

Abstract of Doctoral Dissertation

Title : The Study of Shōtarō Yasuoka's Literature : “The Weak” as a Method

Doctoral Program: Major in Humanities
Graduate School of Letters
Ritsumeikan University
アンドウ ヨウヘイ
ANDO Yohei

This doctoral dissertation examines Shōtarō Yasuoka's literature from the perspective of “weakness” as a literary device deployed in representing the characters in his novels. In previous studies, views on Yasuoka's literature as a “literature of the weak” have already been stratifying since the early days of the author's career. In recent years, however, it has been observed how these studies are merely reassessing over and over this same concept of the “literature of the weak” without actually taking any step further in exploring Yasuoka's literature.

Nonetheless, there are still aspects left to consider in Yasuoka's depiction of the weak. In the present study, I will examine the weak in Yasuoka's literature from two perspectives in particular: how they are portrayed and what kind of critical views arise from their representation.

The first chapter focuses on the novel *Shukudai*. The story is set in an elementary school and depicts an underachieving student who is unable to keep up with his schooling. While investigating the portrayal of these ‘inferior’ students in the novel and its link to society, I will highlight how this novel hides a potential critique of school education in both prewar and postwar periods.

Chapter 2 focuses on *Tonsō*. This novel focuses on an ‘inferior’ soldier who is unable to adapt to the life of the army's internal affairs unit and toward whom the author himself seems to hold out some kind of hope. I will examine this hope by referring to Yasuoka's own idea of literature and to a novel he often criticized, Hiroshi Noma's *Shinkūchitai*.

Chapter 3 focuses on *Inki-na tanoshimi*. This novel revolves around a wounded soldier who is living on military benefits after the war and is affected by an inferiority complex. I will argue that this character's repeated failures in his attempt to “be a man” in the novel can be read as a critique of the

discourse on defeat and occupation of the same era.

Chapter 4 focuses on *Kaihen no kōkei*. In this work, which depicts the last days of a mother suffering from dementia, the son who comes to visit her is unable to get along with her because of the excessive awareness he has toward his own position as a son. I will discuss how in depicting the lights and shadows of this consciousness the novel also shows how to free oneself from it.

Chapter 5 focuses on Yasuoka's study in the United States. While studying in the U.S., Yasuoka felt a sense of inferiority and discrimination due to the defeat and occupation of Japan. Such multiple layers of inferiority led to a new development in Yasuoka's later works. I will argue that the tendency in deploying this inferiority as a motif in his later works can be already traceable in the memoirs from this experience abroad.

Chapter 6 focuses on *Tsuki wa higashi ni*, a sequel of a previous work, *Maku ga orite kara*. In this novel, which is about striving to achieve maturity and finally failing to do so, in examining the immaturity of the protagonist I will discuss how his very failure reflects a criticism from his author.

In addition to the above six chapters, as an addendum, I examine a literary group known in Japan as *Daisan no shinjin* ('third generation of postwar writers'). Yasuoka has long been regarded as the representative figure of this group, but I will criticize the validity of this label by examining the group's origins and the reasons that led it to become so popular in post-war Japan.