowardly, guilty or regretful, he has kept out of the affair. The writer arranges the ending in this way, thus shows the inherent weak humanity and tragic color of Toyotaro. It also reflects an evasive and elusive national character with no responsibility.

## **Conclusion**

In fact, it can be said that Elise is healthy, but a multitude of feudal courtiers who are presented by Toyotaro are mad and declining, and they are held by backward order.

Although Elise was from humbler background and did low jobs, her stability,

determination and courage and the aspiration to pursue freedom in the face of miserable fate are the humanistic spirit, which still lack of in Japan at that time. In the soul, Elise is the spokesperson of a free age, and she is the female with self-awakening awareness to pursuit personality liberty. She is brave in resisting the restriction of fate, and refuses the material temptation of the manager of Viktoria Theater. When her mother forces her by violence to obey the boss, this delicate girl still makes the greatest efforts to resist. This forms distinct contrast with Toyotaro who is obsequious, has no courage and ability to make choices, and is decent on the surface but is treated as a tool by others. The personal glory of Elise reflected in this contrast is worth discussing and thinking about deeply.

## **Higuchi Ichiyo and her *Child's Play***

The Meiji Restoration put Japan on the trajectory of modernization and capitalism. In that period, Japan carried out reforms in various social institutions and ideology also changed fundamentally. During that important and special historical period, what happened to Japanese females' ideology and social status? This is a problem worthy of exploration. During the period of Meiji Enlightenment, Japanese females experienced significant historical transformation in educational thought. For example, they began to stress that both males and females must receive education and make common progress, which created an opportunity for females to receive education and also promoted Japanese females' ideological development and change. However, social reform failed to correspondingly improve Japanese females' status. On the contrary, to maintain its dominant position and accelerate Japan's modernization, the Meiji government made a series of systems including public prostitution, a women's education system based on the idea an understanding wife and loving mother, and a patriarchal family system. These "enlightened" policies seriously constrained Japanese modern females' freedom and development, thus further ascertaining the male-oriented social form. As a result, some awakened and advanced females began to realize society's injustice towards females, and thus they accused society and constantly explored female issues. Among them, Higuchi Ichiyo, as one of the representatives, was an outstanding Japanese woman writer and poet in the late 1990s, one of the early pioneers of literature in modern Japan, and as well the first influential woman writer in Japan's modern history. (Robert Lyons Danly, In the

## Shade of Spring Leaves 14)

Higuchi Ichiyo was born in a declining aristocratic family on May 2, 1872. Ichiyo was her pen name; she came into the world as Higuchi Natsuko. Since her childhood she had allowed to engage in the formal study of poetry and classic literatures. Her parents found the best place to study poetry for her, a school in Koishikawa run by the poetess Nakajima Utako. (Danly 15) At the age of 14 she entered the Haginoya, the “Bush-Clover Cabin,” and started to study waka in Nakajima Utako’s Haginoya. The school taught and nourished her classical knowledge and she discovered her literary talents. Ichiyo began to learn classic literatures such as *The Tale of Genji*, *Kokinshu*, *The Pillow Book* and so forth, which laid good foundation for her future literary creation. (Danly 65) However, after her elder brother and father passed away in succession, the 17-year-old Higuchi Ichiyo had to assume the heavy responsibility of supporting the family since her second elder brother Toranosuke lived separately and her elder sister was married. (Danly 21) Since then, for the sake of livelihood, she ran around and lived a poverty-stricken life with her mother and younger sister. At the beginning, Ichiyo wrote novels to make a living. She learned from Nakarai Tousui and entered the literary arena with his help. Hence, Ichiyo wrote novels to cater to the public for the purpose of making a living and support her family. After she broke up with Nakarai Tosui, Ichiyo’s life ushered in another turning point. Afterwards, to get rid of her living predicament, Ichiyo, with her family, moved to Ryusenji near the Hanayagi Street of Yoshiwara in Tokyo in 1893 where they found a “long house,” a block of row houses. There is a yard in the back;

beyond a leafy thicket, a dormitory where prostitutes live. (Danly, 30)

Ryusenji, the area they had settled on was in the center of the Shitamachi district, and a spot they had chosen in Ryusenji was notorious, since where was in the shadow of the pleasure quarters. Ichiyo's new neighbors were people who worked at famous brothels, such as rickshawmen, waitresses and bouncers. Almost everyone was involved in the business of the houses; they were related to the booming red-light industry. They sent their daughters who never quite had the experience of being a cocotte in the great establishments. In the quarter, every night there was a lady minstrel in black and yellow who plays songs of love suicide on her samisen. She ties a scarf around her hair, the typical "Yoshiwara-style." (Danly 91-94)

Ichiyo, with her family took what remained of the furniture to their friend Nishimura, who had agreed to give them help for selling everything in order to supply them for starting a grocery store. It was exactly during that period that Ichiyo started her literary creation in a real sense. Between December 1894 and February 1896, Ichiyo published more works and ushered in the "14 miraculous months" of literary creation by completing masterpieces like *Child's play*, *Nigorie* and *Jusan'ya*. (Danly 29)

Higuchi Ichiyo's literary career was divided into two totally different stages. Her works created at the first stage were detached from social reality and all of her masterpieces were created in the second stage. Female images in her creations, detached from social society, were simple and ideal in her mind. Through these works she expressed Japanese females' depressed emotions for the contradiction in human humanity,

morality and love in the past. At the later stage of creation, Higuchi Ichiyo began to depict the real world instead of a childish, miserable fantasy world, breaking the conventional constraint and pursuing her free way of creation. Correspondingly, character images also became complex and varied in the second stage of creation, which meant characters in her creations started to fight against the unfair fate rather than submit to destiny. (Hisako Tanaka, Monumenta Nipponicap 174 191 192)

However, Higuchi Ichiyo suffered from tuberculosis in 1896. Without being treated promptly, she passed away when she was 24. In her short writing career, Higuchi Ichiyo wrote a total of 22 stories, many diaries and more than 4,000 waka poems. Based on her hard life experience, Higuchi Ichiyo gave a detailed description to females and lower-class people's life in her works, mirroring social status at that time. (Tanaka 176)

*Child's Play*, created in the later period and published for the first time in 1895 is her best-known masterpiece. (Tanaka 185) The novel describes the emotional life as well as their different life paths of a group of young boys and girls near Hanayagi Street of Yoshiwara in Tokyo, Japan during the Meiji period in the 1920s. To be specific, Ichiyo portrayed leading characters including Midori, Nobu, and Shota to reflect their special mental state from adolescence to youth. At this important stage of physical and mental development, they were supposed to receive good education and cultivation, but the cruel living environment forced them to face the ugly adults' world, expose to the dark side of society, and breathe in the corrupt air. In such an environment, teenagers' innocent heart

were bound to be seriously damaged, so they had to face a dark future, which meant they were going to be either corroded or destroyed.

*Child's Play* describes young boys and girls, which is not just a literary work about children but criticizes social reality. Although *Child's Play* shapes adolescent boys and girls' images, it actually reveals two totally different worlds – children's world and adults' world – one is full of vitality and innocence, the other of chaos and fraud. Leading characters experienced the transformation from children's world to adults' world, namely, an intermediate zone between two worlds. While keeping childish innocence, children were affected by adults' world and infected with adults' bad habits. The innocent world of these young boys and girls depicted by Ichiyo was in stark contrast to adults' world to which they were proceeding, revealing teenagers' fear of stepping from free children's world into orderly adults' world. The life of teenagers depicted in the work was closely related to the social environment. As they were setting foot on adults' stairs step by step, they would finally become members of adults' world in the near future. By giving a description of the joyful childhood and the ugly realistic society, Ichiyo vividly and profoundly manifests the two worlds and convincingly implies teenagers' tragic fate. This unique creation technique endows *Child's Play* with exclusive artistic characteristics. Based on plentiful descriptions to teenagers' world, the work extensively mirrors lower-class people's life, exquisitely depicts teenagers' characters and realistically shapes their image. The combined social life and children's world reveal that the social life in

the brothel street cast deep shadow on teenagers' innocent soul and life; and showed problems about money and social life corroded teenagers' soul and predicted their uncertain future.

Since 1868, Japan entered the era of modernization. Gradually, politics, economy and ideology began to change in Japan. In terms of economy, as capitalism developed, a lot of overnight millionaires and usurers emerged in a flash. In *Child's Play*, Shota's grandmother was a typical representative of usurers and known locally as a rich woman. In contrast, shop keepers and handicraftsmen declined.

All poverty-stricken households around the brothel street in Yoshiwara were making the money-drawing bamboo rakes in the hope of fetching a good price at the temple fair. "Year in, year out, the minute the New Year pine bough comes down from the front gate, every self-respecting businessman takes up the same sideline, and by summer hands and feet are splattered with paint. They count on the earnings to buy new clothes for the holidays. If the gods grant prosperity to mere purchasers of these charms, the men who make them figure they stand to reap a windfall. Funny thing, no one hears of any rich men dwelling in these parts." (Danly 259) However, despite one year of hard and busy work, they still found it difficult to get rid of the trouble of poverty. In 1894, the first Sino-Japanese War broke out. To support the warfront, the Japanese government constantly extorted its people's hard-won possessions. Meanwhile, to satisfy soldiers' desire, the erotic industry in Yoshiwara became more prosperous. *Child's Play* was created and published after the outbreak of the First Sino-Japanese War. Although the

Meiji Restoration had launched civilization and enlightenment, nevertheless, it was hard for the atmosphere of civilization and enlightenment to rapidly spread in areas like the brothel street in Yoshiwara where a deep-rooted feudal patriarchal system was still remained. The sweeping reform tide of the Meiji Restoration failed to shake the foundation of feudal patriarchal system. Therefore, ordinary people here still lived a busy but poverty-stricken life.

*Child's Play* depicts young boys' and girls' life and their love stories around Yoshiwara district. However, there're also many women characters in this novel. This paper is aimed at analyzing female characters and exploring from feminist perspective the inner world of Higuchi Ichiyo under the special background of Japan's transition to commodity economy in the early Meiji period. On this basis, it further illustrates Japanese females' awakening and liberation issues in such a specific transition period. The illustration is still carried out from feminist perspective, but the research on female characters is not limited to one heroine; instead, most female images in the work are comparatively analyzed.

## **Women around Yoshiwara**

The main characters are children living in the Yoshiwara district, which was licensed for prostitution. In the beginning of the work, the author gives an introduction to the edge of Yoshiwara streets. "It's a long way round to the front of the quarter, where the trailing branches of the willow tree bid farewell to the nighttime revellers and the bawdyhouse lights flicker in the moat, dark as the dye that blackens the smiles of the Yoshiwara beauties. From the third-floor rooms of the lofty houses the all but palpable music and laughter spill down into the side street. Who knows how these great establishments prosper? The rickshaws pull up night and day. They call this part of town beyond the quarter "in front of Daion Temple." The name may sound a little saintly, but those who live in the area will tell you it's a lively place. Turn the corner at Mishima Shrine and you don't find any mansions, just tenements of ten or twenty houses, where eaves have long begun to sag and shutters only close halfway." (Danly 254) The main characters are children living in the Yoshiwara district, where prostitution was legal. Prostitution provided primary economic support for the quarters. Those who didn't work for a job related to prostitution had a difficult time maintaining their life. In Yoshiwara, some people lived in a profligate lifestyle that indulged in luxury and lust. At the same time, poor people were struggling with their life. In this circumstance, there are various women living in such an environment.

## Women Who Become Commodities

Although the sister of Midori, Omaki is a famous geisha in Daikokuya, the author does not give a direct description of her. A few years ago, Omaki was sold to the Yoshiwara from her hometown, Kishfl, and since then she had become a geisha. “The great lady’s satellites knew how to purchase good will: ‘Here Midori, go buy yourself a doll.’”(Danly 259) “Where would the Daikokuya be without her sister? Why do you think even the owner of the house was never curt with Midori and her parents?”(Danly 269) “What with her recent success, it was nothing for her to repay all the debts she had ever owed her parents. Midori had no notion of what price Omaki might have paid to reign supreme in her profession. To her it was all a game.” (Danly 271) Before long, she became popular that most of people like her in Daikokuya, so much so that the great lady would find a way to please her.

The sister of Midori, Omaki played an important role in Daikokuya who was sustaining prosperity. For this reason, Midori’s family could live in Daikokuya, and was well looked after by the great lady at Daikokuya. Midori was extremely proud of her sister Omaki, because Omaki not only lived a luxury lifestyle, but also was popular. However, Midori never knew her sister experienced such sorrows behind her luxury lifestyle. Midori’s sister was a geisha at early of Meiji period, and was a commoditized female.

The sphere of activities of Geisha is strictly delimited during the Meiji period. Many

women who were born in a poor family were sold here. They observed indentured servant system; even if they had worked for some years, they still could not return to their hometown. If they had some money, they could redeem themselves. If some prostitutes couldn't redeem themselves on account of age, they still stayed at the brothel to do odds and ends like needlework. When Omaki reached a certain age, she had to face such a fate.

Omaki's sitster, Midori plays an important role in *Child's Play*. Midori has the feature of loveliness and shyness that every blooming young girl has, and is arrogant and also enjoys the luxury lifestyle. "For a child, Midori had a handsome pocketbook, thanks to her sister's success in the quarter. The great lady's satellites<sup>9</sup> knew how to purchase good will: "Here Midori, go buy yourself a doll," the manager would say. "It isn't much, honey," one of the attendant girls would offer, "but it'll buy you a ball, anyway." No one took these gifts very seriously, and the income Midori accepted as her due. It was nothing for her to turn round and treat twenty classmates to matching rubber balls. She had been known to delight her friend the woman at the paper store by buying up every last shopworn trifle." (Danly 259) Despite Midori's humble origin, she lived a life of abundance envied by children from poverty-stricken families. She had a large amount of money to splurge with, so she often acted luxuriously, which was too far for lower-level ordinary people to catch up with.

Midori had a large amount of money, and this is exactly the reason why her personality became stronger and arrogant. Certainly, her behaviors and personality

characteristics were related to the living environment she had grown up in. “Needless to say, Midori, who spent her days and nights immersed in such a world, soon took on the color of the quarter. In her eyes, men were not such fearsome things. And her-sister's calling was nothing to disparage. ” “To her it was all a game. She knew about the charms and tricks the girls would use. Simpering to summon men they longed for, like mice grabbing cheese. Tapping on the lattice when they made a wish. She knew the secret signals they would use to give their guests a parting pat. She had mastered the special language of the quarter and she didn't feel the least embarrassed when she used it. It was all a little sad. She was fourteen. When she caressed her dolls, she could have been a prince's child; But for her all lessons in manners and morals and the wifely arts were topics to be left at school. What never ceased to capture her attention were the rumors of her sister's suitors—who was in and who was out of favor—the costumes of the serving girls, the bedding gifts that men would lavish on Omaki, the teahouse tips for the introduction of a patron. What was bright and colorful was good, and what was riot was bad. The child was still too young to exercise discretion. She was always taken with the flower just before her eyes. A headstrong girl by nature, Midori indulged herself by fluttering about in a world that she had fashioned from the clouds.” (Danly 271) In this environment, she was influenced by the discussion on prostitute as well as the desire for luxury. She said: “What about the patrons her Sister Omaki had? The banker Rawa, a steady customer for three years now; Yone, from the stock exchange; and that short one, the member of parliament—why, he'd been all set to buy her sister's contract and marry

her, till Omaki decided she could do without him. And he was somebody!" (Danly 268)

Therefore, instead of being ashamed of the fact that her elder sister was a prostitute,

Midori was envious of Omaki.

The author gives two specific descriptions of Midori's hairstyle in the work, which is when Midori appears in the beginning and the ending of the story. The descriptions as follow: "Undone, her hair would reach her feet. She wore it swept up and pulled into a heavy-looking roll in the "red bear" style—a frightening name for a maiden's hairdo, but the latest fashion even among girls of good family. (Danly 259) "I've been looking for her since this morning. Where'd she go off to? She hasn't been to the paper shop. I know that. I wonder if she's in the quarter." "Oh, Midori, she went by a little while ago. I saw her take one of the side bridges into the quarter. Shota, you should have seen her. She had her hair all done up like this." He made an oafish effort to suggest the splendor of Midori's new grown-up hairdo. "She's really something, that girl!" The boy wiped his nose as he extolled her. "Yes, she's even prettier than her sister. I hope she won't end up like Omald." Shota looked down at the ground." (Danly 283) "Inside the bustling quarter, Shota found himself swept along into a corner of the compound. It was there he saw Midori. Why, it certainly was Midori of the Daikokuya; she was talking to an attendant from one of the houses, and, just as he had heard, her hair was done: up in the glorious shimada style of a young woman. And yet she looked shy today. Colored ribbons cascaded from her hair, tortoise-shell combs and flowered hairpins flickered in the sun."(Danly 283) When Midori made her debut, she rolled in the "red bear" style, which

is a fashionable hairstyle, consisting of a large chignon and flowered hairpins. It originated in the red-light district, and most ladies in wealthy and influential families wore liked that at that time. Midori started wearing hairpins since she was young. Besides, women in Yoshiwara Street also often wore flowered hairpins.

The change of hairstyle indicated that Midori was no longer a child but an adult from then on. Of course, her life ushered in another turning point – she would say goodbye to girlhood and enter into the adults' world. More, it also meant that she was going to start her career as a prostitute. However, she could not become master of her destiny, that was, she must go into that world whether she liked it or not.

Just when Shota praised her good-looking hairpin, she said, "Midori had difficulty speaking, 'I had it done this morning at my sister's. I hate it.' Her spirits drooped. She kept her head down; she couldn't bear it when a passerby would gawk." (Danly 284) Here, Midori expressed her extreme dissatisfaction with flowered hairpin, but she was helpless. At that time, Midori didn't understand why they made her wear such a hairstyle, and she even didn't know she was going to face a dark age full of pains and struggles. From then on, she would become a member of prostitutes in Yoshiwara district, just like her elder sister. Midori's sister was a reflection of Midori's future destiny.

Although the author did not explicitly present Midori's destiny, Midori's future destiny was implied. Especially when children often joke that Midori is a whore: "Yeah? You're nothing but a whore, just like your sister," Chflkichi shot back He stepped around from behind the others and grabbed his muddy sandal. "This is all you're worth." He

threw it at Midori.” (Danly 264) In addition, when the people around Yoshiwara Street have a conversation about Midori, which is always inseparable from the comparison with prostitutes.

Ohana is Nobu’s sister and the daughter of the priest, who wasn’t become a prostitute just like Omaki. However, in fact she has become a tool for earning money to her father. “Ohana, on the other hand, was quite the opposite, a lovely girl with fine skin and a soft, plump little chin. To call her a beauty would be going too far, perhaps, but since adolescence she had had her share of admirers. It seemed a shame to waste such a girl, for she might have been a geisha. Who knows? There may be worlds where even Buddha enjoys the music of the samisen. In this world, at any rate, there was the matter of what others said and talk they would if the daughter of a temple became an entertainer with her skirt hitched up. What the priest did instead was to establish Ohana in a little tea shop in Tamachii He put her behind the counter, where she could vend her charm- Young men with no idea in their heads how tea was weighed and measured began to gather at the shop. Sel-dom was Ohana's empty before midnight.” (Danly 273) In the priest’s opinion, Ohana deserved to be ‘put behind the counter’ and vend her charm for getting more guests. In the work, Ohana also was a commodity in the society who never had a say in anything. In the social environment where the patriarchal system was leading, Ohana wasn’t able to strive for her right to speak, and what she could do was only to listen to her father.

Although Midori’s sister and Ohana were of different social rank, they were both

victims under the control of money and power. As women, they did not have any freedom and choice in life, what they could do was only to passively listen to the arrangements of leader at Daikokuya and parents.

### **Women Who Cannot Live on Their Own**

In addition to the commoditized women in *Child's play*, there are many women who acquiesced to the social condition at that time, and were not able to live on their own like Ohana's mother: "At one time, she herself had been among the parishioners. But her husband died young, and, having nowhere to turn, she came to do the sewing at temple. In exchange for meals, she took over the washing and the cooking. Before long she was out in the graveyard, sweeping away with the best of the groundsmen. The priest was quick to offer his compassion, and quicker still to calculate the advantages. The woman knew full well that the difference in their ages, some twenty years, might make the arrangement appear a bit unseemly. But she had nowhere else to go, and she came to consider the temple a good place to live out her days and to meet her end. She learned not lose too much sleep over prying neighbors."(Danly 273) The mother of Ohana was not able to live independently, so she took refuge in the priest's temple. In addition, in order to pursue a better life, she married the priest regardless of being ridiculed over the fact that the priest is over twenty years older than her. The mother of Ohana made this

decision because she was left with no alternative and had to leave virtuousness behind.

Besides, she never stood up to her husband's authority and unethical behavior. "His eyes never left his feet as he trudged over to the Musashiya. If he heard voices at the paper shop across the street, he would keep on going. Then, when the coast was clear, he'd dart into the eel shop. The shame he felt! He would never eat the smelly things. At dusk she took over for herself, quite forgetting what a spectacle she made with her sudden itch for profit. "Everything marked down! Prices slashed!" she barked after a customer who backed away. Buffeted and dizzy from the throngs, the victim soon lost his powers of appraisal. They had fled along with memory: two days earlier he had come to this very temple as a pilgrim."(Danly 274) Faced with the fact that husband made use of daughter's good looks to earn money and engaged in avocation by setting up a stall regardless of his Buddhist abbot identity, Ohana's mother never questioned about this unethical conduct, but submitted to her husband. "At dusk she took over for herself, quite forgetting what a spectacle she made with her sudden itch for profit." (Danly 274) To some extent, the quotation reflects Ohana's mother is too shortsighted to face with temptation of money as a woman who leans on her husband.

Midori's mother worked in the sewing department of the Daikokuya, and did not think the job Midori's sister was doing was degrading. In fact, Omaki was the primary financial supporter of her mother. "What lay behind it all would be difficult to say, but today her parents were housekeepers for the gentleman. On the side, her mother took in sewing from the women of the district." (Danly 260) Their family would not be able to

live anymore if her mother who not able to rely on Omaki.

Similarly, as for Midori, her mother also naturally made her second daughter a prostitute. “It was as rare as snow falling from a summer sky, but today Midori couldn't brook the thought of school. She wouldn't eat her breakfast. Should they order something special? It couldn't be a cold, she had no fever. Too much excitement yesterday, probably. “ ‘Why don't you stay home?’ her mother suggested. ‘I'll go to the shrine for you.’”

(Danly 265) Taro-sama was the patron saint enshrined and worshipped by brothels and stores. Midori's mother worshipped the patron saint in the brothel to ward off her daughter's disease, which to some extent implied Midori's future destiny. When people tacitly regarded Midori as her elder sister's successor, Midori's mother did not show any disgust. Faced her menarche, Midori, as an innocent girl, felt terrified of her physiological change. All fellows worried that if Midori got sick, and only her mother smiled about it. From her mother's series of words, it can be seen that she acquiesced in Midori's future identity – a prostitute.

The mother of Ohana and mother of Midori, as women, were in fact on the edge of society. They were not able to be economically independent, and what they could only do was to rely on her husband or daughter, because they were not the main economic supporter of their family. They have no right to speak about the family and society, which is dominated by money and power. And, they acquiesced in the prostitution system. In addition, according to their thoughts, they can do shameful things as long as they can make money. Money has crossed the bottom line of what is moral, which constantly

destroyed the women's mind.

### **Women Who Lived around Yoshiwara**

There were a group of women who lived around the Yoshiwara district. They were not prostitutes, “the great lady” of Daikokuya, but who actually having an allowable occupation. “Customs here are indeed a little different. You won't find many women who tie their sashes neatly behind their waists. It's one thing to see a woman of a certain age who favors gaudy patterns, or a sash cut immoderately wide. It's quite another to see these barefaced girls of fifteen or sixteen, all decked out in flashy clothes and blowing on bladder cherries, 7 which everybody knows are used as contraceptives.” (Danly 255)

“ ‘At What's-Its-Name? She looks like the girl at the sewing shop, Over in Kanasugi. But, with that funny little nose of hers, she's even uglier.’” (Danly 270) Women here walked together in the red-light districts all day long. They undressed themselves and talked cheerfully and humorously, diffusing strong flavor of rouge. Prostitute was an eternal topic at their leisure. In the eyes of these women, selling body was a way of survival. They approved this way of survival. At that time, these women, as female representatives in Yoshiwara, accounted for the biggest proportion, but most of them were do-nothing. Although they did not become prostitutes, nevertheless, they believed from their deep inside that selling body for money was not shameful at all.

To sum up, it can be known from the analysis of female roles in *Child's Play* that in

special periods when old feudal system made its final struggle in the early Meiji and the society was transforming to commodity economy society, regarding women living in ordinary civilian areas, some of them became commodities – prostitutes or pastimes of men, and some were not economically independent but lived on their husband or daughter. These women accounted for a large proportion then, but regardless of their plight, they shared a common ground that was, they couldn't become master of their fate or keep independent. Additionally, their idea was not modern enough, for they acquiesced in the existence of public prostitution, received absolutely their husband's instruction, and paid more attention to money than to moral restraint. It was the social norms controlled by money and patriarchal system that caused them to face such a plight, for the bold and resolute Meiji Restoration didn't involve female liberation. In the early Meiji, women still suffered double oppression from imperialism and masculinity. They still observed the feudal society's convention that women were inferior to men and lived quietly their ordinary but vulgar life. No matter whether they became victims of prostitute or ordinary women, they were tragedies of the times.

## **Natsume Soseki and his *Kokoro***

Few people will disagree if we call Natsume Soseki the greatest writer in modern Japan. The Japanese worship him by placing his picture on the one thousand yen bill. Even now, his works are still widely loved among young people even though his literary style has been a lot of changes that have occurred through the course of time.

The Meiji period (1868-1912), when Natsume Soseki lived, is a historical transition period in which Japan blindly introduced western thought with the purpose of realizing western modernization. In fact, such great social reform mainly refers to the “Europeanization” process in which the Japanese social system imitated European and American countries on three main components (e.g. economic structure, political structure, and cultural structure) and strengthened the modernization of Japanese society. With the boosting of this process, the conflict of eastern and western culture inevitably brought some troubles difficult to be solved within Japanese society, and made the people (especially the intellectuals) show different responses when facing heterogeneous culture, such as confusion, acceptance, extremity, and uneasiness. Natsume Soseki believed that such behavior was quite unfavorable for Japanese cultural development. However, he could not hold back the promotion and progress of western modernization in Japan, so he always lamented the fact that Japanese culture had been invaded by western culture. Afterwards, he formed his own unique thoughts on individualism by taking egotistical thought as the center, and then started his own literary creation with the purpose of maintaining Japanese traditional culture, propagandizing the individuality through ethical

ideology, to exclude the danger of egoism and selfishness resulting from the collapse of the individualism.

Natsume Soseki held that, at college, or when serving as a teacher in Matsuyama High School, or during his overseas study in London, he practiced literature only through blindly absorbing the achievements of the predecessors. He suddenly realized that if he continued to use such a method, he would not achieve the purpose of creating literature no matter how many books he had read. Therefore, Natsume Soseki was quite annoyed. Afterwards, he gradually discovered that previous literary research was conducted completely according to the author's thought, so that he gained nothing. Natsume Soseki believed that, to create excellent works, it was necessary to rely on his own strength and thought to carry out the practice of literature. Henceforth, Natsume Soseki declared "I was an independent Japanese, not a slave to England, and it was incumbent upon me as a Japanese to possess at least this degree of self-respect." (Natsume Soseki, Soseki on Individualism 34) Making this his creed, he fiercely criticized Japan's process of blindly copying western civilization, and started to instead advocate egotistic thinking. Natsume Soseki's individualism absolutely did not threaten the nation and others' interest. Instead, it is established as the "the true way," with respect for others as the premise. Meanwhile, Natsume Soseki emphasizes the subject position and value of humans, and promotes the courage of facing society and reforming the reality, and advocates that literature should be actively involved in social reality.

For most people, when it comes to the individualism, they will easily regard it as

egoism, and look down upon it. However, Natsume Soseki holds that individualism has dual characters. If it is properly treated, it will be favorable for others; otherwise, it will be turned into self-interest. "Everything I have said thus far comes down to these three points. First, if you want to carry out the development of your individuality, you must respect the individuality of others. Second, if you intend to utilize the power in your possession, you must be fully cognizant of the duty that accompanies it. Third, if you wish to demonstrate your financial power, you must respect its concomitant responsibilities." (Soseki 40), Natsume Soseki's individualism necessitates the high standard of morality and ideology. Unless a man has attained some degree of ethical culture and an ideological level, there is no meaning in developing his individuality, and using his power or wealth becomes meaningless.

The thought of "others-centered" thinking is to learn and assimilate western culture in complete compliance with western standards. Therefore, the "civilization" process of Japan is nothing but a superficial imitation. In contrast, the thought of individualism is to make judgments over things independently without being influenced by others. Simply speaking, instead of being the "egoism" that seeks profits from others in an egocentric manner, the individualism of Natsume Soseki requires that the rights of others should be also respected besides one's own rights. Only in this way, individualism can be deemed as "individualism in a real sense". Real individualism is not only a discipline, but also the code of conduct that people need to follow when getting along with others.

The novel *Kokoro*, one of the late works of Natsume Soseki, describes the collision

of love and friendship, as well as the conflict between self-serving and morality during the period from the Meiji era to the beginning of the Taisho era (1912-1926), and presents modern Japanese intellectuals' contradictory spiritual world, in which they still hope to maintain their dignity, despite their contradictions, melancholy, and helplessness. This Chapter aims to, through Natsume Soseki's *Kokoro*, study the relationship of K and Sensei's suicide and collapse of individualism, and investigate different characters' behaviors violate the content of Natsume Soseki's individualism.

First of all, the Chapter tries to study the relationship between K's suicide and the collapse of individualism. K, in order to get rid of the predicament caused by others-centered thinking, transforms himself to a person sticking to his personality, and playing an active part in the life based on egotistic thinking. However, due to him not abiding by individualism and its obligations, K's pursuit to individualism finally gets collapsed, and thus leads to tragedy. The collapse of individualism is the root of K's tragedy. In particular, K cheats his foster parents, and attempts to court the widow's daughter Ojosan before Sensei. However, he ends up with failure. After he knows Ojosan is engaged to Sensei, K leaves a simple posthumous note and then takes his own life quietly. In the posthumous letter, he does not show any resentment against Sensei but only gratitude. This chapter will seek for the answers hidden in the posthumous letter: why K did not tell others about what he thought and quietly took his own life, and what implication his death left for the readers.

In the second half, this paper deals with the causal relationship between Sensei's

suicide and the collapse of individualism. Sensei is firstly deceived by his uncle, and then falls behind his friend K in love, which throws him into a deep mistrust of people. Since then, Sensei betrays K and marries the landlord's daughter before K's wedding with her by a deceitful maneuver. However, Sensei was not able to bear the torture of guilt from egoism after marriage, and commits suicide in the end when hears that General Nogi Maresuke has committed ritual suicide upon news of the death of the Meiji emperor.

K is a representative figure with Japanese traditional ethics and Bushido ideologies. What is the reason why we say K's suicide is the result of the collapse of individualism? As we read towards to the climax of the work, what causes K's suicide? Why does he take his own life quietly instead of expressing resentment against Sensei? The following sections will investigate the relationship among K's suicide and the collapse of individualism.

### **K's Deception**

K's deception of his foster parents causes a family breakdown between him and his foster parents; this section will demonstrate K's deception that in fact results in a collapse of individualism.

Firstly, I would like to talk about the character of K who is in such a turbulent period of social transformation, and meanwhile is facing a variety of impacts that have never

appeared previously. He tries to become the image of the intellectual of the Meiji period who carries out the ideal of living by himself. From the perspective of K's life experience, his thoughts have gone through three stages of development, which are 'Other-centered' thinking, egotistical thinking and individualism. Firstly, K was sent to his foster father when he was young. With regard to his father's behaviors, K had no choices at all and the only thing he could passively obey, from which we can infer that K kept the thinking of the 'Other-centered' person who was always at the mercy of others.

K's foster father is a doctor, who had originally sent K to Tokyo with the strong purpose of making him a doctor just like him. However, after getting into the high school in Tokyo, K refuses his foster father's recommendation on a career in the medical profession: 'Undaunted, he agreed with me, and then answered that he did not mind doing such a thing, so long as it led him to "the true way."' (Soseki, *Kokoro* 19) K adheres to his own ideal and holds on to his 'true' dream, even if he deceives his foster father. From that period, K's thoughts start to transform from the 'Other-centered' thinking to egotistical thinking.

Nevertheless, K's foster father is very furious and infuriated, who no longer offers to supply K with his school expenses that result from K's stubbornness and unreasonable behavior. Meanwhile, K also refuses the material assistance from Sensei without hesitation. "His view, in short, was that once having entered the university, it would be a disgrace to him as a grown man not to be able to solve his own problems by himself." (Soseki 21) From his words, we can conclude that K refused the 'Other-centered'

thinking, and was getting started to live with the egotistical thinking.

After K refused Sensei's material assistance, he worked hard and relied on his own efforts to make a living for a year and a half. "When one pointed out the unreasonableness of such an attitude, he would become infuriated. Then he would begin to worry about his future, which seemed not as promising as it did before." (Soseki 22) A whole pile of sticky questions was come up to K after he left from his adoptive family that increasingly drove him exhausted both mentally and physically. Even so, K still advocated, "What was important, he said, was that he should become a strong person through the exercise of will-power. Apparently, this could be done only by living in straitened circumstances." (Soseki 22) He also promised never to change his mind.

Here's a description of K's egotistical behavior in order to strengthen his mind: "Moreover, straitened circumstances seemed not at all to be strengthening his will-power. Indeed, they were making a neurotic out of him." (Soseki 22) The following scenarios represent K's strong sense of keeping the egotistical thinking: "Because of his stubbornness, I was forced to bow to him. At last, I succeeded in bringing him to the house." (Soseki 22) K was supposed to be very grateful and thankful to Sensei, because Sensei offers him a living place, but K ignored Sensei's feeling, a people who was also moving into adolescence as him. "Seeing the trembling of his lips, I knew that he was about to say something. But, of course, I had no inkling of what he was going to say. And so I was shocked. Imagine my reaction when K, in his heavy way, confessed to me his agonized love for Ojosan. I felt as if I had been turned into stone by a magician's wand. I

could not even move my lips as K had done. (Soseki 36) Sensei couldn't image that K was so unusual and increasingly complicated this time, and the thing is K have held his affection to Ojosan ahead of Sensei that hurts Sensei's feelings severely.

From the investigations above we can see that K already gets away from the others-centered thinking, and playing an active part in the life based on egotistic thinking. However, since K sticks to his own personality excessively that makes him to deceive his foster father and Sensei. Not only K's foster father and original family disown K due to such behaviors, but also his only friend 'Sensei' leaves him. In addition, K has suffered enough pain from the failure in love, and the ideal he always tries to pursue is also shattered, which make K have to committed suicide to take his own live in the end.

So why does this kind of tragedy happen to K one after another? From the conclusion, K's tragedy is doubtless caused by the collapse of individualism. Natsume Soseki's individualism has already been mentioned at previously, but I will emphasize it again in order to enhance the effect of explaining: "Everything I have said thus far comes down to these three points. First, that if you want to carry out the development of your individuality, you must respect the individuality of others. Second, that if you intend to utilize the power in your possession, you must be fully cognizant of the duty that accompanies it. Third, that if you wish to demonstrate your financial power, you must respect its concomitant responsibilities." (P.40, Soseki on Individualism 'Watakushi no Kojinshugi', Jay Rubin and Natsume Soseki) However, what K has done contradicts Natsume Soseki's individualism, which leads to the collapse of individualism.

Therefore, K's tragedy becomes inevitable.

K's behaviors severely violate the spirit of Natsume Soseki's individualism. First, K doesn't respect his foster father and Sensei's personality and dignity. Second, K doesn't fulfill the gratitude he is supposed to have and express after his foster father and Sensei giving assistances to him. Moreover, K doesn't fulfill the obligation what he ought to do, conversely, he deceives his foster father and Sensei. Given the above, K's deception to his foster father and Sensei is certainly a result of the collapse of individualism.

### **K's Failure in Love**

This section will discuss the relationship between K's failure in love and the collapse of the individualism from the viewpoint of K's suicide and failure in love. K is a person who had strong religious belief and regarded "the true way" as a life goal, but gradually, he finds that it is extremely difficult to achieve his goals, and then K starts to become restless, and often falls into distress. However, at that time, the young and beautiful Ojosan shows up in front of him, and walks into K's lonely internal world. Afterwards, K's strong resolution of giving his life for "the true way" starts to waver. Finally, he walked to the worldly way of falling in love with Ojosan.

In fact, K had strong morality, because he regards "being willing to sacrifice for 'the true way'" as his own life creed. Therefore, he believes that to indulge own desire would hinder the pursuit for "the true way." When K fell in love with Ojosan, his inner feelings had to be extremely contradictory. From the perspective of K's morality, he should never

fall in love with Ojosan, but he failed to master his emotions. At this point, K must be extraordinary suffering and depressed that his thoughts and mind are inundated with the original old morality and new thought for pursuing freedom and independence.

K is puzzled over “the true way” and things about love, and he went to ask his best friend Sensei about declaring his love to Ojosan. Unexpectedly, Sensei was very sharp with K: “I said again: ‘Anyone who has no spiritual aspirations is an idiot.’ I watched K closely. I wanted to see how my words were affecting him.” (Soseki 215) In the meantime, Sensei started to see K as his rival in love. Since then, the love triangle around Ojosan started to unfold.

Sensei wasn’t aware of K’s love to Ojosan, meanwhile K didn’t detect Sensei also loved Ojosan. “K seemed totally unaware of my love for Ojosan. Of course, I had been careful not to be too obvious about it. But there is no denying that, in such matters, K was quite insensitive.” (Soseki 187) Both K and Sensei didn’t get to know each other’s ‘Kokoro’, which is also exactly the reason of leading to the tragedy.

What makes K desperate to love Ojosan and insist to love her, even though he gives up on his ideals and the ‘true dream’? “Ojosan had taken great care over her appearance. Though she was naturally very light-complexioned, she had covered her face liberally with white powder, which made her conspicuous. Passers-by stared at her. What gave me a strange feeling was the fact that after they had had a good look at her, they would begin to stare at me.” (Soseki 161) Ojosan is a young girl with the appearance of beauty, and took the initiative to approach K and Sensei, which inevitably made both of them attracted to this girl. Especially because K is a lonely person that certainly will fall in

love with Ojosan. “K had always been fond of the phrase, ‘concentration of mind.’ When I first heard K mention it, I thought it likely that ‘concentration of mind’ implied, among other things, ‘control of passions.’” (Soseki 215) K had strong religious belief and regarded “the true way” as his life goal. He believed that everything had to be sacrificed for “the true way”; even love without desire and bodily need were to be avoided. Pursuit of “the true way” involved not only restraint of appetite, but also abstinence. So, why does K abandon his pursuit of “the true way” so easily and love Ojosan, as a person who had the strong sense of abstinence and the control of the body? This is probably because K was under the misapprehension that Ojosan liked him. For instance, “One day, it so happened that I had to go to Kanda on my way home, and I returned much later than usual.” “Again, about a week later, I returned home to find K and Ojosan talking to each other in his room.” (Soseki 181- 183) Ojosan frequently went to see K when Sensei went out. Moreover, she also went out with K alone. “She began conspicuously to help him whenever she could, and very soon the game developed into a contest between me and these two.” (Soseki 202) When people played the game of cards during the New Year season, because K knew nothing about this card game, Ojosan began to help him out very obviously. I think K could detect such obvious behaviors at that time, which are exactly the reasons why he thought Ojosan liked him. However, Ojosan never had imagined that her behaviors exactly planted the seeds of a series of tragedy.

K was sent to others when he was very young, then disowns his foster father which made him become a lonely person. Sensei is the only friend of K, but he also has some

kind of critical views on K's pursuit of "the true way". "She stopped outside K's room and exchanged a few words with him." (Soseki 195) Ojosan timely appeared just as K was extremely alone. Although she couldn't understand what K talked about "the true way", she was willing to be an audience who was enjoy with it. How Ojosan behaved can say that she did really encourage K and gave confidence to him, which made K realize that he was recognized by Ojosan, that's why he mistakenly thought Ojosan liked him.

K used this as an opportunity to start to be close to Ojosan. During this period, K realized he is extremely alone, and thought that his mind will be eased as long as he could stay with Ojosan. In the meanwhile, K was getting into deep water of love. However, if K settles down and thinks about himself, K will feel regretful that he fell in love with Ojosan. "Normally, on that day of the week, my lectures ended earlier than K's, and so I went home assuming that K would not yet be back. When I opened the front door, however, I heard K's voice. And then the sound of Ojosan's laughter reached my ears. (Soseki 195) Ojosan frequently went to K's room and saw him. Since K didn't know how to be relaxed and chat with people, he told to Ojosan about some deep topics, which made Ojosan usually just laughed and barely answered to him. Ojosan was unable to understand the theory of "the true way" mentioned by K, and she realized that K's theory is not only useless, but also there is no real significance in real life. When K had a crush on Ojosan, he gradually realized that he was starting to be far from the spirit of "the true way". Meanwhile, K also deeply fell into the inconsistencies of sticking to "the true way"

or adhering to love. "I said again: "Anyone who has no spiritual aspirations is an idiot." I watched K closely. I wanted to see how my words were affecting him." (Soseki 215)

When Sensei accused K of behaving an idiot who has no spiritual aspirations, K feel incredibly hopeless in his life, and thought he is a loser who was failing to pursue beliefs.

For the sake of the lofty ideal, K sacrifices everything to his willpower. As a matter of fact, however, "the true way" is only an abstract life goal, which cannot be fulfilled easily in real life. It is exactly because of his life experience that K feels it difficult to fulfill his vision and values and therefore seeks spiritual liberation by suicide. Thus, K's suicide not only results from the disappointment in love, but also embodies his indulgence in sensual emotion and extreme disappointment about betrayal.

According to observation, it is exactly Ojosan's imprudence that results in a series of tragedies, such as K's unrequited affection, K's gradual disillusionment, Sensei's jealousy of K, and K's suicide. Additionally, K's suicide has not only kept Sensei filled with self-accusation, but also made Ojosan a victim of an unhappy marriage.

Undoubtedly, K's disappointment in love arises from Ojosan's love game that trifles with K's affections. Ojosan's behavior has violated the contents of Natsume Soseki's individualism; people should assume the obligations that they should perform while exercising their rights. Therefore, K's disappointment in love is certainly a result of the collapse of individualism, in the meantime; K is also a victim of the collapse of individualism.

## K's Testament

Once the book reaches the clue about K's suicide, we firstly think about the posthumous paper he left. In my opinion, all readers who have read this paper up to this point likely have some doubts on this simple and abstract posthumous paper: Namely, the reader is likely regarding why K didn't show any complaint towards Sensei, and why he didn't mention Ojosan at all?

Firstly, I will cite the contents of a paragraph in K's posthumous paper and then explain it. "The letter was simply written. K explained his suicide only in a very general way. He had decided to die, he said, because there seemed no hope of his ever becoming the firm, resolute person that he had always wanted to be. He thanked me for my many kindnesses in the past: and as a last favor to him, would I, he asked, take care of everything after his death? He asked that I apologize to Okusan on his behalf for causing her so much trouble. And he wanted me to notify his relatives of his death. In this brief, businesslike letter, there was no mention of Ojosan. I soon realized that K had purposely avoided any reference to her. But what affected me most was his last sentence, which had perhaps been written as an afterthought: 'Why did I wait so long to die?'" (Soseki 48)

The content of testament hasn't shown any of K's complaint towards Sensei. It's worth noting that the original text says: "He had decided to die, he said, because there seemed no hope of his ever becoming the firm, resolute person that he had always wanted to be." (Soseki 48) From which we can infer that the reason K commits suicide is that he is a

weak-willed person with no hope, and no perseverance. Because K originally was a man of ambition, who had such strong morality, that he regarded “the true way” as his own life creed. However, K’s faith was shaken after he met Landlord’s daughter Ojosan in the course of pursuing his belief, as well as after he failed in love. Therefore, I think K’s failure in love should not be seen as the only cause for his suicide.

K barely felt it a pity that he would commit suicide. “But what affected me most was his last sentence, which had perhaps been written as an afterthought: “Why did I wait so long to die?”” (Soseki 48) K realized that he should die from the moment he felt in love with Ojosan, since the moment he felt in love with Ojosan, his ideal was disillusioned. Perhaps K thought it is a mistake that he lived in this world. K was sent to others when he was very young, then he deceived his foster father in order to stick to his resolution and specialty, which ultimately caused a family breakdown between him and his foster parents. Everything that happened from that period made K feel the sadness of life, being alone that didn’t get care and love from family. Hence he decided to work hard to live on his own, and regarded “the true way” as his own spiritual support. However, K’s long term pursuit of “the true way” was completely shattered due to the appearance of Ojosan. Therefore, we can conceive that the reason to K’s suicide is that he needs to sacrifice for the disillusion of the ideal, and it is also a relief for him to commit suicide because of his loneliness and sadness.

When K tried to declare his affection for Ojosan to Sensei, he was heavily hit by Sensei's word again: “Anyone who has no spiritual aspirations is an idiot.” (Soseki 215).

That night, K wanted to commit suicide, but did not act on his desire. Why did he not commit suicide that night? During the two weeks from that night to his suicide, in what kind of mood did he live? It is understandable why K is full of regret that he did not commit suicide earlier: If he had ended his life earlier, he would not have been informed of Sensei and Ojosan's engagement, and would not have felt that his fate was so unsatisfactory. From the human nature perspective, K must have harbored some resentment when he was writing his suicide note, although this can't be seen from the letters. It had been an extremely intense process for fighting for Ojosan between K and Sensei, so the content of K's suicide note is nothing but an ordinary letter to outsiders. However, although K did not say any complaints in the letter, it does not mean that he did not want to say them, as the saying goes, silence speaks better than sounds. K used this approach to express his discontent towards Sensei. K must have never noticed Sensei's feeling towards Ojosan before he was informed by Sensei and Ojosan's engagement from Okusan. He did not blame Sensei for his betrayal; instead, he sent his blessings with a smile. Meanwhile, in his mind, K might regret that why he'd never noticed Sensei liked Ojosan. It is precisely because of this that K did not mention Ojosan in his testament. In addition, while expressing his gratitude to Sensei for taking care of his life in the letter, he must have felt the humiliation and loneliness in his heart. At the same time, K also fell into despair: "I was saddened by the thought that she, whom I loved and trusted more than anyone else in the world, could not understand me. And the thought that I had not the courage to explain myself to her made me sadder still. I was very lonely. Indeed,

there were times when I felt that I stood completely alone in this world, cut off from every other living person” (Soseki 240). He realized at that time that only death could let him return to "the true way". Therefore, K was ashamed of his hasty affection for Ojosan without considering Sensei's feelings, so it can be said that he did not write complaints against Sensei in his suicide note because such repentance was at work.

Let's first put aside why K committed suicide, and talk about Sensei's strong sense of guilt towards K. When sensei heard that K liked Ojosan, he told Okusan that he wanted to marry Ojosan before K: Such despicable acts of betrayal of trust also made Sensei carry a burden of guilt accompanying his whole life. However, K had made a serious mistake as well. For example, why did he not fully consider Sensei's feelings before clarifying his affection for Ojosan to Sensei? The reason why K didn't write anything negative Sensei in his suicide note is because he also had a sense of guilt towards Sensei in his heart.

*Kokoro* has been said to be a work revolving around traditional ethics and morality of Japan. In the work, Sensei and Ojosan are supposed to live a happy life after marriage, but Sensei feels pain and therefore commits suicide to get rid of the pain. Sensei's pain grows out of his betrayal of getting engaged to Ojosan. From the perspective of Japan's traditional ethics and morality, such an act is immoral. Sensei's death, so to speak, is atonement for K, a sacrifice for ethics and morality, and a tragedy resulting from the collapse of individualism. Why does Sensei commit suicide? What are the implications of Sensei's testament? The causality between Sensei's suicide and the collapse of individualism will be explored hereunder.

## Uncle Takes over Sensei's Property

Sensei's tragedy has begun to unravel since he lost his parents when he was nineteen. As the only child growing up in an atmosphere of generosity, Sensei was a child with an optimistic and cheerful personality, but he suddenly began to distrust and suspect other people. When Sensei's uncle took over his house after his parents died. After that, Sensei lost his simplicity and optimistic attitude and began to be suspicious of people from then on.

Because Sensei's mother trusted Sensei's uncle, she entrusted the right of property management and Sensei to his uncle when she was on her deathbed. His mother said to his uncle: "Please look after my child" (Soseki 30). Sensei says: "My father would often speak of my uncle in glowing terms, saying what a sound fellow he was, and how superior his brother's qualities were to his own. 'The trouble with inheriting money from one's parents,' he once said to my mother and to me, 'is that it dulls one's wits. It's a bad thing not to have to struggle for one's living'" (Soseki 133). From those words, it is easy to find that Sensei not only quite believed in his uncle, but also felt grateful to his uncle in the early days. He could not doubt uncle, whom his father trusted and admired so much.

However, Sensei didn't expect that he would deceive by his uncle. Thus he would think "You remember of course that day when I said that there was no such thing in this world as a species of men whose unique quality is badness; and that one should always be

careful not to forget that a gentleman, when tempted, may easily become a rogue.”

(Soseki 141) From this, Sensei deeply realized the egoism is the ugliness of human nature.

Afterwards, the level of his uncle's greed was enhanced and not under control, since he would even marry his daughter to Sensei in order to gain Sensei's inheritance legally. Thus Sensei began to distrust and suspect other people. “You were then good enough to point out to me that I was excited. You also asked what it was that caused good men to become bad; and when I answered simply, ‘Money,’ you looked dissatisfied. I remember well that look of dissatisfaction on your face” (Soseki 141). He thought that money causes good men to become bad. It could be say that his uncle's behavior of taking over the house is the first step leading to Sensei's loneliness. “Other relatives of mine stepped in to settle the quarrel between me and my uncle. I had no trust in any of them. In fact, I regarded them as my enemies.” (Soseki 143) From these words, we could see that Sensei had fallen the hell of being suspicious of others. As a result of his uncle's betrayal, Sensei thought his hometown and relatives were not worth recollecting; before he left hometown, he went to his parents' grave to worship for the last time. Since then, Sensei never visited his hometown again, which has been shown that he felt that he had become a homeless person. Based on the content elaborated above, we can confirm that Sensei's uncle (a typical Egoist) causes Sensei to become a person who no longer believed in others.

In this paragraph, I will illustrate the causes that led to a breakdown between Sensei and his uncle through the content of Natsume Soseki's individualism, as well as how the

takeover of Sensei's property by his uncle affects Sensei's future life. At first, uncle was entrusted by Sensei to take over Sensei's family property and custody of Sensei.

Therefore, uncle can be seen as the owner of power and property. In the meantime, uncle also had corresponding obligations and responsibilities to take care of Sensei. However, Uncle did not fulfill his obligations when using his power and seized Sensei's family property taking advantage of Sensei's young and naive nature. This had turned Sensei's life into a nightmare of distrust, so that he betrayed K in later life, was trapped in grief and loneliness throughout his whole life, and eventually sought relief by committing suicide. In conclusion, Uncle does not possess the morality, gentility and personality standards that Natsume Soseki mentioned in his individualism. Sensei's uncle is actually a destroyer of individualism; it is exactly his misconduct that broke down his relationship with Sensei and led to a series of adverse consequences.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this Chapter studies the relationship of K and Sensei's suicide and collapse of individualism, and investigate different characters' behaviors violate the content of Natsume Soseki's individualism. K's deception of his foster parents causes a family breakdown between him and his foster parents that in fact results in a collapse of individualism. K is a person who had strong religious belief and regarded "the true way" as a life goal. However, K's strong resolution of giving his life for "the true way" starts to

waver, since he walked to the worldly way of falling in love with Ojosan. Ojosan's behaviors exactly planted the seeds of a series of tragedies. K's failure in love arises from Ojosan's love game that trifles with K's affection. Ojosan's behavior has violated the contents of Natsume Soseki's individualism. K's testament is simple and abstract. The reason why K didn't write anything negative about Sensei in his testament is because he also had a sense of guilt towards Sensei. The reason K would commit suicide is because he would like to sacrifice for the disillusion of the ideal, and it is also a relief for him to commit suicide because of his loneliness and sadness. Sensei's uncle was entrusted by Sensei to take over Sensei's family property and custody of Sensei, but he didn't fulfill his obligations when using his power, and seized Sensei's family property taking advantage of Sensei's young and naive nature, which turned Sensei's life into a nightmare of distrust. His uncle planted the seeds of a series of tragedy which leads to Sensei's commit suicide. His uncle's behavior violates the spirit of Natsume Soseki's individualism, which is the result of supporting the egoism. Meanwhile, Sensei started to doubt that "a gentleman, when tempted, may easily become a rogue" (Soseki 141) due to the collapse of individualism, and began to distrust and suspect other people which explains how terrible egoism is.

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the works by Ogai, Ichiyo, and Soseki, we can see that how Japanese people developed and behaved in the feudal society. These works were written in the Meiji period, implementing a series of civilization policies by accepting the western capitalist ideas for the first time after experiencing feudal society for thousands of years. However, feudal factors in the society were still deeply rooted, especially for lower-class people. The social reality of capitalist cash nexus and feudal oppression brought about misery and misfortune to the numerous people.

Meiji Restoration contributed to the development of capitalism. However, because of enormous absorption of Western culture, which impacted Japanese culture, it caused great effect on traditional and conservative society in Japan, especially those intellectuals who received traditional education. Those intellectuals couldn't advance with the times and had old-fashioned concepts. Their ideas were behind the times and couldn't receive Western civilization. Under this background, most intellectuals were no scope for their energies, and their heart was full of fear and frustration. They couldn't bear interpersonal discriminate and hypocrisy in society and powerlessly struggled in the realistic society.

Meiji restoration is a political struggle and ideological battle. Mori Ogai tries to arouse those youth pursuing self-awakening and individual emancipation by *Dancing Girl*. Ideological reformation is a fighting process full of twists and turns, which may ends in failure if the constraint of feudal thought can't be broken persistently. The strong sense of historical mission and enlightenment role of modern Japan are the deeper theme

of the work and the true value of *Dancing Girl*.

Higuchi Ichiyo is good at shaping female image of all forms from each aspect. The female character shares a common ground, that is, they couldn't become master of their fate or keep independent because of the social norms, which controlled by money and patriarchal system that caused them to face such a plight. *Child's Play* not only has a description of females who suffer from the social oppression and insults and cannot receive fair treatment neither on the spiritual aspect nor on the material aspect, but also reflects cruelty and hardship of the society and darkness of life.

In *Kokoro*, Natsume Soseki pointed intensively and critically at the detestable, lamentable and deplorable lonely inward world of the intellectual egoists at the age of autocracy. The title of the novel *Kokoro(Heart)* can be understood after times of reading: The anguish and uneasiness after being deceived, self-accusation and loneliness after deceiving by others, and the unseen future formed strong impact in '*Heart*.'

The project is aimed at analyzing three representative works by Mori Ogai, Higuchi Ichiyo and Natsume Soseki to reflect the lower-class people's miserable life, especially the tragic fate of women ravaged and trampled by society, who struggle to live in the dark society, suffering all kinds of insults and oppression. It also describes depressed and confused life of small bourgeoisie intellectuals, and to a certain degree, it shows the dissatisfaction and resistance consciousness of Japanese towards the dark reality in modern society. However, due to the lack of clear social consciousness, the people's life it reflects is dark and pathless, and the social protest it expresses is passive and hopeless.

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