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Pathography of Taneda Santoka

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Abstract Taneda Santoka was the son of a rich landowner. His mother committed suicide when he was a child. The impact of her suicide lasted throughout his life and prevented him from maintaining a responsible occupation. During the latter half of his life, he went on a pilgrimage as a Zen Buddhist priest, and finally secluded himself in a hermitage. The present paper explains the art of his haiku, which is open, clear, sensitive and free from conservative rules, in relation to his way of life, from which his poems were derived. He was a hard drinking dropout and, at the same time, a master of life. I believe that this contradiction may be the source of his creativity.

Key Words : Santoka, free-style haiku, depression, drinking dropout.

Introduction

Pathography is defined as "a combined field of study that investigates the association between the mental life and creative activity of an outstanding person from the viewpoint of psychiatry or psychopathology" (Miyamoto)¹⁾. In most cases, the subject of pathography is an artist. Outstanding people have an artistic ability that enables them to create works of beauty in forms ranging from novels and plays to poems and paintings. Their art, words, deeds and behavior provide important clues to indicate their pathography.

Even during his lifetime, Taneda Santoka was rated highly by his contemporaries in the field of free-style haiku, in which he was trying to establish his own original style. However, those around him who led a more traditional, ordinary life did not regard him as a good neighbor. He lived a mysterious, selfish and optimistic life as a Zen priest. Why then should a series of haiku created by a man addicted to alcohol who could not create a life of his own still move the heart of Japanese people so deeply?

"In order to truly appreciate haiku, the reader must thoroughly understand the state of the poet at the time the poem was created," Santoka claimed.

The present study details the life history of Taneda Santoka and attempts to understand his character and art from a psychological viewpoint, based on *The Diary of Taneda Santoka*²⁾.

Life history of Taneda Santoka

Taneda Santoka was born in Hofu-city, Yamaguchi Prefecture, on the 3rd of December in 1882. He was the first son of a wealthy landowner. Santoka's father demonstrated great talent in local politics, but had less success in the management of his own home and family business. Santoka's mother, possibly out of despair for her husband, or for other unknown reasons, threw herself into a well in their garden when she was 32 years old. From that time on, the Taneda family reputation started to decline and their financial condition worsened. After the tragedy of his mother's suicide, Santoka, his two sisters and two brothers were brought up by their paternal grandmother.

Santoka was wary of women, and his attitude toward them was influenced by mood swings. The connection between his feelings toward women and his mother's suicide is readily apparent. His mother's death can also be cited a possible explanation for his habit of repaying the kindness, friendliness and sympathy of others with cruelty and sarcasm.

Santoka demonstrated a talent for literature from an early age. He began studying English literature at Waseda University in Tokyo, but returned home when he was 22 years old due to his neurasthenia. Although he recovered from this illness, the financial situation of the Taneda family was becoming increasingly worse. His father, in order to improve their family's situation, sold his house and land and bought a brewery in a neighboring village. However, the brewery also turned out to be unsuccessful.

When Santoka was 27, his father forced him to marry Sakino, the daughter of a wealthy forest owner who lived in a neighboring village. It seemed that her dowry was needed to sustain the failing brewery. It is understandable that the marriage was not a happy one for her. Santoka wrote "I don't think of my home as a prison, but I cannot help thinking of it as a desert". The following year, his son, Ken, was born. Santoka loved his son, as any father would, and tried to give his son the kind of love he had not received from his own father. However, it was around this time that Santoka started to drink heavily. At home, he had no confidence as either a husband or a father, and as he saw it, the world around him held no promise for the future. Anxiety and distress were all he found. During this period, he published coterie magazines with his contemporaries in his home and busied himself preparing reviews, translations (short stories by novelists such as Maupassant and Turgenev) and traditional haiku. In 1911, Ogiwara Seisensui (1884-1976) first published "Soun", a free-style haiku magazine. Seisensui insisted that the key to writing haiku was to express the heart, i. e., the author's inner experiences, in one's own words. He stated that using the standard 5-7-5 syllable pattern, or the inclusion of a word indicating the season was not compulsory. Seisensui's insistence on these

points demonstrates a combination of Japanese sensitivity and Western self-expression³⁾. Santoka was deeply fascinated by Seisensui and became his pupil. He contributed many haiku to "Soun". In 1916, Santoka was chosen as one of editors of the "Soun". In the same year, the sake in the brewery went bad and the brewery went bankrupt. The Taneda family lost everything. Santoka's father fled by night. But Santoka did not seem shocked at this tragic turn of events. For him, there was no impact stronger than that of his mother's death. Supported by one of his friends, Santoka took his wife and son and moved to Kumamoto-city in Kumamoto Prefecture.

In Kumamoto, Santoka opened a shop that traded used books. However, his business was unsuccessful. Shortly thereafter, his wife started an art frame shop. Although Santoka tried to help his wife by selling frames, he was unsuccessful due to his high-strung disposition. Moreover, a large portion of the sales profits was being spent on his drinking habit. In 1918, his youngest brother Jiro killed himself. Santoka could not help his brother Jiro when he asked for mental and financial help. This sad event had a strong impact on Santoka, from which he never recovered.

In 1919, he moved to Tokyo for no apparent reason or any preparation. He could only find part-time work there. In 1920, Santoka and Sakino divorced. Sakino ran the frame shop and raised their son. Their divorce was likely an attempt to protect Sakino from their debt to the Taneda family. Santoka began work as a librarian in Tokyo. However, he was unable to find a suitable outlet to fully express his talent and after one and a half years, he quit his job due to his neurasthenia. In September 1923, the Kanto earthquake hit Tokyo, leaving the city in ruins. Although he was not injured, he lost everything. Given no other recourse, he returned to Kumamoto to assist his ex-wife in her shop. This would prove to be the last conventional job he would take in his life.

Near the end of 1924, he got heavily drunk and stood in the path of an oncoming train. The train was able to stop in time and was taken by a bystander to a Zen temple called Hohon-ji. Despite concerted attempts to

reveal the identity of the bystander, Santoka historians have been unable to find this out. The head priest of the temple was a famous Zen priest called Gian Mochizuki-osho. The priest did not ask Santoka any questions, nor did he offer any instructions. Under the guidance of this priest, Santoka began Zen meditation. In 1925, Santoka was ordained a Zen priest and moved into a small temple called Mitori Kannon-do in a suburb of Kumamoto-city.

The pine branches hang down
Heavy with the chant
Hail to the Bodhisattva of Compassion ! ^{3)*}

This haiku is the first in a series.

He became a beggar in his neighborhood. When he could no longer stand his loneliness, he went on his first pilgrimage. He wore a black priest's robe and a big woven straw hat and carried only a beggar's bowl and a stick. He traveled through Chugoku, Kyushu and Shikoku districts for 4 years. He believed that simply walking was the way to awaken to the great truth.

Going deeper
And still deeper -
The green mountains. ³⁾

This is one of his best known haiku. The haiku reveals his feeling that he could not eliminate the anguish from his heart even after repeated attempts, dooming him to a life of despair through which he must continue. He desired to purge his mind of troubles and enter the world of Buddhahood, free of anxiety. However, he realized this was impossible. Agony was the basic theme of his outstanding haiku throughout the rest of his life. In 1930, he returned to Kumamoto. At that time, his son Ken had just entered Akita Mining College to become a mining engineer. Santoka spent his days trying to act as a good father to his son. However, it was obvious that the pressure and stress of this life did not suit him. Shortly after he returned to

Kumamoto, he was detained by the police after a heavy drinking session. He attempted suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping tablets. To escape this situation, he went on a pilgrimage to Kyushu from the autumn until the end of 1930. He kept a diary from this time until just before he died. Although he had previously kept a diary, he had burnt it. His behavior can be interpreted as an expression of the self-destructive drive of a man who wanted to deny an unacceptable past full of anxiety and regret⁴⁾.

Religious mendicancy is an important part of training for Zen priests, but for Santoka, who did not belong to any temple, mendicancy was a way to earn a living. He used what he was given for food, accommodation and even drinking. He was no more than a beggar. He had no worldly desire and spent all that was given to him on eating and drinking. He did not hope for anything more than that.

In 1931, he was detained again. In the following year, he went on a pilgrimage to Kyushu and his native Yamaguchi prefecture. He was 50 years old and feeling his age. He developed a strong desire to have his own hermitage for meditating and reading. Young friends of his found a small hermitage on a mountain in Ogori, a place near the town where he was born. They gladly not only looked after his hermitage, but also brought food and drink for Santoka, who was now unwilling to go out and beg.

Although Santoka always wanted to settle in one place while he was traveling, now that he was settled, he wanted to go traveling again. In 1934, he traveled to visit fellow haiku composers living in the central part of Japan, during which time he contracted pneumonia and was obliged to stay in a hospital. Ken, who had already started working as a mining engineer, came to visit his father and from this time he sent cash to his father to assist with his living expenses every month until Santoka died. While Santoka appreciated his son's kindness, he spent most of the money on drinking. In the summer of 1935, Santoka attempted suicide again by

* All the haiku cited in this paper were translated into English by John Stevens who was born in Chicago, Michigan USA. He himself is a trained Zen priest and a devoted Santoka researcher.

taking pills. In 1936, he went on a trip following the same route as that of Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), who established haiku as an art form and whom Santoka greatly respected. His trips are described in his work "Oku no Hosomichi".

In 1939, after a pilgrimage in Shikoku, he decided to spend his last days in a hermitage built by his friends from Matsuyama-city. As a monk, Santoka eventually reached a state in which "[I am] sometimes quietly dissolved in mother nature and I can look at society in peace".

In 1940, he died from a brain hemorrhage at the age of 58.

Santoka wrote more than 10,000 haiku. The best were published as a collection of 7 anthologies. He had already published an anthology of 701 haiku that he himself chose, "Soumokutou".

Santoka and drinking

Santoka's father did not drink, but Santoka acquired his drinking habit after he left university. He started drinking heavily after he married. He preferred Japanese sake but he had to drink cheaper spirits when he was poor.

He considered that a slightly drunken, balanced and happy state was ideal, but he was rarely in such a state as he usually drank until he was totally inebriated. He used to drink hard to get drunk as if escaping from anxiety, not to appreciate the taste of sake. When he was drunk, his usual character, quiet and shy, changed. His eyes glittering, he talked loudly and became very active. In a bar he would order a drink even when he had no money. He would drink too much and one of his mates usually ended up paying for the drinks. When they got fed up with his attitude and nobody wanted to pay, he was detained at a police station. In his later years, his son Ken would cover his father's bills. When Santoka became sober, he deeply regretted his actions and wrote down his repentance repeatedly. In fact, he was able to go several days without drinking at all. This condition (once he started drinking, he drank hard for a few days) is similar to that of dipsomania. Dipsomania involves alternating periods of heavy drinking and abstinence. When the

patient's mood is low, he/she becomes easily irritated and starts drinking heavily to escape from depression and anxiety. True dipsomania may be based on an epileptic tendency. However, because Santoka started drinking for psychological and physical reasons and because he did not crave a drink as long as he didn't start drinking, his condition can be more accurately described as pseudodipsomania.

He often wrote in his diary "creating haiku and drinking are my life. Without them, I would have killed myself." He suffered from insomnia from an early age and used insomnia as an excuse for drinking. He sometimes took sleeping pills at the same time as drinking. In the last years of his life, he wrote in his diary that he saw hallucinations at night (implying delirium tremens). From the age of 20, he had been writing that he had visual hallucinations before he fell asleep. These may have been hypnagogic hallucinations. He said he saw "a long, long white road". Kaneko Tota interpreted that the road symbolized a way to the other world in Buddhism⁵⁾.

Once, when he went on a pilgrimage to the Miyazaki region of Kyushu, he was offered a drink of local spirits by a farmer's wife, and he immediately fell to the ground in a drunken sleep.

Drunk, I slept
With the crickets.³⁾

He loved drinking very much but he did not write many haiku about drinking. Among the more than 10,000 haiku, fewer than 100 were about drinking. Drinking and anything regarding drinking might have become too ordinary for him to use as the subject of haiku. At the same time, he also loved drinking water.

Water of my native village !
I drink it,
I wash with it.³⁾

Drinking, though the ultimate cause of his death, may have also been the spark to his artistic genius.

Santoka and neurasthenia

He "always fell into the same mental state -irritation, depression, fatigue and distress- during the period from late spring to early summer." We can assume that he was forced to leave the university as well as resign from the library in Tokyo due to this mental state. According to Santoka's medical chart, which was discovered by Murakami Yuzuru⁶⁾, the physician in charge of Santoka diagnosed him as suffering from "neurasthenia" when Santoka resigned from the library and recorded "claims of symptoms such as depression, headache, vertigo, anorexia and decrement of ability to think".

The term "neurasthenia" is used sparingly in Japan. Neurasthenia is defined as a series of mental symptoms caused by mental fatigue that can be cured by rest which may also be related to a poor constitution. This condition is clearly differentiated from psychosis. The definition is somewhat ambiguous, although this term is still used in some countries due to its ambiguity. Neurasthenia is listed in the "Neurotic, stress-related and somatoform disorders" in the International Classification of Diseases of the World Health Organization (ICD)-10⁷⁾. In fact, the word used to be used often in Japan when Santoka was alive. The periodical appearance of fluctuation of mood may be equivalent to "Depression" listed in "Mood (Affective) disorders" in ICD-10. According to the theory, we can assume that the first episode of neurasthenia was when he left the university (22years old), the second episode was when he resigned from the library (40years old) and the third episode was when he attempted suicide at 53years old.

It has been considered that Santoka demonstrated only the depression phase and did not show the manic phase⁸⁾. Generally people recover from depression after several months without any specific treatment. In Santoka's case, he would go for days feeling invigorated and was troubled by so many haiku coming to his mind during the period of depression. However, such manic days did not last even a week. Because of slightly atypical progress, neurotic depression and dysthymic disorder can be suspected in his case. I must point out that his overdrinking might have made the progress and symptoms of his illness

more complicated⁹⁾.

Santoka and "Soun"

Ogiwara Seisensui objected to classic haiku rules, i. e.. the theme should be the beauty of nature and the use of the 5-7-5 syllable pattern and a word indicating the season. He claimed that haiku should be for expressing one's impression of life in a free style and organized a group called "Soun" (layered cloud) to that end. The members of the group were sympathizers of Seisensui's opinion and were of the middle-class intelligentsia, including lawyers, doctors, dentists, pharmacists, teachers, bankers, post office officials and bookshop owners. Many of them, who hankered after the life style of the unsocial Santoka but knew that they would never follow his way, entrusted their dream to Santoka and accordingly indulged him to excess. But some of them took a critical attitude toward the dependency of Santoka. They pointed out that part of Santoka's idealism was nothing more than his self-satisfaction and his desire to lead a community was a manifestation of his philistinism. Part or all of his way of life was hard for people to accept. He was too selfish to leave, by his own wish, privileged social status, to neglect the psychological connection with his wife and son, to be released from conventional practice, to concentrate only on making haiku and to aim for a state of religious peace. However, nowadays, his ambivalence has been accepted by many of the young generation without much opposition. Asian and Japanese people may admire a way of life that allows them to renounce the world and go on pilgrimages in order to follow a life without any social restriction, live in a small hermitage when they get old and love loneliness, and die alone in peace. Santoka felt that a spirit was dwelling in even a small insect such as a cricket, cicada or fly or in ordinary flowers and grass, and his fellows had a strong sympathy for him. Many Japanese people fairly easily accept such animism.

Conclusion

The love and hate he showed to his wife were probably due to the shock (he) suffered

from his mother's suicide. While he showed excessive dependency on "Soun" fellows and overdrank and became a dropout, he pursued his own way even while risking his life. He neglected his wife and son, but neither his wife nor son ever let him down in his lifetime. I conclude that such conflict and ambivalence full of contradiction must have enabled Santoka to make impressive haiku.

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