

Thanatological Considerations on Takusen, Ogai,
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Academics

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Thanatological Considerations on Takusen, Ogai, and Chomin

Life and Death to Meiji Era Academics

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KATO Takusen is MASAOKA Shiki's real uncle, and was one of the most talented pupils of NAKAE Chomin, who was one of the greatest Enlightenment leaders of the *Bunmei Kaika*, which coincided with young Takusen's training years.

MORI Ogai had a close friendship with Takusen, along with one-of-a-kind best friend, KAKO Tsurudo (additionally, his wife was also the aunt of Ms. Kato). There is no doubt that the way of confronting death by Ogai has had a decisive influence on Takusen (two died one after in about nine months).

Takusen chose to adorn his own tombstone with the words "Mr. Takusen Bone." He wanted to leave the best work that he can, and as much work as possible during his lifetime.

Preface

In this paper, I will take up KATÔ¹ Takusen (1859-1923), MORI Ôgai (1862-1922), and NAKAE Chômin (1847-1901) as representative intellectuals who were educated in the early *Meiji* (1868-1912) era, and in particular, look at how they confronted their own deaths. Of the three, Ogai and Chomin require no introduction, but Takusen on the other hand is almost unknown. His biography will be detailed in Chapter 3 of this paper.

Chapter 1. Relationship Between Main Characters

In my 2019 treatise, I discussed MASAOKA Shiki (1867-1902)'s view of the life and death (thanatology) and compared him to Chomin, who was also facing death and was pondering its meaning around the same time, placing emphasis on Shiki's criticism of Chomin (Cf. Ino 2019: esp. 40-42).

By picking up Takusen this time, the relationship between these three will be connected; Takusen is Shiki's real uncle, and was one of the most talented pupils of Chomin, who was one of the greatest Enlightenment

キーワード：エリート、教養、治療拒否、リビング・ウィル、遺書
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leaders of the *Bunmei Kaika* (Japan's Westernization Era), which coincided with young Takusen's training years.

To add one more individual, Ogai, a skilled military doctor and the pinnacle of modern Japanese literature, of course had a friendship with Shiki in terms of *Haiku* 俳句, which was still in the progress of being reevaluated at that time, a younger Shiki led Ogai, a great figure in the literary world. So when Shiki went to the Sino-Japanese War as a war correspondent in his later years, and met Ogai on the battlefield, how might have Shiki, who was ailing from pulmonary tuberculosis, appear to the doctor Ogai?

Ogai also had a close friendship with Takusen, along with one-of-a-kind best friend, KAKO Tsurudo (additionally, his wife was also the aunt of Ms. Takusen Kato. 1855-1931). There is no doubt that the way of confronting death by Ogai has had a decisive influence on Takusen (who two died one after in about nine months. See chapter 4 of this paper).

Unfortunately, this kind of friendship was not a coincidence; in the middle of the *Meiji* era, the younger generation who supported the modernization of Japan was concentrated in a very close society. All of them were elites who gathered in the new capital of Tokyo from all over the country, who had studied at the University of Tokyo, still the only university in Japan, or had studied abroad in Europe to come back to become the first generation to modernize Japan. It became the driving force of it.

To be precise, Chomin is from a

generation above Takusen, having been his teacher. Kako, Takusen, and Ogai respected each other on equal footing. Takusen, on the other hand, was already a veteran as a young man, and was indeed four years younger than Kako, and Ogai, who was the most precocious prodigy in modern Japan, was seven years younger.

Shiki was the son of Takusen's eldest sister, nine years younger than his uncle, and he appeared in the world after these three, who I consider to be the "first generation of the Meiji era."

Also, at the beginning of the last century, when this generation reached its peak, the word "Shisei-kan [view of life and death; thanatology]" was coined in Japan and attracted a lot of attention (Cf. Shimazono 2013: 87). The trigger for this new interest came from none other than one of Chomin's final works, *One Year and a Half* (1901) and its sequel.

Chapter 2. Elites as the 1st Generation of Meiji Era

KATÔ Shûichi, a critic representing postwar Japan, said in their book (with two more western co-writers), *The Japanese View of Life and Death*, "in general, the attitude of the "elite" to life and death is different from that of the general public in at least two ways" (this book focused on six people, including Ogai and Chomin, which this paper deals with).

The two points are, first, the elite are often "more conscious of themselves", "better educated", can muster "stronger self-control",

and that “‘ideology [idealism]” and religious systems will be especially important” to them. Second, the effects of their relationship with power in their lives is “relatively large” (Cf. Kato et al.: 1977). These points almost entirely apply to the discussion in this paper.

When Shiki, who has just moved to Tokyo, was asked by his respected elite uncle Takusen, a star of expectations in his hometown of *Matsuyama*, about his dreams, Shiki answered that “if I were to be a bureaucrat, the Minister of Government; if I were to be a politician, the Speaker of the House of Representatives.”

It is a pleasant and well quoted episode, however, Shiki was forced to drop out of the elite course due to tuberculosis. But, in fact, HARA Takashi (1856-1921), one of Takusen’s best friends since law school who was three years his senior, climbed up to the role of prime minister thirty-five years later and would be called “Prime Minister of *Heimin* [commoner]”.

Takusen himself was also undoubtedly a typical elite person in such a rising society during the Meiji era (initially as a foreign bureaucrat, later as a deputy and corporate manager). He moved to Tokyo from Matsuyama in the middle of his teenage years, and studied as a second-generation student at the newly established Law School of the Ministry of Justice.

He was, indeed, expelled (not because of poor academic performance, but due to his student activism being labeled violation of school policy) and lived a year unemployed and

in harsh conditions, but he continued his studies, mastering French and other Western studies crucial to modernizing Japan at the time. This led him to his first stay in France (study abroad) in 1883 [16th year of Meiji-era], and during that stay he was able to become a bureaucrat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the introduction of his lifelong friend, Hara.

In this generation also belong Ogai, AKIYAMA Yoshifuru (Takusen’s lifelong friend from childhood in Matsuyama, the hero of the Russo-Japanese War, and later General of the Army), Kako, and so on. Most of them were born in the 1850s (*Bakumatsu*, the end of the *Edo* period), and were given advanced education in Western studies in Tokyo throughout the 1870s to 1880s (in the early Meiji era), but were also well-equipped with classical studies (Chinese studies; history, religion, philosophy, and literature (poetics 漢詩 *Kanshi*)).

It is very difficult to explain “漢文 Kanbun” in English. To put it simply, it is a Japanese-style modification of Chinese, but most of the Japanese who understand Kanbun (including myself, having taught Kanbun for college entrance exams in high schools) are not always able to speak Chinese. Chinese, which is spelled entirely in Chinese characters, is read aloud as Japanese by reading comprehension of Chinese characters as far as the Japanese understand (of course, it can’t be perfect), and the intention is captured (therefore, it is impossible for Chinese people to read Japanese sentences with mixed *kanji* and *kana*

(Japanese original, simplified characters derived from kanji) using only kanji as clues).

NAKAE Chomin, this other great man, who is older than the protagonists of this treatise, and one of the most outstanding Enlightenment thinkers of the generation who raised them, is Takusen's greatest teacher.

At the *Futsugaku-juku* [private school for the studies of France] that he opened after returning from studying in France, he taught two departments, Jurisprudence and Literature, based on books written in French, or books written in Kanbun and Japanese (History seems to have been as the major part of the latter).

First and foremost, is it characterized by an emphasis on classical Chinese studies, that is emphasis on culture, which embodies the thinker Chomin himself.

Later, he became the principal of the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages, but due to his emphasis on classical Chinese studies, he was confronted by the Ministry of Education which led to his early resignation. Since he emphasized the cultivation of morality in education and tried to impose classical Chinese studies such as Confucius/Mencius; it could not have been in line with the policy of the Bunmei Kaika [Enlightenment in early Meiji] period.

Today (at least in my opinion) I can defend his scholarly understanding and educational philosophy, but at that time there were almost no bureaucrats who wished for such “old-fashioned classical education” from up-and-coming intellectuals returning from France.

The emphasis on classical Chinese studies by Chomin was not limited to his own training period of youth, but surprisingly, he was so thorough that he personally attended some Chinese studies schools from 1878 to 1880 after returning from studying in France to deepen his cultivation, despite having already entered his mid-thirties.

As he was called “Rousseau in Orient”, his most representative achievement was the translation into Kanbun of his *The Social Contract* (*Du contrat social*, 1762), *People's Covenant Translation* 『民約訳解』, which had a decisive influence on the later *Freedom and People's Rights Movement* 自由民権運動 in Japan. This translation was not like just a language exchange, but a work particular to Chomin, which was interpreted and translated from the perspective of himself who emphasized Confucian morality.

In addition, while teaching acquired jurisprudence with his excellent French, he translated a french book written by Eugene Veron by the title, *Aesthetics by Mr. V* 『維氏美学』 and gained a reputation as the first aesthetic book in Japan (today in Japan, Veron is an almost forgotten thinker known only as the original author of this translation).

From these points as well, we can see his breadth of as thinkers.

Ogai and Kako became doctors, Yoshifuru became an army officer, and Takusen became a diplomat. Each one of them can be considered to have reached the pinnacle of their positions: Ogai became the military medical director (beside the main job, he

reigned as a literary writer at the highest peak in modern Japan), Kako became a performer who was called the originator of Japanese otorhinolaryngology, Yoshifuru became an army general, and Takusen became a minister (there was no ambassador in Japan at that time).

Chapter 3. The Man Named “Takusen” Kato Tsunetada

However, the person named Kato Tsunetada (Mr. Takusen 拓川居士) is almost unknown to the general public, who stands in stark contrast with the monolithic presence of Mori Rintaro (Ogai). For example, a typical biographical description might list something like the following:

Tsunetada Kato
Ansei 6 (1859) -March 26, 1923 [alias]
Takusen Kato, Takusen, Chuzaburo
Diplomat and politician from the Meiji to
Taisho era. Mayor of Matsuyama, member
of the House of Representatives. He has
served as president of Osaka Shinpo and
was a temporary ambassador to Siberia
(Cf. Nichigai 2014: 338)².

In other words, Takusen is the pseudo name of Tsunetada Kato, a diplomat in the Meiji and *Taishô* (1912-1926) eras.

But that’s not all. In the above biographical dictionary, there are important matters that were not intentionally written because of the provision of information as a diplomat, that is, a public figure. That is, Takusen was the real uncle of Shiki, and he was

in a close friendship with Ogai, who is the other protagonist of this paper. Furthermore, in this paper, I pay particular attention to the fact that the three parties, who had a close friendship (or blood relationship) with each other, also confronted the deaths of themselves and others and considered them in depth.

Takusen had close relationships with at least three former prime ministers: Hara Takashi (it was a tragedy that he was assassinated as the incumbent prime), SAIONJI Kinmochi (1849-1940), and INUKAI Tsuyoshi (1855-1931; he was also assassinated as the incumbent prime). I have mentioned Hara, the lifelong ally, many times. For Saionji, who was ten years older and had great authority and power (later became an elder statesman 元老), Takusen was his most reliable foreign bureaucrat since they studied together in their youth in France. They remained very close friends until Takusen died an early death leaving Saionji behind. Inukai had a foreword in Takusen’s manuscript *Takusen-shu* as a friend representative.

“It is as if Takusen was born in this world to make friends. If he had collided with ITÔ Hirobumi (Note: the first Japanese prime minister, and the leader of the latter among the *Satsuma* and *Chôshû* oligarchy who divided power in Japan at that time. 1841-1909) and continued without quitting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he would have become the Minister of Foreign Affairs even if he kept silent. I think he was a person who would have been the Prime

Minister if he had the will to pursue a little more career advancement” (Cf. Masaoka et al. 2018: 309).

These are the words of SHIBA Ryōtarō, the author of *Cloud Above the Hill* and *Sounds of People's Footsteps* depicting the Matsuyama people of the Meiji era.

In Japan, it was often said of the elite of this era, “will be a doctor or minister.”

Although many said he had the capacity to become a foreign minister, ironically, he didn't want that honor.

Therefore, let's arrange the birth and death years of the three people again.

Takusen: February 24, 1859 [January 22, *Ansei*] - March 26, 1923 [Taisho 12]. Died at 64 years old.

Ogai: January 19, 1862 [February 17, *Bunkyū* 2] - July 6, 1922 [Taisho 11]. Died at 60 years old.

Shiki: October 14, 1867 [September 17, *Keiō* 3] - September 19, 1902 [Meiji 35]. Died at 34 years old.

Considering the average life expectancy of Japanese adult males at that time, dying at 60 years old [*Kanreki* 還暦] was not an early death. In fact, there were many friends around Shiki who died younger than him (Cf. Ino 2019: 44).

In any case, compared to Shiki, who suffered from an incurable disease, both Takusen and Ogai left a brilliant achievement

and would be considered to have died having lived a full life.

Of course, no one dies without any regrets, but the two died after completing the elite mission. It must have led to the fact that both were far from being obsessed with their lives.

Chapter4. Each Person's Views of Life and Death

What is crucial about the relationship between Shiki and Takusen is that the young Takusen, who came to Tokyo from *Iyo* [Matsuyama], became a classmate with KUGA Minoru (1857-1907) who also came from *Aomori*, and made a lifelong friendship while attending the Law School of the Ministry of Justice. He was later called *Katsunan* and presided over Japan's finest newspaper, *Nippon* [Japan].

Seven years after his uncle, Shiki, who also came to Tokyo in 1883, cared by his uncle Takusen, who was about to go to France, to consult his best friend Katsunan. This was Shiki's encounter with the greatest benefactor of his life, but it wouldn't be until more than ten years later that he would actually write for the *Nippon* newspaper, after realizing that he did not have time left due to tuberculosis.

Also in my 2019 treatise, I quoted Shiki's letter to his pupil TAKAHAMA Kyoshi, as follows: “Many people in this world have great ambitions, but none so great as I. Most people are buried in the earth still embracing their dreams, but no one will ever go beneath holding fast to as many as I. No matter how

great my achievement in *Haiku*, it will be as zero compared to the infinity of my dreams” (Translated by Beichman. Cf. Beichman 1982: 60. Originally, *Shiki Zenshû* XIX: 18).

Shiki’s ambition expressed here is no longer only a public one, but also private. The ambition of Takusen’s generation, however, was the ideology [idealism] of the modern nation, the Empire of Japan.

I have already introduced the fact that Shiki criticized Chomin’s thanatological work (Cf. Ino 2019: 40-42). Takusen must have been deeply influenced by Chomin’s view of life and death, the greatest teacher in his life, but there is no record stating that this was influenced by nephew’s harsh criticism.

On the contrary, perhaps influenced by his nephew’s view of life and death, Takusen, similar to his nephew’s opinion, voluntarily erected his own tombstone inscription in later years.

In addition, Takusen was also affected by the death of his deceased teacher Chomin.

Chomin was prepared for his life expectancy and stated that he did not need a funeral or a dharma name 戒名. After his death, Japan’s first farewell ceremony was held in his honor.

Perhaps the one that had the deepest influence on how Takusen confronted his death was the work and philosophy of his best friend Ogai.

A letter not included in the Iwanami version of *Ogai Complete Works* is introduced in the latest issue of *Ogai* (Cf. Yamazaki 2021: 105-107). This was addressed to YAMADA

Tamaki and Mari, the eldest daughter of Ogai and her husband on May 2, 1922, just two months before his death.

Here Ogai said “I was a little unhealthy this spring, but now in Nara [Note: The Prince of Wales (later the British King Edward VIII, Duke of Windsor after abdication) who came to meet the Imperial Prince of Japan Hirohito, also visited *Shosoin* in Todaiji-temple, *Nara*. Naturally Ogai, real name Mori Rintaro, accompanied the Prince’s party because of being the head of the Imperial Museum of Japan], I’m going to feel better”; he lied in an attempt to reassure the daughter’s couple.

In fact, he was often ill in this ancient city, and in the letter addressed to his wife *Shige* on the same date as the above letter, “[Note: May 1st afternoon] sleeps from 1 to 4 o’clock, (...) sleeps from 9 o’clock to 2nd morning. I think that the bronchus is not good; black sputum clumps appear.” As a doctor himself, he diagnosed and reported himself *objectively* and calmly. He told his wife about his condition in frank terms, but he didn’t go to the doctor no matter how much she insisted.

And in a letter to his best friend Kako on May 16th, the famous saying “*Don’na mei nimo, mite morawanai* [No matter how great the doctor, I’m not going to see him].” Kako decided to respect Ogai’s will, and in the opening margin of the wrapping paper of this letter, he also wrote a famous appendix “*I-yaku Wo Shirizokeru Sho* [Letter to Reject Doctors and Drugs].” This is very important and will be discussed in more detail: this Ogai’s letter was a living will as a “refusal of treatment”.

And another important material I would to mention is Ogai's suicide note, which is very famous in Japan. The original text was written in formal and old-fashioned Japanese, but for the sake of convenience, I will try to translate it into English with priority given to the meaning.

It is Mr. Kako Tsurudo who has been my friend without any secrets from childhood to death.

I am dying now and bothered Mr. Kako with a few lines.

Death is a serious event that ends everything.

I believe no governmental [Note: one character correction] power can resist it.

I want to die as the *Iwami* people, Mori Rintaro.

The Imperial Household Ministry, the Army, but at the moment when life and death broke up, I will abandon all external relationships.

I hope to die as Mori Rintaro.

No character should be carved on the grave other than *Mori Rintaro grave*.

This calligraphy is entrusted to NAKAMURA Fusetu.

The honor of the Imperial Household and Army absolutely wishes to be canceled.

There will be procedures for each.

This is a reminder to my only friend and does not allow anybody to blame.

Taisho 11th year [1922] July 6th

Mori Rintaro stated (thumbprint)

Kako Tsurudo writes

Mori Rintaro

Eldest son *Oto*

Friend representative

Kako Tsurudo

Concluded

“After Mori, Aoyama [Note: AOYAMA Tanemichi, a professor of internal medicine at the University of Tokyo School of Medicine. 1859-1917] passed away, you are the only soulmate of mine.” This is a letter dated July 14, 1922 [Taisho 11], from Kako to Takusen.

On May 26, 1922 Takusen became Mayor of Matsuyama, where he was born. He had already suffered from esophageal obstruction (cancer) and had difficulty eating.

Takusen had received at least two important documents (copies) about Ogai from Kako. One was the so-called “Medicine Suicide Note [above *Letter to Reject Doctors and Drugs*]”, and the other is this suicide note. Kako, who had lost his best friend Ogai five days ago, wrote to his one other friend Takusen whom he had diagnosed himself with.

Takusen also rejected aggressive treatment, eating liquid food at first, and later not even at all, and lived the last month consuming nothing but water. The last words in his diary that he kept writing until the day before his death was “The old cherry blossoms in front of the garden have fallen [Note: written in Kanbun. 庭前老櫻去]”. The next day, on the 36th day of fasting, he finally submitted his resignation, saying, “I want to abandon the title of mayor and die as a citizen,” and left the world at 10:50 pm.

His grave marker engraving was humorous, ironically and the date of death, which was left empty, expressed his readiness for death, like his nephew Shiki's.

Tombtable of Mr. Takusen

Mr. Takusen, common name is Tsunetada: the third son of Professor ÔHARA Kanzan: his mother was a daughter of Professor UTAHARA Shôyô: born in Matsuyama in the 6th year of Ansei [1859]: married Dr. KASHIMURA's daughter: gave birth to three sons and two daughters: the beloved second son died before: Mr. Takusen, being an emotional individual, never recovered from his grief: sixty-five years old, on ----- -- th [Note: month and date are blank], 12 years of Taisho [1923]: left a will to bury him on the side of the tomb of the dead son: Mr. Takusen studied in Tokyo during his youth: became a law student at the Ministry of Justice in three years: forsook

[Note: it can be read "thrown out"] and left, study in France: although studies were incomplete but was nonetheless appointed to a diplomatic position: working for twenty years: known for incompetence: finally elected to the Imperial Diet: was known for being a representative without much presence: later years, became Mayor of Matsuyama: did not accomplish much yet again: had high aspirations, perhaps too high, lacked the academic talent to realize them. Died without recognition, how sad.

In reality, however, Takusen had his grave marker engraved with the words "Mr. Takusen Bone" instead of this table (Figure 1 & 2).

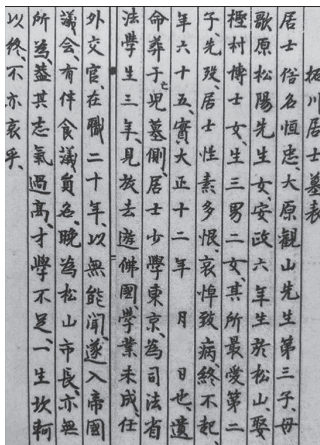


Figure 1. Tombtable



Figure 2. "Mr. Takusen Bone"

Addendum

Before I conclude this treatise, I would like to tell a very personal story. My one and only elder brother passed away while writing it. He was still twenty years shy of the average life expectancy, and was all the more miserable for it.

Even more than ever, I began to think that people become just *things* when they die, and that only in life can accomplish anything.

I don't dare ask about the whereabouts of the soul; whether or not there is an eternal soul is unknown to me. I don't know if it will eventually come into view the way quarks and neutrinos have as of late. Therefore, it is a transcendental realm.

I do understand the mental state that Takusen must have been in when he chose to adorn his own tombstone with the words "Mr. Takusen Bone." That is why I want to leave the best work that I can, and as much work as possible during my lifetime.

However, death sometimes cuts off such thoughts so easily. Some people are not even given enough time to live in the first place.

As always, I want to continue to think about "sentenced life expectancy." Regarding sudden deaths, accidental deaths, and deaths caused by murder, I would like to take another opportunity to think about such immediate problems for a while and then consider whether or not take them in earnest.

Notes

1) In recent years, Japanese names are often written in European languages in the order of surname-first name. I personally thought it is desirable, but in my European treatises I have followed traditional conventions. However, this time, because the Japanese in the Meiji era are main characters and the pen names are used, the notation is unified in the order of surname-pen name or surname-first name. Along with that, in order to make it clear, the first surnames that appear are all capitalized.

Samples: KATO Takusen, KATO Tsunetada; MORI Ogai, MORI Rintaro

Another annoyance is the long vowels, which I have represented by the macrons.

2) A more detailed background is given below:

"Minister of the House of Representatives to Belgium, Mayor of Matsuyama

January 22, 1859-March 26, 1859 [Birth] Iyo *Kumi* Matsuyama (Matsuyama City, *Ehime* Prefecture)

[First name] Last name / Old name = Ohara, Child name = Chuzaburo, Pen name. = Takusen Kato

[Final Education] Dropped out of the Law School of the Ministry of Justice, Paris Law School (France) [History] Born to the third son of Matsuyama feudal lord OHARA Aritsune (Kanzan).

Entered the Law School of the Ministry of Justice in 1876, became a classmate with HARA Takashi (later Prime Minister of Japan), KUGA Katsunan (on him, a very important person, I must elaborate later), etc. and formed a friendship. Entered Paris Law University in 1883, became a diplomatic trial assistant while staying in Paris in 1886, and later served as a counselor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a minister of envoy to Belgium. Attended the wedding ceremony of the Spanish king in 1906. He resigned in 1907 and was elected a member of the House of Representatives in 1908. Also serves as president of Ôsaka Shinpô. From 1912 to 1923 served as a member of the House of

Peers, traveled to Siberia as a special mission ambassador for eight years, and supported the anti-Red Army. After World War I, he worked as the director of the League of Nations Ehime City to spread the idea of peace. His later years were recommended by Mayor Matsuyama in 1922. There is a collection of manuscripts called the *Collected Writings of Takusen* (6 volumes). Shiki's mother Yae is the eldest sister. [House] Father = OHARA Aritsune (Confucian scholar), Nephew = MASAOKA Shiki (Haiku) (Cf. Nichigai 2011: 182)

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