

Introduction

The time of snow
Closes in on Mount Hiei . . .
Bleak days
Of ultimate loneliness;
My path never ends.¹

—Yukawa Hideki (1907–1981)

Japan's first Nobel laureate, Yukawa Hideki, wrote the above *waka* poem during December 1945, just months after Japan's unconditional surrender, which ended the Pacific War. With this first defeat as a modern nation state in Japanese history, Japanese society was completely devastated. It was during this bleak period that Yukawa seems to have identified his feeling of loss as a Japanese with the cold of winter on Mount Hiei, which he looked up to as the cradle of Japanese Buddhism. What connects his sense of loneliness, the severe cold, and Buddhism is the process of following a path toward an only dimly sensed goal—perhaps the recovery of Japan in general and a new world of physics in particular. Yukawa's idea of an “endless path”² is derived from Japanese literary tradition. He was fond of medieval and early modern Japanese literature, including *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*), Saigyō's *Mountain Home Anthology* (*Sankashū*), and Bashō's *haikai*, as well as Chinese classics, especially *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi*. Yukawa represents a broad range of modern Japanese intellectuals who do not consider themselves to be religious but maintain an interest in literary expressions of Buddhism.

Buddhism is one of the dominant forces that shaped Japanese culture. Western scholars have discussed Japan's Buddhist art, Buddhist architecture, and performing art influenced by Buddhism, as well as Buddhism's impact on medieval Japanese literature; however, they have done so by considering

Buddhism to be incidental to modern Japanese literary studies. On the other hand, Japanese scholars have studied the representation of Buddhism in modern Japanese literature mostly through a denominational doctrinal lens. *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction* introduces to the Western academic world the significance of Buddhism in modern Japanese literature by extracting unrecognized Buddhist elements from the disciplinary divide between literary and Buddhist studies through the notion of “path.” It also corrects the dominant perception in which the Christian practice of confession has been accepted as the primary informing source of modern Japanese prose literature.

This book features prose works created during the first three decades of the twentieth century both by literary figures—Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867–1916), Tayama Katai 田山花袋 (1872–1930), Shiga Naoya 志賀直哉 (1883–1971), and Matsuoka Yuzuru 松岡譲 (1891–1969)—and Buddhist priests, such as Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903) and Akegarasu Haya 暁鳥敏 (1877–1954). Their works are approached from a Buddhist point of view more than a literary point of view and analyzed in terms of the Buddhist narrative structure of “ground, path, and goal.” In Buddhism, path is a metaphor for spiritual growth that leads to the attainment of Buddhist realization. The Buddhist notion of path is not only useful for analyzing the structure of personal fiction that features the spiritual growth of the main character but is also helpful in the allegorical reading of such texts from a Buddhist perspective.

The Awakening demonstrates two types of textual study. First, it presents textual study that is inseparable from analyzing the writer’s interiority. When Sōseki, Katai, and Shiga are considered in light of the lay Buddhist movement, they had their own spiritual training that was comparable to Buddhist practice. Although they did not intend to write religious novels, for these writers—and for Kiyozawa and Akegarasu—writing can be considered a path and a narrative is a medium of self-reflection that triggers self-transformation. Second, this book uncovers the meaning of a work—a meaning defined by an unlimited number of contexts—rather than explaining the authorial intent of the work.³ It demonstrates a way of reading in which Buddhist imagery and symbols are interpreted on subtextual levels to reveal their connections to the main characters’ spiritual impasse, self-realization, and Buddhist awakening. Allegorical readings of the texts, underpinned by the Buddhist notion of path, are, to some extent, inseparable from the writers’ Buddhist experiences. Their Buddhist engagement is evident in their works through their linguistic codifications and in their religio-philosophical choices. Those stories are neither doctrinal nor written from a Buddhist clergy’s point of view, but represent how most Japanese, including the writers themselves, relate to Buddhism in their daily

lives. *The Awakening* thus demonstrates the informing presence of Buddhism in the writers' engagement with Buddhism by writing personal fiction and in readings of personal novels.

For works that were formerly treated as I-novels (*shishōsetsu* 私小説), this book adopts the term "personal fiction." The I-novel is the most popular literary form of confession in modern Japan and is believed to present the author's life without mediation, whether in first- or third-person narration. The protagonist, or hero, and the author are, however, not identical, because I-novels are, after all, fiction. In *The Rhetoric of Confession*, Edward Fowler uses the term "autobiographical fiction" instead of I-novel, and defines it as a literary form that mediates between the experiences of a writer and the hero. Unlike Fowler, who questions the authenticity of self-referentiality in autobiographical fiction, Tomi Suzuki considers I-novels a retroactively constructed discourse and shifts the discussion of I-novels as a literary form to a Japanese cultural ideology. When Suzuki's argument is considered, the Buddhist sensibilities that appear in I-novels can be explained as part of the later ideological construction of I-novels, defined as traditional and uniquely Japanese. However, the practice of confession has always been a part of Buddhist culture. The Buddhism represented in I-novels is also contemporary and mirrors the modern development of Japanese Buddhism and the reinterpretation of traditional Buddhist values. This book focuses on the selected writers' Buddhist experiences as stories that are personally constructed and does not investigate the "nonfictional" (historical) development of modern Japanese Buddhist organizations. Personal fiction includes not only autobiographical fiction, which is confessional in nature, but also novels in which parts of the protagonists were modeled after the authors and novels in which main characters were based on people the authors knew, as well as diaries and documentary works.

Sōseki, Katai, Shiga, and Matsuoka had experiential contacts with Buddhism not only by reading Buddhist scriptures but also by participating in funerary Buddhism and interacting with Buddhist clergy. Although Confucian ethics had been the norm for modern Japanese intellectuals, this lived experience was significantly different from their experiences of other forms of East Asian religio-philosophical traditions, such as Confucianism and Taoism, with which they had become intellectually familiar by reading Chinese classics, including the *Analects of Confucius* and *Zhuangzi*. Buddhism, therefore, constitutes a key category for analyzing these writers' growing spirituality and serves as a point of reference for exploring their experiences of other religions, such as Christianity and Tenrikyō, as well as their perceptions of popular indigenous religious beliefs.

The form of Buddhism embraced by the literary authors and Buddhist priests examined in this book is both traditional and modern. Their works represent cultural forms that grew out of the exchange between Western European civilization and local traditions in non-Western countries after the nineteenth century. During the rise of Japan as a modern nation-state in competition with the West, the Japanese searched for a distinct national identity through a new form of writing. In this modernizing process, Japanese intellectuals reconfirmed and articulated traditional Buddhist ideas. They renewed their sense of impermanence when they experienced rapid social changes, which also altered human relationships, and new types of death caused by recent developments in their country concomitant with modern epidemics, warfare, mental breakdown, and growing poverty. Modern Japanese writers associated untimely death, loneliness, self-detachment, and the beauty of nature with the Buddhist sensibility of impermanence and Buddhist awakening. They did not accept the notion of karmic punishment, but projected their present on their past, incorporated various non-dual Buddhist images into their work, and adopted the Buddhist attitude of seeking the way.

At the same time, the Buddhism that modern Japanese writers experienced—and to which they contributed—is a modern construction. They accepted new discourses on Japanese Buddhism created by the Buddhist clergy, such as United Buddhism, as a trans-sectarian Buddhist movement, and Kamakura New Buddhism, as the pinnacle of Japanese Buddhist development. Lay Buddhist leaders invented methods of the unmediated inner religious experience and overlooked a wide range of long-standing “physical discipline and ritual competence,” according to Robert Sharf.⁴ This tendency coincides with the “myth of sincerity” that Fowler points out in the development of autobiographical fiction.⁵ The Buddhist practice of seeing things *as they are* resonates with realism as a vision of reality, namely, describing what writers perceived exactly *as they are*, or *ari no mama* ありのまま. The ability to detach oneself from one’s attachment was sought in both the Japanese literary establishment and the Buddhist world of modern Japan.

This book consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides a background for two types of readers—specialists and students of Japanese Buddhism and Japanese literature. It highlights the problem of disciplinary boundaries that have prevented discussions of literary figures’ interest in Buddhism within the categories of either literary studies or Buddhist studies and introduces previous discussions of Buddhism and literature in modern Japan by Japanese scholars. It then provides a survey of Japanese Buddhism, including discussions of basic Buddhist doctrines, major Mahayana sutras, and the formation of funerary

Buddhism. Chapter 1 also explains the overarching conceptual framework of the book—that is, modernism, personal fiction, and path literature.

The following chapters are divided into two parts. Part 1 consists of four chapters and considers the writing of personal fiction to be a Buddhist practice. Chapter 2 introduces Sōseki, Katai, and Shiga from the point of the lay Buddhist movement. They are known as great literary writers of modern Japan, but their Buddhist experiences are relatively unknown in the West. Although they considered themselves to be neither Buddhist practitioners nor religious thinkers, they expressed great interest in Buddhism. They were not interested in Buddhist sectarianism, but were drawn to Buddhist worldviews, Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings, and aesthetic conventions of Japanese culture through which evanescent sentiments are expressed. Further, Sōseki practiced sitting in meditation, wanderlust led Katai to seek a reclusive life, and Shiga took pleasure in viewing Buddhist art.

Chapter 3 focuses on the notion of *ari no mama*, which Sōseki, Katai, and Shiga considered crucial to the descriptions of realistic fiction, and analyzes the ways in which these authors articulated the relationship between literary art and Buddhism. While investigating the impact of realistic writing as developed in both Japan and the West on their personal fiction, this chapter demonstrates the relationship between the literary practice of observing and describing things as they are and the Buddhist practice of “right view” or seeing things as they are. For these writers, writing personal fiction—particularly autobiographical fiction that is confessional and highly self-reflective—was a form of spiritual practice that made them aware of who they were. They did not, however, write personal novels in order to gain spiritual comfort; rather, writing personal fiction helped them understand how their present conditions came to be by their conduct in the past. Sōseki's *Grass on the Wayside* (*Michikusa* 道草, 1915), Katai's *Remaining Snow* (*Zansetsu* 残雪, 1917–1918), and Shiga's “At Kinosaki” (*Kinosaki nite* 城の崎にて, 1917) are read as examples of the authors' paths and in light of their introspective practice that paralleled Buddhist practice. Although the notion of a self is negated in Buddhism, that does not mean the existence of a self is denied. Rather, the denial of the self leads to an awareness that the cause of suffering is self-attachment and the self is always in a state of change. Those who attain Buddhist realization develop non-dual perspectives and understand that life is interdependent.

Chapter 4 treats the confessional writings of Shin Buddhist clerics as variants of personal fiction. A close reading of the texts demonstrates that Shin Buddhism was part of a system of confession and served as one of the sources of modern Japanese literature. It thus replaces Karatani Kōjin's position that

Christianity's confessional mode was the primary "source of modern Japanese literature."⁶ Shinran (1173–1263), the founder of Shin Buddhism, confessed how difficult it was for him to overcome his base passions, and since then, expressing the burden of karma and repentance became an established Shin Buddhist practice. For modern Shin Buddhist leaders such as Kiyozawa, who suffered from tuberculosis and a fear of death, and Akegarasu, who struggled with his carnal desires, confessional writing as a record of religious conversion and as reportage of a spiritual experiment was a method through which they examined their Buddhist path and questioned the limits of moral judgment.

Chapter 4 begins with an investigation of Kiyozawa's "The Nature of My Faith" (*Waga shinnen* 我信念, 1903) and continues to Akegarasu's sexuality as observed in *Before and after My Rebirth* (*Kōsei no zengo* 更生の前後, 1920). Unlike Kiyozawa, whose confession is rational and expository, Akegarasu, who was aware of the artistic effects of confessional writing, employed literary techniques and deliberately constructed his work to be read as literature. For him, confessional writing represents both traditional and modern Shin Buddhist practice. He was also interested in prose, poetry, and autobiographical fiction. The social standing of Kiyozawa and Akegarasu as Buddhist priests and their intentions to write about personal religious experiences, as well as those of their readers, have led their works to be distinguished from works of "literature." Akegarasu represents a writer excluded from the disciplinary boundary formed around modern Japanese literature. The difference in the personal novels of Akegarasu and the other literary authors examined in this book is that for Akegarasu, personal fiction served as a means of religious propagation—whereas for Sōseki, Katai, and Shiga, it did not—and that unlike Katai and Shiga, Akegarasu was not concerned with the transient beauty of nature.

Chapter 5 explores a personal novel that features the history of a contemporary Shin Buddhist denomination, its reform movement, and the lives of Shin priests and lay members. While *Guardians of the Dharma Castle* (*Hōjō o mamoru hitobito* 法城を護る人々, 1923–1926)—a best seller that contributed to the so-called Taishō Religious Boom—is Matsuoka Yuzuru's autobiographical fiction, its historical account is supported by his documentary work. This chapter analyzes the ways in which Matsuoka placed his hero in modern Shin Buddhist history. His documentary work became his religious practice and a path that led him to address a Buddhist reform by means of fiction. *Guardians* also represents two major Shin Buddhist events. Although Matsuoka wrote *Guardians* to question a Shin Buddhist organization, because it depicts the lives of ordinary clergy and laity from a Marxist perspective and shows Shin Buddhist history from the bottom up, it adds to the organization's institutional

history that is created by its ministerial authority. Despite a recent surge of interest in modern versions of medieval Buddhist hagiographies, serious scholarly attention has not been given to modern Buddhist historical fiction. This chapter therefore contributes to a wider discussion of historical novels in modern Japan.

Part 2 consists of three chapters. It demonstrates allegorical Buddhist readings of personal novels created by Sōseki, Katai, and Shiga. Not all of the main characters and narrators studied in this section experience Buddhist awakening; however, because Buddhism deals with the nature of suffering, the Buddhist notion of path is helpful in exploring the ways in which main characters and narrators handle their problems, deepen their sense of being, reflect their conditions of selfhood on others, and gain self-realization. While Buddhist traditions are diverse, when the personal novels are read from the standpoint of path, the transformation of main characters or the development of the narrator's self-awareness is the common theme. These changes are brought about by their reflections on other characters, suffering, death, and nature, as well as through their interaction with Buddhists, Christians, and followers of other religions.

In chapter 6, the words and objects used in daily life in Sōseki's *The Three-Cornered World* (*Kusamakura* 草枕, 1906) and *The Gate* (*Mon* 門, 1910), as well as in Katai's *The Quilt* (*Futon* 蒲団, 1907), are examined as Buddhist allegories. Both secular meanings and religious messages are found in such words as *ōjō* 往生 (birth in the Pure Land) and *mondō* 問答 (dialogue). The word *futon*, sleeping mattress and cover, which has now become part of the English language, was used to refer to cushions for Buddhist meditation. Chapter 6 views those words and objects as Buddhist symbols and clarifies their implications by highlighting the non-dual nature of Buddhist symbolism. Through the system of Buddhist symbols, the characters' struggles against themselves, others, and society are seen as the beginning of their accepting self-limitation and base passions, which leads them to experience self-transformation.

The main characters analyzed in chapter 7 advance their spiritual inquiries and attain peace of mind. Katai's *The Miracle of a Buddhist Monk* (*Aru sō no kiseki* ある僧の奇蹟, 1917) and Shiga's *A Dark Night's Passing* (*An'ya kōro* 暗夜行路, 1921–1937) are treated as the stories of the main characters' "turning of the mind." Their experiences of Buddhist awakening are analyzed in terms of their experiences of mysticism, organized religion, and nature. The relationship between self and others and the impact of death on the main characters are also examined.

Chapter 8 investigates literary representations of funerary Buddhism. Funerals are Buddhist symbols that appear in personal fiction as rites of passage. During Buddhist funerals, the periods of transition in the lives of literary

characters and new sensations regarding life and death are identified through the connection of the term “path” as a synonym for passage. In Sōseki’s *Sanshirō* (*Sanshirō* 三四郎, 1908), Sanshirō comes across the funerary procession of a child and thinks deeply about the innocence of death, associating it with beauty of the woman he has fallen in love with. In Sōseki’s *The Miner* (*Kōfu* 坑夫, 1908), after the protagonist and miners view the parade for a dead miner, which deviates from conventional Buddhist funerary processions, the barrier between the protagonist and the miners disappears. The Buddhist funeral of an Imperial Japanese army officer in northern China observed by the narrator of Katai’s *The Diary of the Second Army Corps at War* (*Dainigun jūsei nikki* 第二軍 徒征日記, 1905) during the Russo-Japanese War evokes in him loneliness and a sense of displacement. Unlike those accounts of Buddhist funerals, characters in Katai’s *Life* (*Sei* 生, 1908) and Sōseki’s *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* (*Higan sugimade* 彼岸過ぎ迄, 1912) lose loved ones. They find spiritual solace in a Shinto-Buddhist hybrid funeral and a Shin Buddhist funeral, respectively. Liminality is a key to exploring the spiritual growth of the characters in those novels and for examining both the unsettling and cathartic effects of Buddhist funerals as well as relating those discussions to analyzing the non-dual nature of Buddhist symbols.

Sōseki is the thread that binds the contexts of this book. This study initially began as an exploration of Sōseki and Buddhism, and then the scope of inquiry was expanded so as to bridge literary and Buddhist studies. Examination of Sōseki’s Buddhist engagement led the research to delve into Buddhist experiences of other literary authors who also wanted to understand why they had been struggling against themselves. Although Katai was hostile to Sōseki, both writers considered nature to be the source of self-detachment. Shiga admired Sōseki’s idea of “leaving oneself by becoming one with heaven” (*sokuten kyoshi* 則天去私) and entrusted himself to Mother Nature. Although Sōseki and Kiyozawa may never have met, Sōseki modeled the character “K” in *Kokoro* (*Kokoro* ころ, 1914) partly on Kiyozawa, who was attached to ascetic practice, ruined his health, and then entrusted himself to Amida Buddha’s original vow. Matsuoka was one of Sōseki’s students who interpreted *sokuten kyoshi* as Sōseki’s determination to avoid a self-centered way of living.⁷ Yukawa Hideki also became interested in Sōseki’s work because Yukawa’s father-in-law was the physician who treated Sōseki when Sōseki was hospitalized at his clinic in Osaka.⁸

In the appendices, the works of Akegarasu and Matsuoka, which the present study explores, are partially translated. While the personal fiction of Sōseki, Katai, and Shiga, as well as Kiyozawa’s religious testament have been translated into English and studied by Western scholars, Akegarasu’s confessional

writing, which is treated as an adaptation to personal fiction in this book, and Matsuoka's *Guardians*, have been neglected.

Finally, caveats associated with this book must be noted. First, this book deals primarily with the Zen and Pure Land traditions as it builds on the analysis of Sōseki's Buddhist experience. Analyses of other forms of Buddhism in modern Japanese literature are omitted. Esoteric Buddhism is represented in Izumi Kyōka's *The Saint of Mt. Koya* (*Kōya hijiri* 高野聖, 1900), and Miyazawa Kenji, who wrote many children's stories, was influenced by the *Lotus Sutra*. Also, it is important to note that the personal novels of female writers, such as *Child's Play* (*Takekurabe* たけくらべ, 1895–1896) by Higuchi Ichiyō 樋口一葉, which includes episodes about the son of a Buddhist priest, are excluded from the present study, though they are touched on in the conclusion. Although many prominent literary writers during the postwar period, such as Takeda Taijun and Okamoto Kanoko, commented on the relationship between Buddhism and literature, this study focuses on the prewar era.⁹

Second, those who specialize in literary studies and those who are familiar with the works of Sōseki, Katai, and Shiga may find summaries of these authors' novels descriptive and lengthy. They may suggest that a summary of a work should be part of a textual analysis, rather than dividing summary and analysis in which portions of the summaries are reiterated. This book takes the form it does because of consideration for those who are not familiar with works of modern Japanese literature. Literary critics may also point out the lack of intertextual analysis in this book, especially concerning Sōseki's major works. The spiritual struggles and developments of the main characters in his so-called "trilogy" can be analyzed as one spectrum of the main characters' religious experiences, but such intertextual study is beyond the scope of this book.

Despite these shortcomings, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction* presents a more nuanced understanding of the role of Buddhism in the development of modern Japanese literature. A creative take on the title of the book is that it derives from *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith*, an English translation of *Dasheng qixin lun* (J. *Daijō kishinron* 大乘起信論). This Buddhist commentary, compiled in China in the sixth century, is "one of the most influential treatises in all of East Asian Buddhism" and its author aims to "reconcile two of the dominant, if seemingly incompatible, strands in Mahayana Buddhism: *tathāgatagarbha* (embryo or womb of the buddhas) thought and the *ālaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness) theory of consciousness."¹⁰ *The Awakening* brings together Buddhist studies and literary studies, opens new vistas at the intersection of religion and literature, and brings Buddhism out of the shadows and interstices of early twentieth-century Japanese literature.¹¹