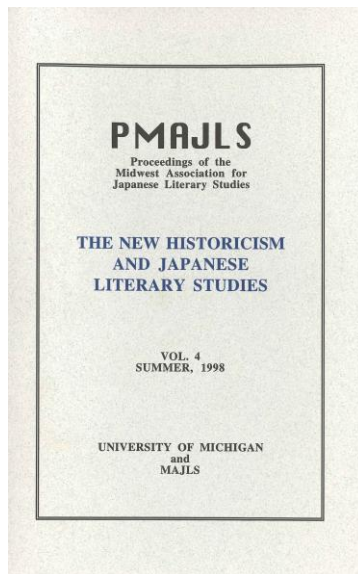


“Tsubouchi Shōyō’s Negotiations in *The Essence of the Novel* (Shōsetsu shinzui)”

Atsuko Ueda 

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**Tsubouchi Shōyō's Negotiations in
*The Essence of the Novel (Shōsetsu shibzui)***

ATSUKO UEDA
University of Michigan

Tsubouchi Shōyō's (1859-1935) *Shōsetsu shibzui* (*The Essence of the Novel*) is often valorized as the manifesto of modern Japanese literature. Published between 1885 and 86, it is considered to be the first critical work to define the modern novel or *shōsetsu*. Yet, at the same time, it is often criticized as a work full of contradictions. The reason for this is simple: Shōyō, despite his effort to modernize literature, was himself "not modernized enough"--or so the argument goes.

Whether they valorize the text or condemn it, these positions have at least one thing in common: they assume that this entity called modern *shōsetsu* existed prior to the writing of *Shōsetsu shibzui*. Instead, what I would like to do is to approach the text as a medium that *produced* the entity called the modern *shōsetsu*. In other words, my approach to this text is to begin with the assumption that the modern *shōsetsu* as Shōyō defined it in *Shōsetsu shibzui* did not yet exist at the time of his writing. Shōyō is in fact producing, creating, and configuring the *shōsetsu* by the very process of writing this text. And within this process, we see various levels of negotiations within the discourses prevalent at the time.

By addressing the text in this manner, it is possible to see the various objectives Shōyō tries to achieve in *Shōsetsu shibzui*. First, he tries to attach value to the *shōsetsu* and establish the *shōsetsu* as a form of art. Second, there is an attempt to define or restrict the realm of *shōsetsu*--this is done in an effort to establish the *shōsetsu* in its own right. Third, there is a struggle

to produce and to privilege his definition of the *shōsetsu*. By *shōsetsu* I'm referring to that which "realistically" portrays the "social lives" of the characters of "the present."¹

For today's presentation, I would like to focus on the third objective that I listed. Just to clarify, there are three constituents that make up the modern *shōsetsu* as defined by Shōyō: they are *ari no mama* ("the real" or literally, "as it is" or "as things are"), "the present" (*gense*) and "social lives" (*sewa*). These constituents of the modern *shōsetsu* all have their opposites in *Shōsetsu shibzui*, namely "the ideal" (*risō*), "the past" (*ōseki*), and "the historical" (*jidai*)² respectively. In *Shōsetsu shibzui*, these sets of oppositions align themselves with each other and against their respective oppositions. A connection is, therefore, made between these oppositions to posit a modern *shōsetsu*, and an examination of the historically specific forces that govern the very *aligning* of the constituents is, I believe, vital in determining the configuration of modern *shōsetsu*.

More often than not, the reason why the *shōsetsu* is defined in this manner is sought by critics in Western novels. This connection is often narrativized in terms of "Western influence." I do not deny Western influence in *Shōsetsu shibzui*, nor do I reject the idea that Shōyō "imported" various arguments from his reading of Western works. Yet "Western influence" alone cannot explain the various questions that arise from a close reading of

¹ Tsubouchi Shōyō, *Shōsetsu shibzui* from *Tsubouchi Shōyō sh.* vol. 3 compiled in *Nihon kindai bungaku taikai* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1974). See chapters "Shōsetsu no shugan" ("The Main Theme of the Novel") and "Shōsetsu no shurui" ("The Types of Novels")

² As I will later discuss, *sewa* and *jidai* do not oppose each other in any obvious way. My translation of these terms, historical/social lives, reflects the displacement evident in the dichotomy.

this text. Although we cannot underestimate the status of the West in Meiji Japan for it is the primary force compelling Japan to promote rapid modernization, the West does not exist independently within the historically specific space in which Shōyō wrote; it is not identifiable as an autonomous entity. The West is always already inscribed within the space of *Shōsetsu shibzui*'s production, and it is within that discursive space that the terms Shōyō adopts to configure the modern *shōsetsu* need to be situated.

My discussion will also extend itself to *Tōsei shosei katagi* (*The Characters of Modern Students*, 1885-6). Written about the same time as *Shōsetsu shibzui*, *Tōsei shosei katagi* is Shōyō's own experimental novel in which he implemented the theory he presented in *Shōsetsu shibzui*.³

At a glance, the three constituents of the modern novel seem to produce a plausible form of modern *shōsetsu*. However, different sets of problems are inherent in each opposition--their correlation therefore is bound to produce a paradox. Shōyō needs

³ The narrative style Shōyō employs in *Tōsei shosei katagi* is reminiscent of *gesaku* fiction, the very genre he criticized in *Shōsetsu shibzui*. Accordingly, the overwhelming majority of literary scholars believe that *Tōsei shosei katagi* is a failure, that Shōyō could not accomplish in practice what he was able to achieve in theory. The criteria by which these scholars judge the work are "realism" and "psychological depth," criteria developed by post-*genbun'itchi* writers and critics; and based on such standards the work is very much a failure. What must be noted, however, is that the discrepancy between Shōyō's theory and practice, that is, the former's success and the latter's failure, is itself a product of a subsequently developed set of criteria that was retrospectively imposed upon the two texts. In fact, *Tōsei shosei katagi* quite faithfully actualizes Shōyō's theory. By examining the work as the embodiment of his definition of the modern *shōsetsu*, we will be able to bring to the fore the configuration of the "modern Japanese novel" that lies at the core of the institution of modern Japanese literature. On *genbun'itchi* and the discovery of the *a priori* reality, see Karatani Kōjin, *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen*, (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1980).

to tackle many such problems as they arise in the process of producing his modern *shōsetsu*. One such negotiation produces a basis for yet another one, and we see him maneuvering his way through them over the course of the text.

Let us first examine the dichotomy of time: "the past" and "the present." The establishment of a temporal framework is ideologically bound in any form of writing. "The present," for example, cannot simply be dismissed as the "here and now." It involves selecting a beginning and an end, and to select a beginning for "the present" means everything that precedes the beginning is labeled as "the past." In Meiji, where to set the break between the "past" and "present" had immediate political implications.

For most of us, the Meiji Restoration marks the beginning of the modern period or the division between the premodern and modern era. At the time, however, this division was not firmly in place. The Restoration was a dramatic event for many, but an event not yet situated in "history;" there was no shared narrative concerning it. Since the Meiji Restoration was the foundation of the Meiji government, whether or not to endorse it as the "beginning" of the present was a clear political statement. This was especially so for the *shizoku* class (the former samurai) of which Shōyō was member. If *shizoku* were to write about the pre-Restoration era, especially the Edo period in which they were the ruling class, they would immediately reveal their political stance; the affirmation or rejection of the prior period would inevitably situate them either for or against the Meiji government. The configuration of the "present"--and in turn the "past" and "future"--in *Shōsetsu shibzui* and *Tōsei shosei katagi* must be explored in this light.

The story time of *Tōsei shosei katagi* is set between 1881 and 1883, but with flashbacks and the narrations of the

characters' background, the story goes back as far as the Battle of Ueno in May of 1868—one of the battles of the Boshin War fought between the Imperial army and the Tokugawa Shogunate. To identify the beginning of the present and the ideological ground upon which “the present” is constructed in this work, we must examine the story of “success” and “failure” that unfolds within this time frame. The characters' lives are governed by their socio-economic positions, and by determining when and how they have acquired their “present” positions, we will be able to locate the designated beginning.

Success in *Tōsei shosei katagi* is best represented by Moriyama Tomosada, the father of one of the main characters, and Miyoshi Shōemon whom Tomosada befriends. Moriyama Tomosada and Miyoshi belong to a generation that got its start in the past; both held political, economic, and social status within the *bakufu* system. In fact, they had once belonged to the *bakufu*, that is, on the side of the Shogunate. Tomosada is a *shizoku* from Shizuoka, the region to which the last Shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu (1837-1913), retreated during the battle of Ueno. At one point in the narrative, Tomosada explicitly states that he was in fact “serving by the Shogun” (御膝下に仕えて or literary “by his knees”) upon the breakout of the war.⁴ Yet, after the Restoration—after the fall of the Shogunate which he served—Tomosada had become extremely successful “by immersing himself in various businesses, changing his ways in accordance with the passage of time” (TSK, 295-6). He begins to work at an export company and “succeeds in acquiring tremendous

⁴ Tsubouchi Shōyō, *Tōsei shosei katagi* from *Tsubouchi Shōyō shū* vol. 3, compiled in *Nihon kindai bungaku taikai*, (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1974), 299. Hereafter, references to this work will be made parenthetically in the text with the abbreviation TSK.

wealth" (TSK, 296). Likewise, Tomosada's friend Miyoshi achieves success in the new world of Meiji. When the Shogunate was in power, he was an owner of a long-standing sword shop, a business very much tied to the *bakufu* system. "His family business (the sword shop) deteriorated with the coming of the Restoration" but Miyoshi took risks in the "dollar market" and "rice market" and made a fortune (TSK, 296). With the money he earned, he later became a president of a bank and has now become very successful.

Tomosada and Miyoshi succeeded in businesses that were developed in the Meiji period; exports and banking arose from the need to establish Japan's position among the world powers. They acquired their current positions by capitalizing on the needs of the new world and adapting to the system of Meiji. Given this background information, it is clear that their lives, as they have them now, began with the Restoration itself and that their success is procured within the newly established socio-economic structure.

In contrast to Tomosada and Miyoshi who epitomize "success," Komachida Kōji, the father of the protagonist Komachida Sanji, embodies "failure." His is the story of a rise and fall that begins with the Meiji Restoration. Kōji, unlike Tomosada and Miyoshi, had fought with the Imperial army during the Boshin War and thus "had connections with those in the government" (TSK, 255). Recognized for "his contribution to the Restoration," he became a public servant at a ministry soon afterward, attaining "success," at least temporarily (TSK, 255). Kōji received "extravagant pay from the government and enjoyed an exceeding amount of glory, leading a luxurious life with his wife and mistress" (TSK, 255). Along the way, however, he also incurred many debts with money-lenders, and during a major reform at the ministry for which he worked, Kōji

was dismissed for being "an inappropriate human resource for the new world" (TSK, 264). As a result, he could no longer maintain the connections he had had with those in power and was left with nothing but his debts. The conditions of Kōji's rise and fall are very specific to the post-Restoration era; and throughout the story, he lives with his "failure," striving to pay off his debts.

These representations of "success" and "failure" in *Tōsei shosei katagi* clearly designate the Meiji Restoration as the beginning of "the present"--the Meiji Restoration is when the current lives of these characters begin. This designation of "the beginning," moreover, reconstructs "the past" and places a clear value judgment upon it. Not only are the two success stories a result of the characters' adherence to the Meiji system, they are also contingent upon a complete conversion--a conversion away from the political, economic, and social systems of "the past." In order to succeed, both Tomosada and Miyoshi needed to relinquish the positions they had occupied in "the past." Jettisoning "the past" is the precondition for "success." By representing "success" in this manner, *Tōsei shosei katagi* constructs the era prior to the Restoration, the *bakufu* system to which these characters once belonged, as "the bygone past." The current system within which they live exists as if independent from that of the *bakufu*; the two systems are completely discontinuous in *Tōsei shosei katagi*. The text thus deconstructs the *bakufu* system and thereby reconstructs it as "the past" to be abandoned.

On the other hand, the configured "present" in *Tōsei shosei katagi* is a naturalized one. The political, economic, and social order of Meiji is fixed; it exists, and there is nothing that can be done to change it. In fact, no character in the text questions the basic paradigm that shapes the world within which he lives.

While the successful characters continue their path toward wealth, the failed characters struggle to make ends meet within their reality, their "present."

By designating the Meiji Restoration as the beginning of "the present," *Tōsei shosei katagi* seems to endorse the Meiji government. However, it is important to note that "success" in this work is brought to those who neither fought for nor contributed to the Restoration and that "failure" befalls those who did. Though the text clearly acknowledges the Restoration as the point of division between the present and the past, the story of "success" and "failure" that unfolds within the narrative also serves as a critique of the Meiji government whose identity is founded upon the Restoration. While affirming the Meiji system through the designation of such a beginning, *Tōsei shosei katagi* also maintains a critical stance against the Meiji government itself.

At the same time, when we shift our attention to the discursive space within which Shōyō wrote, it is possible to see that the configuration of time in *Tōsei shosei katagi*, as well as *Shōsetsu shibzui*, also functions as a criticism of a genre that dominated the literary scene during his time. I have in mind the *seiji shōsetsu* (the political novel).

Seiji shōsetsu is a genre that Shōyō completely ignores in *Shōsetsu shibzui*. In the introduction, for example, he narrativizes a genealogy of the *monogatari* from the classical age to the present. When his narrative reaches the present, he only mentions *gesaku*, not *seiji shōsetsu*. Despite its absence, or rather precisely because of its absence, *seiji shōsetsu* is clearly inscribed within *Shōsetsu shibzui*. And the key constituents that make up the modern *shōsetsu* show Shōyō's negotiation with the very genre he ignores.

Seiji shōsetsu was written by the advocates of *jiyū minken*

undō (People's Rights Movement), which opposed the newly established nation state. This was a movement governed by the ideology of *risshin shusse* ("success and advancement" by means of education--as opposed to birth) which promised equal opportunity to all. *Jiyū minken undō* was initiated soon after the Restoration by the *shizoku* who were dissatisfied with the fact that the government was dominated by *shizoku* from Satsuma and Chōshū. It was led and supported by those who were deprived of the ruling class privileges they had enjoyed during the Tokugawa period, privileges that were taken away by numerous policies set forth by the government in the first decade of Meiji. Although they ostensibly fought for the "liberation of the people," the supporters' discontent with the new Meiji order was the main cause of the movement.

Accordingly, *seiji shōsetsu* was a genre that refused to acknowledge the Meiji government and its "present" as a fixed, inconvertible entity that cannot be overthrown. For *jiyū minken* activists, the institutions of Meiji needed to be restructured for the establishment of the rightful government that would put into practice the ideals of *jiyū minken undō*.

Inscribed in works of *seiji shōsetsu* are the concerns of the *jiyū minken* movement at different phases of the movement. These works construct the "present" in varying ways and envision different forms of victory. There were many issues that had been debated among them, but one important issue, especially in the second decade of Meiji, was the establishment of the parliament. For example, Toda Kindō's (1850-1890) *Jōkai haran* (*Storms in the Sea of Passions*, 1880) allegorically thematizes the convening of the parliament. In 1881, however, the parliament was set to convene in 1890 by the Imperial Edict. From then on, *jiyū minken undō* shifted its focus to party politics. This shift can be seen in Yano Ryūkei's (1850-1931) *Keikoku*

bidan (*Inspiring Instances of Statesmanship*), published in 1883. It portrays the struggles the members of the "Rightful party" (正党), who have been ousted from the government as a result of a *coup d'etat* carried out by the "Unrightful party" (奸党). When the members of the Rightful party are forcibly exiled, the leaders of the authoritarian government oppress the people while accumulating personal wealth. The government attempts to destroy the forces of the Rightful party but fails each time. Of course, the story ends with the victory of the Rightful party and its members regain their past glory. Forgive me for the gross simplification of these works, but the point I would like to make is that *seiji shōsetsu*, by thematizing the political issues at hand, envisioned a future that would transform the present. In *seiji shōsetsu*, the activists attempted to (re)construct the Meiji Restoration, their first loss, as a phase toward their eventual victory. As far as they were concerned, the Meiji Restoration was simply a negative moment in history and not a decisive beginning of the present. Rather, the Restoration, as well as the social-political structure founded upon it, was a result of a temporary setback.

It must now be clear why Shōyō's construction of "the present"--as that which is fixed, as that which cannot be transformed--opposes the world to which *seiji shōsetsu* and *jiyū minken undō* aspired. To regard the Restoration, not as a phase toward a different future, but as the decisive beginning of "the present" signifies a rejection of *jiyū minken undō* itself.

What drives this criticism of *seiji shōsetsu* and *jiyū minken undō*? It is here that we must examine the next opposition, that of *ari no mama/risō*. For Shōyō, *jiyū minken undō* was a refusal to accept the present as *it is*--the *ari no mama* condition. While *jiyū minken undō* struggled to establish the parliament and to organize party politics, there was a significant number of *shizoku*

who were disassociated from the conflicts fought between *jiyū minken* activists and the government. By the time *Shōsetsu shibzui* was written, there were many *shizoku* who had been stripped bare of all their property. Almost a decade had past since the *chitsu roku shobun* ("abolishment of stipends," 1873-76), a policy that had been implemented to lessen the financial burden of the government. As a part of this policy, *karoku*-stipends paid by the government to the *shizoku* and the aristocracy--were replaced with *kōsai* or public bonds (with interest), which were to mature in 30 years. Those who succeeded in acquiring large sums of *kōsai* (i.e., the aristocracy and high-ranking *shizoku*) were able to invest in land and various businesses. Others, however, used up the value of their meager bond and were busy making ends meet in the new world. They were unable to educate themselves or their sons, and thus the ideal of *risshin shusse* was merely an unattainable dream.⁵ In other words, by 1885, the gap between those who succeeded in getting favorable treatment from the government and those who didn't had widened considerably.

Jiyū minken undō was at its height between 1880 and 1883 when the main issue of debate was shifting from the establishment of the parliament to party politics. As the power dynamics changed to accommodate party politics, the focus of the government was now on gaining seats in the parliament. Accordingly, government officials and *jiyū minken* activists alike sought support and connections with the voters. In Meiji, suffrage was only granted to men over 25 years of age and who paid more than 15 yen in taxes.⁶ Given this financial restriction,

⁵ On *shizoku*'s economic condition, see Sonoda Hidehiro et. al, *Shizoku no rekishi shakai gaku kenkyū* (Nagoya: Nagoya daigaku shuppankai, 1995).

⁶ The election law that specified such eligibility was passed along with the first constitution in 1889, but these restrictions were known well in advance.

the voters were limited to those with wealth. As the activists began to place more emphasis on winning parliamentary seats, *jiyū minken undō* began to betray itself as a political movement for the upper *shizoku* class, not the "liberation of the people." The political arena had become increasingly compartmentalized excluding those with money.

While the Meiji Restoration had seemed to bring about equality to all by abolishing the rigid class hierarchy of the Edo period, it was also a time when money and close affiliations with those in power became the key components of success and advancement. "*Risshin shusse* by means of education" was revealing itself as an empty rhetoric, used by the *jiyū minken* activists to gain support for their cause. Shōyō, for example, graduated from *Kaisei gakkō* (the later Tokyo Imperial University), but was without a job for some time after completing his degree. Having graduated from *Kaisei gakkō* meant Shōyō was the elitest of the elites. His reality was far removed from the ideal that *risshin shusse* promoted.

In short, as the *jiyū minken undō* progressed, it became more apparent that its ideological underpinnings--*risshin shusse* by means of education, equality among the people, and the establishment of the parliament where voices of the people could be heard--were all too idealistic. Such ideas simply ignored "the present" as it is.

As the "politics of the people" began to show itself as empty rhetoric, it became evident that the activists' primary motive was their desire to restore the power and authority they had enjoyed as samurai. They were simply seeking to regain the privilege they had in "the past." The deliberate choice of "the present" in its "*ari no mama form*" in Shōyō's definition of the modern

shōsetsu is the denial of the writing about or looking back at the "bygone" past, a perspective shaped by "the ideal." *Jiyū minken undō* was a fight within a small compartmentalized circle of the privileged, fought by those who could not let go of their "idealism"--of the belief that the present could be changed.⁷ And for Shōyō, this belief could only be sustained by ignoring the present "*ari no mama*" situation. "Portraying the present as it is"--the connection he made between *gense* and *ari no mama* is very much a product of his time.

Shōyō thus proposed to fix the present--as that which exists, as that which will never be overthrown. However, as I have mentioned before, this does not mean that Shōyō endorsed the Meiji government. In fact, his *shōsetsu* is a rejection of the political arena as a whole. Whether they were fighting for the government or for *jiyū minken undō*, they were all positioned in the same privileged community, a world so compartmentalized that entrance was denied to those of the low economic strata. This was a world Shōyō could not affirm.

This is where we must turn to the last of the oppositions: *sewa* (social lives) and *jidai* (historical). This is not a common or self-evident dichotomy. According to Shōyō, the historical *shōsetsu* should be written "based on historical figures or real

⁷ Although the *jiyū minken undō* is normally understood to be the first democratic movement in Japan, when we consider the class origin of its members, we see that the advocates of people's rights actually had a strong connection with the elites or those in power. It is not a coincidence that members of the People's Rights Movement move in and out of the government, making various compromises in the face of its decline. In 1887, for example, key leaders of *jiyū minken undō* such as Itagaki Taisuke (1836-1919) and Gotō Shōjirō (1838-1897) were offered the chance to become Barons, a rank in the new aristocracy required for those aspiring to be at the center of the government. They quickly left the movement and grabbed the first opportunity to regain their power.

events of the past," while the social should portray "emotions, customs, and mannerisms."⁸ The definitions he provides for the respective types of *shōsetsu* do not oppose each other in any obvious way. If the social were to oppose the historical, the objects of description could have been "real events in the present" or "figures making history." And Shōyō was very much in a position to write a *shōsetsu* based on prominent figures of his day. After all, he had personal connections with those involved in politics and business dealings like Takada Sanae (1860-1938), a member of Kaishintō (the Progressive Party) whom Shōyō befriended, and Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838-1922), one of the leading figures of *jiyū minken undō* (at least until 1884). Yet he chose not to. It is not a coincidence that a character Shōyō chose as his protagonist in *Tōsei shosei katagi* is the one who claims, "there is no merit in joining a political party; in fact, only harm is done by it" (TSK, 343).

The realm of the modern *sewa shōsetsu* is that which is *not* the realm of politics. By social life of the people, Shōyō meant the "non-political" life of the people. Within the fixed inconvertible present, he had sought to portray a life that is severed from the political arena. By dissociating the world of *shōsetsu* from the political arena, he de-politicized the realm of *shōsetsu*.

However, needless to say, this realm of *shōsetsu* is far from being "apolitical." By rejecting the political arena as a whole, or rather by positing *shōsetsu* as that which restricts itself to a realm that is *not* politics, Shōyō evaded taking a political stance. Yet this position Shōyō took is political and ideologically bound itself. This ideological position, however, is suppressed by the configuration of *shōsetsu*. In other words, modern *shōsetsu* is

⁸ *Shōsetsu shibzui*, 80.

posited where politicality is evaded, and it is a form of *shōsetsu* that suppresses the very ideology that constructs itself.

And this is the foundation of the institution called modern Japanese literature. This institution was founded after *Shōsetsu shibzui*. The master narrative of modern Japanese literary history that designates *Shōsetsu shibzui* as its own origin only ratifies the illusion that *shōsetsu* is an "apolitical" medium. It also means that the institution itself loses sight of the very ideology that governs it. To begin our narrative of literary history with *Shōsetsu shibzui* is to suppress the moment that literature severed itself from politics, the moment that literature itself became politics, the moment the institution of literature came into being.

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