

# A Japanese Pioneer of Autosociobiography?

## Nakano Kōji's Memoirs of Adolescence

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The present paper discusses a series of autobiographical texts written by the Japanese author, German studies professor, and left-wing intellectual Nakano Kōji (1925–2004). Published in book form between 1977 and 1980 in the volumes *Mugi ururu hi ni* [The day the wheat ripens], *Nigai natsu* [Bitter summer], and *Natsu no owari* [End of summer],<sup>1</sup> these narratives of adolescence cannot be linked to the contemporary literary phenomenon of autosociobiography in temporal or spatial terms, but they do exhibit many similarities with later and geographically distinct instances of life writing when it comes to their form and content.<sup>2</sup>

In order to examine the intersections of autosociobiography and Nakano's texts, I will draw on Harald Fricke's differentiation "between a 'literary text sort' as a purely systematic term for literary *classification* and a 'genre' as a historically limited literary *institution*" (Fricke 1981: 132)<sup>3</sup>. On the one hand, the vari-

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- 1 An alternative title is *Kisetsu no owari* [End of the season]. Nakano originally planned to call the third volume of the trilogy "End of Summer", but he had to use the title "End of the Season" for copyright reasons. In his collected works, the third instalment is listed under "End of Summer" (Nakano 2001b: 162). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
  - 2 In addition to the above-mentioned stories, I will also discuss Nakano Kōji's autobiographical story *Waga shōnen-ki* [Record of my youth], which was first published in 1987–1988. In this third person narrative Nakano reiterates and develops themes initially explored in his earlier texts. Although there are many similarities between "Record of my Youth" and the earlier texts, there are also differences, which is why I will avoid mixing them up and will therefore only refer to "Record of my Youth" in footnotes.
  - 3 "zwischen einer 'literarischen Textsorte' als rein systematischem literaturwissenschaftlichem *Ordnungsbegriff* und einem 'Genre' als einer historisch begrenzten literarischen *Institution*".

ous authors' abundant references to each other and to Bourdieu (Blome 2020: 561–7), as well as the intense discussion of autosociobiography in academia and the *feuilleton* (not to mention the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Annie Ernaux), have led to an increasing institutionalisation of autosociobiography as a “genre” (Fricke). On the other hand, there is a wealth of texts independent of this institutionalisation process which, like Nakano's autobiographical writings, share characteristics of autosociobiography as a “text sort” on the level of form and content. A supra-historical understanding applies here, one in which texts are allocated to a “text sort” based on their characteristics alone, without reference to the context in which they were written. In assigning a degree of prototypicality in this manner, my aim is to reappraise Nakano's novels as potentially unrecognised precursors of autosociobiography.

An initial comparison reveals remarkable overlaps between Nakano's texts and the characteristic traits of autosociobiography. The author explains that he wrote the beginning of the first part “only on the basis of facts and without inventing anything in addition” (Nakano 2001d: 460), a claim that can be extended to the entire autobiography. As a narrator but also as a reflexive commentator, Nakano describes his own childhood in the Tokyo area in the 1930s and his social advancement through Japan's educational institutions during the Pacific War and its immediate aftermath. Originating from a carpenter family, the narrator measures every encounter and every incident against the material background of the respective character and the historical context. The stories deal in detail with the various hurdles Nakano had to overcome, such as financial restraints, the hardships of the war years, and the difficult relationship with his parents, to whose memory Nakano dedicated his autobiography.

The obstacles encountered by Nakano suggest that there was, and still is, a class system in Japan that is difficult to penetrate. Based on a quantitative analysis of various parameters, the sociologist Ishida Hiroshi argues that “class origins affect people's life chances (at least intergenerational mobility chances) in a very similar manner” in Japan, Germany, and the USA (Ishida 2010: 52). Ishida further concludes that there is a

pattern of class inheritance and reproduction that is common to all three societies. There is a tendency for class positions to be passed on from one generation to the next, and class background continues to shape people's prospects of mobility not only in Japan but also in the United States and Germany. (Ishida 2010: 52, see also Ishida 2001: 592)

The mechanisms that govern class advancement in the three countries may be similar, as research on social stratification suggests. However, it is important to note that the experience of upward mobility in Japanese society differs significantly from that depicted in German or French autosociobiographies. Although it seems possible to classify Nakano's autobiographical writings as autosociobiographies based on text-immanent characteristics alone, it would result in a gross misinterpretation to analyse them against the background of the contexts thematised in contemporary European narratives. Like all literary texts, Nakano's narratives of adolescence can only be understood in light of the aesthetic concepts, categories, and dichotomies of their context of origin, which in turn are the expression of a specific, historically evolved field (Bourdieu 1996: 299). In the case at hand, language, genre, and, as already mentioned above, social history, are especially pertinent factors to be kept in mind.

## Japanese Autobiographical Writing

(Auto-)biographical writing was already well developed in pre-modern Japan and can be traced back through the centuries from the present day to the diary literature (*nikki bungaku*) of the Heian period (794–1185) (Saeki 1985). My objective is to illustrate that in the case of Nakano's novels, it was primarily Japanese conventions relating to genre that determined their autosociobiographical form of expression. This entails an exploration of the compatibility of established Japanese genres with autosociobiography as well as the relevant Japanese terminology. As a first step, I will examine the lexical divergence of the cognate pair 'literature – *bungaku*'.

Until well into the second half of the nineteenth century, the term *bungaku* had a distinctly different meaning from 'literature' in the modern sense, being used to denote 'learning' and 'rhetoric' (Washburn 2013: 122). It was not until Tsubouchi Shōyō's seminal work on literary theory, *Shōsetsu shinzui* [The essence of the novel] (1885), that there was an approximation to the Western understanding of literature in the sense of art (Washburn 2013: 125). Above all, Tsubouchi called for a portrayal more in line with European notions of realism and a psychological perspective on the characters. In the following decades, a distinction was made between highbrow *jun-bungaku*, which can be directly translated as 'pure literature', and *taishū bungaku*, understood as literature

aimed at a wider readership.<sup>4</sup> To the present day, there has been extensive discussion about which texts, authors, and genres should be counted as *jun-bungaku*, and naturally there are divergent points of view. In addition to the perceived high aesthetic and intellectual standards of these texts, which the *bundan*, the literary establishment, recognises, a central characteristic is their realism (Strecher 1996: 361).

The high symbolic value or level of consecration accorded to factual storytelling by Japanese gatekeepers of literary criticism is evident from the key criterion applied to *shishōsetsu*, which are considered a prototypical expression of *jun-bungaku* (Strecher 1996: 362–7): a commitment to authentic autobiographical representation. Given that Nakano's texts belong to this genre, I will now draw on pertinent scholarship on the *shishōsetsu* to differentiate it from autosociobiography.

Building on traditional autobiographical forms of writing (Fowler 1988: xvii), the *shishōsetsu* emerged from the *shizen shugi*, the Japanese form of naturalism. However, the *shizen shugi* differed from European naturalism in that, in the words of Donald Keene, “in Japan the most salient feature of Naturalist writing was the search for the individual”, so that the *shishōsetsu* can be considered “attempts in the form of novels to establish the individuality of the authors” by autobiographical means (Keene 1998: 221) – an evident parallel to autosociobiography. Keene also highlights another crucial difference between *shizen shugi* and European naturalism: “The Naturalism of Zola or Maupassant came to be interpreted not as a method of examining human beings with scientific detachment, but as an absolutely faithful reproduction of real events, without admixture of fiction or even of imagination.” (Keene 1998: 221) In accordance with the naturalistic form of expression, *shishōsetsu* provide a detailed description of the protagonist's material circumstances; that said, the scientific objectivism shared by European naturalism and autosociobiography is not represented in Japanese naturalism: “[I]t is the very lack of analytic description and the relative neglect of heredity and environmental

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4 With regard to these terms, Bourdieu's insight applies: “The majority of notions which artists and critics employ to define themselves or to define their adversaries are weapons and stakes in struggles, and a number of the categories which art historians deploy in order to treat their topic are nothing more than classificatory schemes issuing from these struggles and then more or less skillfully disguised or transfigured.” (Bourdieu 1996: 297) Far from being neutral descriptions, the terms in question are employed strategically in the process of positioning oneself in the literary field.

factors in *shizenshugi* works which distinguishes it markedly from European naturalism,” writes Irmela Hijija-Kirschnereit (1996: 28). The *shishōsetsu* therefore does not exhibit the same level of reflexivity, for example with regard to structural influences on the protagonist’s life and socialisation.<sup>5</sup>

The central feature of the *shishōsetsu* is its autobiographical postulate of authenticity through factuality. The extraordinary family resemblance between *shishōsetsu* and autosociobiography is based not only on the protagonist-centred narrative perspective, but also on the identity of narrator, author, and protagonist and the associated ‘facticity’, a frequently employed term in both *shishōsetsu* and autosociobiography research (Hijija-Kirschnereit 1996: 174–7; Ernst 2022: 259).<sup>6</sup> In a sense, texts belonging to the two genres blur the distinction between fiction and reality: they present themselves as novels, but they simultaneously convey a claim to truth (Fowler 1988: 10) by asserting that they are a true-to-life reproduction of the author’s experiences.

The claim to facticity is thus a shared characteristic, but the mode of representation is of fundamentally different quality and fulfils a different function in literary communication. In Japan, ‘sincerity’ (*makoto*<sup>7</sup>) increases the artistic value of the narrative (Hijija-Kirschnereit 1996: 289); in the case of autosociobiography, on the other hand, facticity is a condition of the scientific socioanalytical approach. While the professed aim of *shishōsetsu* is the direct, sincere, and authentic communication of experiences, autosociobiographies aim to depict the process of socialisation. Social influences in the broad, abstract sense are not included in typical *shishōsetsu*. In 1935, the literary critic Nakamura Mitsuo wrote in a central text on the theory of *shishōsetsu*:

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- 5 This can be explained by another of Bourdieu’s findings: “As soon as we observe (*theorein*) the social world, we introduce in our perception of it a bias due to the fact that, to study it, to describe it, to talk about it, we must retire from it more or less completely.” (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992: 69) This kind of ‘retiring’ stands in contrast to the characteristic ‘immediacy’ of *shishōsetsu* as a genre, which will be discussed in more detail below.
  - 6 In Nakano’s “The Day the Wheat Ripens”, for example, the author and protagonist share the same name. In the later autobiographical story “Record of my Youth”, the protagonist is called Nakahara Kōji (Nakano 1997: 163); the similarity to the author’s name is strikingly obvious.
  - 7 *Makoto* is a philosophical term which, in contrast to ‘sincerity’ in the conventional sense, also includes a higher pursuit of ‘truthfulness’ and encompasses a moral dimension with the maxims of integrity, loyalty, and respect.

The writers of *shishōsetsu* in Japan must have endured many hardships in their real lives, and at times, they must have struggled with society. However, none of the writers was conscious of the confrontation between him and the reader. In other words, no writer appeared, who has been able to analyse the emotions of their everyday life brought about by their daily existence and to objectify them in a true confrontation with society. Herein I see the most fundamental character that pervades our Japanese *shishōsetsu*, as well as its greatest weakness. The reason is that it is impossible to describe the real-life struggles of these writers who are oppressed by society without depicting society, and it is only through confrontation with society that their pain can be clearly analysed, grasped, and given true objectivity. (Nakamura 1972: 122)

Nakamura, who studied French literature at Tokyo Imperial University, contrasts the *shishōsetsu* with French novels in general and Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* in particular, which, according to Nakamura, exhibits the very characteristics that are absent from the *shishōsetsu*. Nakamura calls for "objectifying one's own psyche" (Nakamura 1972: 125), which coincides with Bourdieu's project of objectifying the objectifying subject. If *shishōsetsu* were to meet Nakamura's requirement by incorporating an objective analysis of social conditions and their influence on the lives of their protagonists, then this new genre would, *mutatis mutandis*, be surprisingly close to autosociobiography, even if Nakamura may have had in mind an adaptation to the French social novel rather than a scientific-sociological approach.

In summary, we can conclude that the family resemblance between *shishōsetsu* and autosociobiography is deceptive: while at first glance they appear to be 'kindred genres' due to their autobiographical character and shared claim to factuality, they also have other, mutually exclusive traits that make it more appropriate to think of them as *faux amis*.

### **Nakano Kōji's Unorthodox *shishōsetsu***

Nakano's autobiographical novels deviate significantly from typical *shishōsetsu*, and where they depart from the latter's specific characteristics, they approach those of autosociobiography. The fact that the texts under consideration here are first and foremost *shishōsetsu* is evident not only from their own form and

content, but also from Nakano's essay "Shōsetsu made no michinori" [The road to the novel], (n.d.):

For my part, since the age of forty, I have developed an attachment to those works that are called *shishōsetsu* in our country. I never saw the appeal of writers who learned from Western honkaku shōsetsu and wrote novels in their style. On the contrary, it was the *shishōsetsu*, which were attacked at the time as something 'that had to be eradicated', that felt like true literature [*bungaku*] to me. (Nakano 2001d: 461)

*Honkaku shōsetsu* can be roughly translated as 'authentic novel'. The term gives the impression that it is related to *jun-bungaku* (pure literature), but in fact, the opposite is the case: *Honkaku shōsetsu* refers to a fictional work of art, as would be considered a prototypical novel in the West.<sup>8</sup> In "End of Summer", Nakano has his protagonist say:

'I am this, and this is me,' to put oneself out there, to confront oneself in one's entirety, to have the unadulterated self recognised by society, and to be accepted – hasn't this become a realisation in contemporary literature, whether in the West or in Japan? (Nakano 2001b: 117)

Nakano is clearly committed to autobiographical writing, self-reflection, and Japanese national literature, of which, as can be seen from the above-cited statement, *shishōsetsu* is considered representative. On the other hand, Nakano, a professor of German studies, attempts to emphasise the uniqueness of his own *shishōsetsu* by pointing to influences from German literature: he argues, for example, that his texts share certain characteristics with the German *Bildungsroman* and *Entwicklungsroman*, both of which he describes (mistakenly) as primarily autobiographical (Nakano 2001d: 458).<sup>9</sup> Nakano also cites Hans Erich Nossack's collection of essays *Die schwache Position der Literatur* ("The Weak Position of Literature") as a model and chief impetus for his own style of writing. As Nakano explains, he, too, experienced Nossack's "urge [...] to fully manifest oneself as a person to the world", a compulsion that had a major impact on the content of his works:

8 On the juxtaposition of *honkaku shōsetsu* and *junbungaku* in Japanese literary criticism, see Fowler (1988: 44–51).

9 On the interpretation of "The Day the Wheat Ripens" as a *Bildungsroman*, see Schelletter (2022: 308–9). The passage in question can be found in Nakano (2001d: 460).

Therefore, it was only natural that I would be more concerned with the theoretical aspect of how I lived in response to the situation than with the expression of the facts themselves. The faithful capture of reality interested me less; I was only interested in the soul of man, his consciousness and way of being. The weakness in capturing facts was to remain one of my weak points ever since. (Nakano 2001d: 462)

For Nakano, subjectivism and ‘perceived truth’ take precedence over factuality, to which he nevertheless aspires. Nakano’s programmatic statement with its reference to a recognised weakness in his own writing confirms an analytical or epistemological claim that is also constitutive for autosociobiography. That this stance implies a sociological or at least socio-analytical perspective classified by Nakamura Mitsuo as atypical for *shishōsetsu* will become clear in the following section.

### **The Conflicted ‘Class Consciousness’ of a Working-Class Child in Higher Education**

Although less pronounced than in recent autosociobiographical works, there is in Nakano’s autobiographical texts a tendency to objectify the objectifying subject. Significant situations, but also banal everyday experiences, prompt the first-person narrator to engage in self-analysis with the aim of understanding his own dispositions and actions in all their conditionality. “To understand is first to understand the field with which and against which one has been formed”, Bourdieu (2008: 4) writes programmatically in his *Self-Analysis*. Nakano’s extensive descriptions of his milieu of origin are consistent with this postulate, insofar as they are undertaken in order to convey its effects on his own person.

Dependence on the milieu of the parental home is greatest in childhood. Nakano’s autobiographical narratives begin, as do many autosociobiographies (Blome 2020: 549–51), with the memory of a deceased family member – in this case, the father – and a visit to the protagonist’s provincial birthplace in the rural outskirts of the Greater Tokyo Area. Even in this first scene, the narrator’s many comments on the characters’ habitus such as about their language, clothing, food, home furnishings, etc. are striking: Nakano shows how the characters’ economic situation has affected their habitus, which the protagonist finds utterly repugnant. Above all, he feels a strong aversion to the local way of speak-

ing: for him, there is “no language as ugly, barbaric, and repulsive” (Nakano 2001a: 12) as the dialect spoken in his father’s place of origin.

Nakano then describes his adolescence in Ichikawa in Chiba Prefecture to the east of Tokyo. The protagonist’s father is a “simple carpenter” (Nakano 2001a: 15), who beats his apprentice and his wife while intoxicated. Even as a small child, the narrator begins to reflect on his social situation as a reaction to events in everyday life. In fact, his first childhood memories are class-related: when, as a toddler, he wets his pants while playing with a friend, the maid in the house of his better-off playmate explains this ‘naughty behaviour’ with the poverty of his parents (Nakano 2001a: 29); he also remembers how a girl from the neighbourhood made fun of his father’s profession.<sup>10</sup> These two scenes are a cause for frustration in relation his social position. The narrator reflects:

Coincidence. For everyone, origin is nothing but coincidence... ‘Why wasn’t I born into a better house?’ – a little older, I had already fallen into this wretched way of thinking. In a suburb where people from different social classes meet in one place, the adults, in the form of blatant juxtaposition of households, had unexpectedly germinated class consciousness in the hearts of the children at an early age. This was because they had allowed the children’s eyes to be opened to contradictions, first through the venom inherent in badmouthing among the children, and then specifically through the comparison of the other children’s households. (Nakano 2001a: 29–30)

The use of Marxist terms such as “class”, “class consciousness”, and “contradiction” is quite conspicuous. That Nakano seeks to explain the narrated world and his own behaviour with the help of these concepts is not surprising, as Marxism exerted a major influence on Japan’s higher schools and imperial univer-

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10 In “Record of my Youth”, there are generally fewer references to material backgrounds and social issues, and the narrative has fewer features of autosociobiography. Nevertheless, Nakano begins with the reflection that all people are born equal, but due to the injustice of society there is discrimination, and children have to go hungry and grow up in poverty (Nakano 1997: 7–8). The protagonist is “discriminated against” (Nakano 1997: 14) by a girl of the same age, probably the same girl as in “The Day the Wheat Ripens”, because of his poverty. In “Record of my Youth”, in addition to class-related discrimination, ethnic discrimination is also addressed for the first time when the protagonist criticises the inequality of opportunity of a Korean friend (Nakano 1997: 74).

sities since the first translations of Marxist writings appeared in the 1920s.<sup>11</sup> This continued to hold true in the war years and the immediate post-war period, when Nakano was socialised at the Fifth Higher School in Kumamoto and at Tokyo Imperial University.

Although Marxist jargon is used sparingly in Nakano's autobiographical texts and Marxism is not mentioned by name, it is clearly recognizable as an intellectual influence. For one, Nakano's criticism is aimed at the traditional adversaries of Japanese Marxists: capitalists, militarists, ivory-tower intellectuals at the higher schools and imperial universities, and bourgeois literati. Moreover, Nakano's self-reflexive observations build on Marx' theory of acting in accordance with a "class consciousness" (Nakano 2001a: 29), i.e., out of an awareness of one's own social class and its role in shaping life experiences, values, and actions. The first-person narrator primarily employs this analytical perspective in his pursuit of self-knowledge, but he also applies it to other people around him in an effort to find out how their respective material situation influences their thinking. An important concern of his is to fathom the way of thinking of his family, from whom he has become estranged. About his mother he assesses:

I had the suspicion that my mother had been able to give her all for her work, which was probably little more than preparation for survival, by unquestioningly accepting the society of the established class system and thus determining for herself that she belonged to the working side of the population. (Nakano 2001a: 85)

The protagonist's mother shows a lack of understanding towards her son, who wants to break out of the working class and resists conditioning by the class system. His habitus, altered by his academic environment, causes her to worry about his "behaviour and manner of expression" (Nakano 2001a: 218). In particular, she cannot understand why he strives for education, as in her opinion the children of craftsmen have no need for it (Nakano 2001a: 46).<sup>12</sup> The attitude that

11 On the higher schools referred to as Number Schools and the Imperial Universities, see Roden (1980); on Marxism, Roden 1980 (222–9). For a detailed exploration of this topic in Japanese, see Takeuchi Yō (2003).

12 In "Record of my Youth", the narrator explains that children from higher classes are supported in school by their parents, and parents from higher social classes demand lesson preparation and follow-up from them (Nakano 1997: 26–7). The parents of the protagonists in Nakano's autobiographical novels, on the other hand, prevent

one should behave according to one's (inherited) social position is part of her class-based thinking. The son, on the other hand, takes the opposite approach:

I always felt that my family was more of an annoying obstacle. [...] I wanted to break out of my carpenter father's household, whose customs were like shackles to me, to free myself from all restraints, to become a person who is allowed to behave as he pleases. Perhaps I wanted to become a member of those privileged intellectual classes. [...] 'Birth and socialisation mean nothing', 'You decide for yourself what you make of yourself' – by obsessively telling myself these things, I tried to suppress the obstacle of family. (Nakano 2001a: 202)

The last sentence clearly suggests that such an undertaking is tantamount to lying to oneself, which underscores the role of class in socialisation. The attitude of Nakano's family shows a strong rejection of class transition, or rather implies a demand for social reproduction.

When Nakano emphasises the protagonist's struggle to cast off the restraints imposed by family and tradition, he implies that social mobility was uncommon in the timeframe in question. However, sociological research on social reproduction has made it clear that the opposite was the case: the time when Nakano entered working life, was in fact a time of unprecedented educational expansion and "tremendous societal transformations" (Ishida/Slater 2010: 3). While, on the one hand, social reproduction in Japan follows similar mechanisms as in other countries, it is important to keep in mind that "[i]n comparison to American and German manual working classes, the Japanese skilled and non-skilled manual working class is characterised by a low level of intergenerational stability and a low level of self-recruitment. In Japan, the children of the manual working class are more likely to be found in other classes." (Ishida 2010: 51) The low prevalence of social reproduction is due to the "steadily increasing percentage of the sons of the working class joining the professional managerial class; more and more sons of the working class are moving into the upper white-collar sector (21 per cent in 1955 to 46 per cent in 1995)" (Ishida 2001: 594). Against this background, Nakano's educational advancement is not as extraordinary as he makes it seem.

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him from progressing at school. As the narrator of "Record of my Youth" explains, children do not attend secondary school because of their abilities, but rather because of the material background of their parents (Nakano 1997: 46–7).

As another sociologist, Takeuchi Yō, points out, many young men from farming villages attended universities in the cities during the pre-war period (women were not yet allowed to enter the imperial universities). They were fascinated by the cosmopolitan atmosphere they encountered, but they also had difficulties adapting to the unfamiliar urban environment (Takeuchi 2003: 170–4). Students from non-urban backgrounds were particularly numerous at the Faculty of Literature at Tokyo Imperial University, with many relying on financial aid to study (Takeuchi 2003: 109–10). According to Takeuchi (2003: 188), no social reproduction of the cultural elite took place at the faculty – rather, the lack of access barriers enabled upwardly mobile people from the countryside to acquire cultural capital.<sup>13</sup> Rural students often displayed an affinity for Marxism (Takeuchi 2003: 195).

That said, the fact that the rise from the working class to a white-collar profession as part of the Japanese educational expansion was far from exceptional does not mean that we must neither discount the struggles these sons from manual labour families faced in general nor the phenomenological viewpoint of the subjective experience Nakano in particular had to contend with on a personal level.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary: there were many households with intergenerational conflicts, which in turn allows us to conclude that there was a broad readership that could identify with Nakano.

As his school and university education progresses, the gap between the first-person narrator and his family widens. He now feels “disgust” (Nakano 2001c: 248) towards his family and “hatred” (Nakano 2001c: 382) for his father due to the latter’s status as a manual labourer. In return, the father has “given

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13 Takeuchi (2003: 117–21) makes this clear through a comparison with the *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS). Compared to the ENS, the top of the Japanese education system was more open to social mobility. In contrast to the *normaliens* with a literary orientation, the students of the literary faculty of Tokyo Imperial University came more often from rural regions and, in contrast to the ENS. On average, the students of the natural sciences came from higher classes than the students of the literary faculty. Takeuchi (2003: 188–94) also uses the protagonist in Nakano’s “Bitter Summer” as an example of an educational advancement at the literary faculty of Tokyo Imperial University.

14 However, the assertion by Nakano’s protagonist in “Record of my Youth” that his family was probably the poorest compared to his fellow students (Nakano 1997: 186) can certainly be relativised by research into the social background of pupils and students. What is interesting, however, is that Nakano perceives himself as very unprivileged, or at least wants to be perceived as such.

up all hopes for his son" (Nakano 2001c: 256); he harbours disappointment, shame, and anger at the protagonist (Nakano 2001a: 93), who not only does not contribute to the family's livelihood, but whose intellectual affectations cause an additional financial burden.

At the same time, there is also a conflict between the protagonist and the academic milieu. The school uniform is meant to level out class differences at the higher schools, and yet the protagonist cannot fit into his new environment; he isolates himself and does not participate in unifying group activities (Nakano 2001a: 174). While he initially tries to rationalise his difficulties as being rooted in psychological factors, he soon recognises the true cause in his social background. At secondary school and university, he finds it difficult to socialise with the descendants of bourgeois households for reasons of habitus, as they have more confident manners due to their *anciennté*.<sup>15</sup> He feels "animosity" (Nakano 2001c: 339), "envy and contempt" (Nakano 2001c: 347) towards his more affluent classmates, "sons of the urban bourgeoisie" (Nakano 2001c: 348) who fill their lives with pleasurable pastimes like sailing instead of work. Not being accepted in either the milieu of origin or the target milieu can be interpreted as an expression of the "practical incompatibility of the social worlds" (Bourdieu 2008: 1) in which the protagonist finds himself.

## The Material Conditionality of Cultural Production and Reception

In Nakano's trilogy, 'class consciousness' also determines the mode of dealing with objects of culture. For instance, the first-person narrator describes an encounter with a fellow student at university who informs him that he "has something of a bondsman about him" (Nakano 2001a: 37 and 2001c: 431). For "bondsman", the fellow student does not use a Japanese word, but the German term "Knecht". Nakano explains this impression with his disposition to "look at the sublime from the very bottom" (Nakano 2001a: 37): born into the working class, he adopts a servile attitude in the face of what is considered classical cultural canon (Schelletter 2022: 311–2). At Tokyo Imperial University, Nakano suffers from an inferiority complex (Nakano 2001c: 332) that is clearly attributed to the material circumstances of his socialisation.

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15 See in particular Nakano (2001c: 350), where the first-person narrator analyses the informal and imperious way in which sons from affluent households deal with employees.

This is just one example of how the first-person narrator reflects on how his family's poverty, which has sensitised him to the material conditions of cultural production and reception, affects his attitude towards culture and education. Everyday experience teaches him that a spiritual existence independent of class is unattainable. By reflecting on these experiences, he learns that the quest for one's spiritual identity begins with the awareness of one's class (Nakano 2001c: 431, 437). Nevertheless, he keeps his origins in a working-class household secret from his fellow students (Nakano 2001c: 432).

In keeping with Bourdieu's emphasis on the necessity of "thinking about the social conditions of thought" (Bourdieu 1996: 312), the protagonist analyses not only his own cultural consciousness and disposition, but also that of his teachers, his fellow students, and of certain writers against the backdrop of their material circumstances. The character Kinoshita, for example, who grew up around the first-person narrator but in a middle-class family, demonstrates a different "*familiarity*" (Bourdieu 1993: 230) in dealing with objects of culture. Although both are students when they meet again at university in the post-war period, Kinoshita still treats the son of a working-class family with condescension (Nakano 2001c: 319–20). When Kinoshita proudly announces that what he is studying at university is not aesthetics or art history, but rather "the Beautiful", he casually flaunts his social and economic background: he comes from a household where people apparently still listened to Tchaikovsky and Beethoven during the war, he can afford to pursue this, from the point of view of the first-person narrator, decadent subject at a time when many Japanese are fighting for survival and the country's cities are lying in ruins. In other words: to the narrator, Kinoshita's educational arrogance reveals his bourgeois attitude and disposition.

Despite all his criticism of Kinoshita's infatuation with "the Beautiful", the first-person narrator is aware that he himself is enrolled in a humanities subject that is far removed from everyday life, and that he attaches great value to idealistic and spiritual content. This ambivalence fosters doubts regarding his own choices, especially as far as the balance between personal ambition and social commitment is concerned. The protagonist asks himself: "Could it be that while I pretend to admire beauty or universal truth, I am in fact merely a careerist?" (Nakano 2001a: 146), and his fellow student Omokuni likewise accuses him of pursuing education not only for its own sake, but also the allure of bourgeois elegance attached to education, culture and titles (Nakano 2001c: 340, 391). Yet as Takeuchi points out, cultural capital must be differentiated from membership in the bourgeoisie: although Nakano had managed to climb the

educational ladder, he did not possess the economic capital and *ancienneté* of the upper classes, a circumstance Takeuchi sees as the protagonist's "tragedy" (Takeuchi 2003: 192).

The relationship between the aspirational first-person narrator and the intellectual field, too, is characterised by tensions: similar to Bourdieu in his "Self-Analysis", Nakano is an intellectual and academic who is critical of intellectuals and academia. As the protagonist has also alienated himself from his environment of origin, he is now isolated. This sense of double non-belonging, a staple feature of autosociobiography, chimes with the feeling of solitude experienced by the typical protagonist of the *shishōsetsu*, which Donald Keene describes as follows: "In order to emphasise his individuality, the 'I' was of necessity at odds not only with society but also with those he loved. His hostility to his surroundings became the most vital part of his life." (Keene 1998: 514) It could therefore be argued that the presence of an "institutionalized outsider" (Hijiya-Kirschnereit 1996: 275) in both *shishōsetsu* and autosociobiography is not primarily due to the problems associated with class advancement, but rather a product of the former's technique of emphasising the self.

The protagonist's search for like-minded individuals and/or intellectual role models turns out to be unsuccessful. While he initially sympathises with a number of intellectuals, all of them eventually fall out of favour with him. He is critical of his teachers, his fellow students, and the subject of his studies: bourgeois authors from the annals of German literary history. He also adopts negative positions in order to try to fathom his identity and position in the intellectual field and to clarify his own point of view, a process that involves a highly normative division into a 'right' and a 'wrong' kind of intellectualism. This includes criticism of the political Left, for example when he rejects rigorist positions (Nakano 2001c: 342). In the case of his fellow student Okada, he notes that although the latter was "upset about the contradictions of capitalist society, it did not follow that he also had empathy for the female factory workers" (Nakano 2001c: 311). Yet the first-person narrator can be said to be guilty of the same problematic stance: on the theoretical (i.e., intellectual and ideological) level, he is full of sympathy towards his proletarian family; in practice, his attitude is one of aversion.

The main target of Nakano's criticism is the elitist intellectualism of *kyōyō shugi*. The term *kyōyō shugi* refers to an intellectual movement that reached its peak in the Taishō period (1912–1926), but it continued to shape elite education at higher schools and state universities, especially at the literary faculty

of Tokyo Imperial University (Takeuchi 2003: 86–9), until well into the post-war period. Strongly influenced by German intellectual history, especially idealism, *kyōyō shugi* propagated spiritual cultivation through the acquisition of an education in the humanities. Marxist thinkers (Marxism was the second important intellectual movement based on German idealism in higher education) castigated the *kyōyō shugi* for its apolitical inwardness and educational elitism (Takeuchi 2018: 229–55). The reflections on intellectualism and social engagement in Nakano's stories must be understood against this background. Since the first-person narrator himself is part of this closed-off world and affirms the value of training in the liberal arts, the pursuit of a higher education leads to self-doubt and moral misgivings articulated in the form of self-critical confessions: for example, we are told that because he is busy studying for an entrance exam, he is emotionally unaffected by the tears of a neighbouring family when the father is called up for wartime military service. The protagonist does not even attend the funeral of his own brother who died in the Pacific War, pathetically comparing himself to the unscrupulous Faust, “[t]he aimless, restless reprobate”<sup>16</sup> (Goethe 2008: 106 or Goethe qt. in Nakano 2001c: 305), who plunges Gretchen into misfortune.

While many of the scenes in which Nakano deals with *kyōyō shugi* are primarily of a critical nature, the protagonist's encounter with Nagaoka, a professor of German literature, leads to particularly interesting reflections on culturalist positions. The first-person narrator observes that after Japan's surrender, the differences between the rich and the poor are becoming more and more conspicuous as they struggle to survive amidst the rubble of their bombed-out cities (Nakano 2001c: 262). Nagaoka, meanwhile, “talks about culture as if there had been no such thing as war” (Nakano 2001c: 263).<sup>17</sup> The professor tells his students a wartime anecdote of his own and combines it with a pithy story about Goethe<sup>18</sup>:

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16 “Der Unmensch ohne Zweck und Ruh”.

17 Nakano's position is reminiscent of Adorno's famous dictum “[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (Adorno 2003: 162), which is also discussed in “End of Summer” (Nakano 2001b: 80).

18 The origin of this anecdote is a conversation between Goethe and Eckermann on March 17, 1830.

There was a bothersome head of the neighbourhood association<sup>19</sup> at the time. In his civilian uniform,<sup>20</sup> he ordered the snow to be shovelled in front of each household, but I pretended it was none of my business. Things like shovelling snow or carrying firewood should be done by people who are responsible for such things. So, I quietly listened to Mozart in my house and that was that. Hahaha. Goethe was once asked by a certain person what it would have been like if his Excellency had been born in England. At the time, Goethe was a highly respected privy councillor in the state of Saxony, so the questioner inquired spitefully whether things would have unfolded in a similar way in England. He replied: 'I would probably have been born a duke or an archbishop [sic] with a salary of 30,000 pounds per annum.' The questioner followed up and replied that it also happens that one draws a bad lot in life. Goethe laughed and is said to have replied: 'Who do you think you have in front of you? Do you think I would do something so foolish as to draw a blank?' So much for the anecdote. There are people who live for the mere sake of living, whereas others are born for high cultural values, hahaha. (Nakano 2001c: 264)

Both anecdotes showcase intellectual arrogance on two temporal planes, but another aspect is implicitly present: the general impossibility of class mobility. Culture, as part of the superstructure, is enabled by the efforts (and to the detriment) of the working population, the base. According to Nakano's account, the production and reception of art is conditioned by the general material context of a given society, but also by the individual's class situation.<sup>21</sup> What is described here is an unjust social order in which only a privileged few can afford to pursue cultural activities while turning up their noses at the supposedly uncultured. The first-person narrator reflects on his own circumstances:

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19 During the war years, households were organised into neighbourhood associations (*tonari-gumi*). They had several functions, which, as described here, included shovelling snow and fighting fires caused by air raids, distributing food, disseminating propaganda material, and exercising mutual control in the spirit of the military dictatorship.

20 This civilian uniform had the function of indicating the man's authority and ensuring obedience.

21 Bourdieu defines this method as "put[ting] in direct correspondence cultural objects and the social classes or groups for or by which they are presumed to be produced", and considers it to be a "short-circuit fallacy" (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1996: 69). For Bourdieu, the chief representatives of this "sociological reductionism" (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1996: 69) are Georg Lukács and Lucien Goldmann.

Should it really be the case that, as Professor Nagaoka said in Kumamoto, something like beauty or culture can only emerge from a life of abundance? When you have nothing to eat and not even a roof over your head and then, like me, you find yourself in the predicament of a miserable student life – in a time like this when everything is at rock bottom, art cannot succeed, no matter how hard you try. (Nakano 2001c: 332)

Nakano's critique of elitist culturalism also manifests itself in a commentary on Thomas Mann's person and work. Thomas Mann's partly autobiographical novella *Tonio Kröger* (1903) exerts a great fascination on the first-person narrator in the period before the war (Nakano 2001a: 129), as he can identify with Tonio's perception of the incompatibility of the bourgeois and artistic spheres due to his own "torn habitus" (Bourdieu 1992: 127) caused by his precarious position between the social classes. Later, in the post-war period, the first-person narrator discusses Thomas Mann and his work with his fellow student Okada, with whom he shares an interest in the writer (Nakano 2001c: 308–22). Okada, too, is poor and must work in order to finance his studies. When he reads Thomas Mann in his free time, he escapes into the aesthetic counterworld. Nakano, on the other hand, criticises this attitude of turning away from the supposed social responsibility carried by intellectuals. Okada then tells him about the criticism of Thomas Mann in the post-war period, according to which the author had commented on the misery in Germany from his comfortable exile in the United States, or in Frank Thieß's memorable turn of phrase, "from the boxes and parterre seats of abroad" (Thieß 1946: 3).<sup>22</sup> Okada proceeds to defend Thomas Mann: he believes that a civilisation that does not appreciate culture even in times of crisis is tantamount to "barbarism" (Nakano 2001c: 321). The first-person narrator, on the other hand, argues in favour of 'inner emigration' – to him, the author he formerly revered is now just another representative of 'false' (i.e., elitist) intellectualism enabled by immense wealth and an upper-class upbringing.

The intellectuality of reflective passages such as those about Goethe, Thomas Mann, and "the Beautiful" is typical of autosociobiography, but unusual for *shishōsetsu* (Hijiya-Kirschner 1996: 27). This can be attributed to the fact that the authors of *shishōsetsu* generally had not attended university: they were not social climbers through education and consequently did not deal with such problems. Nakano's material socialisation is similar to that of other

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22 "aus den Logen und Parterreplätzen des Auslands".

*shishōsetsu* authors, but since, unlike them, he achieved social advancement through the academy, his autobiographical writings also contain reflections on the relationship between poverty and the pursuit of an intellectual life.

Analogous to French naturalism, which, according to Bourdieu, is “more petit-bourgeois” (Bourdieu 1996: 265), a correlation between low cultural capital and Japanese naturalism as well as a rejection of the latter by holders of high cultural capital can be observed (Schelletter 2022: 390–3). Following Bourdieu’s demand for an analysis of the “genesis of the habitus of occupants of these positions” (Bourdieu 1996: 214), it can be argued that Nakano’s humble origins predisposed him to the choice of *shishōsetsu*, whereas, according to the author, the academics in his environment who had been socialised in more educated milieus tended to gravitate towards the *honkaku shōsetsu* of Western literature (Nakano 2001d: 463).<sup>23</sup> Nakano’s choice of genre is also consistent with Bourdieu’s (1996: 261–4) observation that a disadvantageous social background correlates with the adoption of conventional positions (such as, in this case, the choice of the established genre *shishōsetsu*).

While this paper primarily argued that Nakano’s autobiographical texts can only be understood against the background of their specific contexts (e.g., language, genre, and social history), similarities such as these are remarkable. Nakano builds on other conventions of literary writing and reception, and the intellectual field against which he writes is a different one, which is why he primarily engages with the culturalist positions of *kyōyō shugi*. Yet despite these different premises, it has become clear that there are many congruencies in terms of form and content between Nakano’s unusual *shishōsetsu* and later European autosociobiographies. It is striking that a Japanese autobiographical text from the late 1970s, despite its strongly divergent contexts, shares many characteristics with the phenomenon of contemporary literature that is autosociobiography. Particularly evident in Nakano’s literary portrayal of the affective experience of social mobility and the concomitant sense of double non-belonging, this resemblance points to a universal experience regarding mechanisms of social reproduction.<sup>24</sup>

23 See the following observation by Bourdieu: “Thus, humanities students who have received a homogeneous and homogenizing training for a number of years, and who have been constantly selected according to the degree to which they conform to school requirements, remain separated by systematic differences, both in their pursuit of cultural activities and in their cultural preferences.” (Bourdieu 1993: 232)

24 This finding validates Bourdieu’s retrospective self-assessment: “And hardly a week goes by without the publication of a book or an article showing that the mecha-

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nisms of class reproduction that I described in the sixties [...] are at work in countries as different as the United States, Sweden, and Japan." (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992: 78–9)

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