

Soseki Natsume and Modern Japanese Female Liberation: From 'Jiko-hon'i' to 'Sokutenkyoshi'

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Abstract: As the founder of modern Japanese literature, Soseki Natsume's works not only reflect the various conflicts of Japanese society at that time, but also describe the situation of female at that time. The female images in Soseki Natsume's works are 'Jiko-hon'i' (self-centeredness). On the one hand, they are required to maintain their self-image. On the other hand, they are required to provide reproductive value to men, and finally they have to give up their individuality for survival and status. By portraying the contradictory group of women, Soseki Natsume's works reflect the ideological suppression of women in Japanese society at that time. Soseki Natsume further touched on the issue of female liberation in his idea of 'Sokutenkyoshi' (following natural principles and removing personal selfishness). This concept advocates following the laws of nature, eliminating personal selfishness, and emphasizes transcending the individual self and pursuing universal truth and justice. In the context of gender relations, it can be interpreted as a call to eliminate gender bias and inequality, and to advocate respect for female independence and rights. Therefore, Soseki Natsume's works play an important role in understanding modern Japanese women.

Keywords: Soseki Natsume; Jiko-hon'i; Sokutenkyoshi; Female liberation

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1. Introduction

Soseki Natsume is a famous writer and thinker in modern Japan. Most of Soseki Natsume's novels take the small characters in daily life as the main characters, and reflect the social reality through their joys and sorrows. He pays attention to real life and sharply exposes and criticizes various problems existing in society. Many works depict women's problems and liberation. Although limited by the social background and ideology at that time, the female issues involved in his works are of high research value. Through his works, we can better understand the modern Japanese women^[1].

2. The Social Background of Soseki Natsume

The evolution of Soseki Natsume's literary ideas is deeply influenced by the social background^[2]. The Meiji Restoration made Japan move forward rapidly in the process of modernization, and the Japanese government carried out drastic reforms in politics, economy, culture, education and other aspects. In this social background, women's social roles and status also began to change. The traditional Confucianism and the spirit of Bushido, which advocated the female image of obedience, implicit beauty and obedience to men, were gradually challenged.

In Soseki Natsume's works, there are many descriptions of the current social situation at that time. His early work, *I Am a Cat*, showed his critical attitude towards society and traditional gender roles at the time^[3]. His 'Jiko-hon'i' idea was initially formed at this stage, which emphasizes the importance of individual independence and self-realization. This kind of idea is manifested in the resistance to the traditional female bondage and the shaping of the new female image in the treatment of female roles.

3. 'Jiko-hon'i':the Ideological Basis of Female Liberation

'Jiko-hon'i' is a philosophical and sociological concept, which mainly refers to the individual's self-centered thought and behavior tendency, and emphasizes the individual's subjective feelings, desires, needs and value judgments. In modern Japanese society, especially in the modernization process after the Meiji Restoration, the concept of 'Jiko-hon'i' gradually influenced people's cognition of gender roles and promoted the development of female liberation movement. As a master of modern Japanese literature, Soseki Natsume's portrayal of female images in his works is based on 'Jiko-hon'i'. This kind of thought can be seen in his early works^[4].

In *I Am a Cat*, the wife of Kushami Sensei shows an independent sense of self despite living in a traditionally patriarchal society. She received secondary education and had a certain knowledge quality. In the face of the troubles of life and marriage, she showed a tenacity and self-adjustment ability, which reflects the 'Jiko-hon'i' thought to a certain extent.

In *Gubijinso*, the image of the heroine Fujio more clearly shows the idea of 'Jiko-hon'i'. Fujio is a well-educated woman who always sticks to her values and emotional appeal when choosing a marriage partner^[5]. Fujio's self-awakening and pursuit of free love undoubtedly reflects Soseki Natsume's contemplation on the spirit of female 'Jiko-hon'i'.

However, Soseki Natsume's understanding of women's liberation is not limited to 'Jiko-hon'i'. In his later works, he further proposed the concept of 'Sokutenkyoshi'. This philosophy advocates transcending individual egocentrism and pursuing higher moral and spiritual realms. In these works, although the female protagonists still maintain a 'Jiko-hon'i' independent consciousness, they gradually realize the connection between personal happiness and social responsibility after experiencing life's challenges, and begin to seek a broader and deeper self realization.

4. 'Sokutenkyoshi':An Action Guide for Female Liberation

With the enrichment of Soseki Natsume's personal experience and the deepening of his thought, his literary idea gradually turned to 'Sokutenkyoshi'. This idea, heavily influenced by Buddhism and Confucianism, advocates transcending personal desires and pursuing selflessness and great love. On the issue of female liberation, 'Sokutenkyoshi' is not to deny female individual value and self-realization, but to advocate a universal outlook on life that transcends gender boundaries^[6].

'Sokutenkyoshi' is a moral philosophy and outlook on life proposed by Soseki Natsume in his later years. Its core meaning is to advocate people to go beyond personal desires and self-centered, and pursue higher moral realms and social responsibilities. This concept originates from the philosophy of 'following natural principles' in classical Chinese philosophy, which follows the laws of nature and the order of the universe, as well as removes personal selfishness and prejudice.

In Soseki Natsume's works, 'Sokutenkyoshi' is regarded as an action guide for female liberation. Because the concept emphasizes not only individual self-realization and free pursuit, but also the concern and commitment to social responsibility and public interests. For modern Japanese women, the pursuit of 'Jiko-hon'i' liberation is only the first step. To achieve true equality and dignity, they need to transcend their personal limitations and devote themselves to broader social practice and public affairs. In *Light and Shade*, Soseki Natsume applied the concept to the female roles, and advocated that women should transcend their selfish desires and narrow view of interests, and pursue a higher spiritual realm and personality independence^[7]. Women are no longer satisfied with being appendages to men, but actively seek the realization of their self-worth, dare to express their thoughts and emotions, and demonstrate a resilient and indomitable spirit. Through the portrayal of the role, Soseki Natsume shows to readers the important significance of the 'Sokutenkyoshi' concept for women's liberation. He believes that only when women can transcend their personal desires and biases, can they truly achieve self-worth enhancement and personality independence, so as to gain equal status and respect in society.

Therefore, 'Sokutenkyoshi' is not only Soseki Natsume's pursuit of personal moral cultivation and life ideal, but also his set of guidelines for women's liberation action^[8]. In Soseki Natsume's works, we can see the transformation of women from 'Jiko-hon'i' to 'Sokutenkyoshi', which is not only the deepening and expansion of women's liberation, but also an important symbol of the progress of human civilization.

5. Soseki Natsume's Views on Love and Gender

In Soseki Natsume's works, the traditional concept of marriage is seen as a shackle to individual freedom and social progress. He believes that marriage should not be just about procreation or social expectations, but should be a choice based on love. This view undoubtedly challenged the traditional concept at that time and provided strong support for women's independent choice. Secondly, he also questioned the gender role setting of men and women. In his view, men should not oppress women with their identity and status, but should respect rights and dignity of women. He also advocates that women should have independent thinking and judgment, and not be limited by traditional gender roles. This kind of thought promoted modern Japanese women to get rid of the shackles of feudal thought and pursue self-realization and self-value consciousness^[9]. Furthermore, Soseki Natsume has a unique view on the

issue of power relations between men and women. On the issue of gender equality, he believes that personal equality is more important than economic equality. He opposes male domination and control over women, and advocates for the establishment of a relationship of mutual understanding, respect, and support. The concept not only helped to break the traditional gender power structure, but also promoted the women's liberation movement in modern Japan^[10].

6. Conclusion

Soseki Natsume's view is not entirely beyond the limitations of his time. His works also reflect some outdated social concepts and unreasonable expectations, which hinder his in-depth analysis of the relationship between men and women in society. But even so, he opened up a new path for the women's liberation movement in modern Japan, and led people to re-examine the importance of gender relations. In the liberation of modern Japanese women in the Works of Soseki Natsume, we can see the embodiment of the two important concepts of 'Jiko-hon'i' and 'Sokutenkyoshi', which not only reveals the awakening of women and the spiritual of pursuing freedom at that time, but also provides rich materials for future research.

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