研究ノート

一茶と「寺の晩鐘」
—『父の終焉日記』における秩序への渇求—

“The Evening Temple Bell”
—The Search for Order in Issa’s *Journal of My Father’s Last Days*—

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要旨
日本文学における私小説的創作の草分けとも言われる小林一茶の『父の終焉日記』は、愛情深く父を看取った一茶の人生観や世界観を深く知り得る内容となっている。幸薄い少年期の混沌を経た彼は、往々にして諧謔的であることによって滑稽味に救いを求めた。しかし、本日記における一茶は、父のために祈り続け、仏教や儒教の指南の中に秩序を渇求していた。
●キーワード：小林一茶（Issa）／日記（Journal）／俳句（haiku）

Introduction

Journal of My Father’s Last Days（1801, 父の終焉日記, *Chichi no shūen nikki*）is Kobayashi Issa’s (1763-1828) collection of diary entries that begin on the 23rd day of the Fourth Month of 1801 and end on the 28th day of the Fifth Month of the same year.[1] In this diary, Issa—one of the greatest Haiku masters in Japan—records the painful final weeks of his father’s life on this earth. It describes not only the process of his father’s dying but also the emotional turmoil the poet experiences through the process. Alongside *The Spring of My Life*（おらが春, 1819）, *Journal of My Father’s Last Days* (hereafter *Journal*) is an important autobiographical resource for understanding the challenges and struggles Issa faced throughout his life. Furthermore, the narrative provides important clues to understanding his Haiku, which are known for their pathos.

This paper explores the ways in which Issa tries to make sense of chaos in his life as apparent in *Journal*. A brief overview of his eventful life will be followed by a discussion of two sources of strength that helped him cope with various challenges in his life: Buddhism and Confucianism. Confucianism came to Japan around AD 400, and Buddhism came to Japan a century and a half later (Renard 191). Thereafter, alongside Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism became two pillars of Japanese thought.

Similar to Matsuo Basho (1644-94), the first great Haiku master in Japan, Issa was a devout Buddhist. Whereas Basho was a Zen Buddhist, Issa embraced the Jōdo Shinshū (Pure Land Buddhism), which teaches to recite the Amida Buddha’s name (Nembutsu) as a way to attain Buddhahood in the Pure Land after death. Whereas Issa’s Buddhist worldview makes him accept fate and suffering as part of human life, the Confucian teaching of filial piety (also called *filial duty*) compels Issa to submit to his father’s wishes, thereby averting chaos at home.[2] We will first trace Issa’s life before we discuss the Buddhist and Confucian elements in *Journal*.

Brief Overview of Issa’s Life

Issa was born of middle-class farming parents in a mountainous village in Shinano Province (present-day Nagano Prefecture) of Japan. The poet’s official name was Kobayashi Nobuyuki（小林 信之）; as a child, he was also called Kobayashi Yatarō（小林 弥太郎）.[3] His birth mother died when he was three. It was the beginning of his many personal tragedies. A Haiku written in 1812 reflects his sorrow over the premature

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loss of his mother:

亡母や海見る度に見る度に

my dead mother—
every time I see the ocean
every time... (Lanoue, *Haiku*)

Here Issa captures the unabated sadness that comes from losing his mother.[4] Losing a parent can be a traumatic experience whose emotional impact can last for a lifetime.

When Issa was six, his father remarried a mean, abusive woman named Satsu. Issa had many quarrels with his stepmother, who—according to his account—abused him both verbally and physically.[5] She insisted that he miss school to work in the fields. One of his poems written in 1816 seems to suggest that he was used to receiving rebukes from her:

人の世や木の葉かくさへ叱らるる

world of man—
even raking leaves
brings a scolding (Lanoue, *Haiku*)

Not finding peace at home, Issa often wandered in the fields alone. When Issa was ten, his stepbrother, Senroku, was born; Issa was to have a strained relationship with his stepmother and Senroku for the rest of his life. In 1777, another tragedy struck Issa: his grandmother, who had served as his mother figure, passed away.[6] When Issa turned fourteen, Father decided to send him to Edo (present-day Tokyo) to become a servant. Father expected Satsu and Issa would feel better about each other by living separately. As a filial son, Issa did not bear grudges against his father who was caught between his beloved son and his second wife who bore him a son.

However, Issa must have felt pushed out of his family, in which he was the head of his own generation. His life for the next ten years is unknown other than the fact that, by 1787, he became a disciple of Kobayashi Chikua (1710-90), a Haiku poet who wrote in the tradition of Basho.[7] After Chikua's death, he became a wanderer (as Basho was), composing Haiku and associating with poets in Edo and in western Japan.

In 1801, almost a quarter century after his departure from his native village, Issa returned home because his father was dying. On his deathbed, his father promised Issa that he would receive an inheritance, but Issa knew that no one would help him get it. Issa tries to understand his miserable life in the context of the Buddhist doctrine of fate: those who spoke with his father "are so deeply mired in the Six Passions [six desires or pleasures that hinder enlightenment in Buddhism] that they are not likely to obey Father's last wishes" (Issa 53). They tell him they intend to honor those wishes, and he remains hopeful. The text does not tell us whether Issa actually receives his inheritance, and the inconclusive nature of Issa's narrative gives the impression that his life of wandering might resume.[8] His Haiku at the end of *Journal* reads,

If Father were here,
We'd be looking out at dawn
Across these wide green hills.[9] (54)

The poem expresses a longing for his father and may reflect Issa's distrust of anyone other than his father.

Pillar #1: Buddhist Philosophy

Issa embraced the fundamentals of Buddhist teachings: suffering arises from karma, humans have the capacity to do evil, and life is an illusion. Not surprisingly, in *Journal*, he rationalizes suffering based on the Buddhist doctrine of karma, the idea that one's actions in the past life determine his or her present life. The bad relationship with his half-brother is due to the unfolding of karma. After his father announces his decision on how his land will be divided after his death, Senroku is contentious about it. Issa thinks that his stepbrother's misbehavior derives from karma: "[A]lthough Senroku and I were of different mothers, I couldn't help but think that the real reason for his

unpleasant hostility was that we had been enemies in some previous life" (Issa 37). After his father's death, he strives to understand his hard life through karma:

> What a wretched place the world had become.... I had been born heir to this household, but sadly enough, through retribution from a previous life, I had not been permitted to serve my father in his home. It was not as if I'd taken up gambling or playing around, and had squandered my father's fortune. Perhaps Heaven had dealt me this bad hand as repayment for some slander I had committed in a previous life. (51)

In the supposed misbehavior of Senroku, Issa recognizes the evilness of human nature. Although Buddhism sees human nature fundamentally good, it also recognizes the human potential to do evil. In his Fourth Month, 29th day entry, Issa records a daylong quarrel between his father and Senroku regarding the inheritance. The poet finds Senroku's behavior symptomatic of the Five Polluted Age. Also known in Buddhism as the Latter Day of the Law or the Degenerate Age, the Five Polluted Age follows the Former Day of the Law (the first 500-1000 years after the Buddha's death) and the Middle Day of the Law (the next 500-1000 years). During the Five Polluted Age, which is to last for 10,000 years, the Dharma (Law) declines. Issa writes,

> It [the quarrel between Father and Senroku] all started because greed, perversity, and guile had blinded Senroku and had driven him out of his senses. How sad it was to see him turning his back on his father and revealing this world of men as it is in these evil days of the Five Polluted Ages.[10] (35)

As Issa helplessly sees his father breathe his last, he is reminded of the Buddhist belief that all human life is an illusion: "I took hold of his empty, pitiful body. [⋯] I felt as though I was wandering in darkness without a lamp, on this cold dawn in this fleeting world" (49). Then, the impermanence of human life does not surprise him as he considers the deceptiveness of the natural world: "The impermanent spring flowers are seduced and scattered by the wind; this ignorant world's autumn moon is surrounded and hidden by flowers" (49). The ringing of an evening temple bell deepens his sadness: "[T]he evening time is sad enough without all this" (50).

Pillar #2: Confucian Virtue of Filial Piety

Issa's *Journal* shows that Issa practices the Confucian virtue of filial piety when he looks after his dying father. More than anything, Issa does his best to make him comfortable on his deathbed. For instance, in the entry of the Fourth Month, 29th day, Issa records the event that led his father to erupt in anger. Early in the morning, he sends Senroku on an errand because he cannot trust anyone in nursing his ailing father. Discovering later what Issa had done, the stepmother berates him for having dispatched the younger brother on an empty stomach. The father also becomes furious about the fact that Issa had not consulted with him. As an obedient son, Issa blames himself for the whole situation and apologizes to his father:

> There was no way to remedy the situation and so I suffered in silence. Pressing my head to the floor and wringing my hands, I repented tearfully of my error, promising, 'I'll be more careful in the future.' Father's rage abated somewhat.
>
> Because Father's admonitions, whether given gently or in anger, were all for my own benefit, how could I resent them? But how pitiful was his weakened voice raised in anger. After I had spent the previous night brooding about our pending, eternal separation, the joy of suffering Father's scolding this morning could hardly be surpassed even by the joy of the blind tortoise finding a piece of driftwood. (36)

With his apology, Issa prevents the household from plunging into further chaos. More importantly, he feels deeply sorry for his father, who will die soon.

When Senroku says, "Father would be better off dying now," Issa deplores his half-brother's lack of filial piety. A son of unconditional loyalty to his father, Issa writes, "Since we will never have a chance of seeing our parents again, we ought not grow weary even if we have to take care of them for a hundred years" (38). Indeed, what Senroku said was not only subhuman but also unimaginable even in the world of animals:

> They say that even the ferocious tiger does not devour its parents, and that even the detested crow takes care of its parents for fifty days. How then could a human being dare to say such a thing as Senroku did? I felt all the sorrier for Father, and I massaged his neck and legs for him. (38)

Six days later, Issa's father craves pears, which are hard to acquire at this time of year. Issa exhausts himself by visiting all the households nearby—wealthy and poor—and asking if they have saved pears from last year; not even one has a pear (41). He visits shops nears Buddhist temple Zenkōji to pick up his father's medicine and to find some pears for him. Even there, he cannot find anyone that has pears: "Even if I had to soar up into the heavens or descend into the earth, I wanted to find a pear. But although I went around in a daze to every grocer's and vegetable shop, sadly there wasn't a soul who could help me" (42).

The next day, Issa and his father have a conversation. Sensing that death is fast approaching for him, his father shares his concerns about Issa's wellbeing after his death. He has been protecting Issa from his stepmother and stepbrother, but after his passing, there will no longer be a buffer for him. Deeply moved by what his father said, Issa writes, "At this, I too burst into tears of gratitude. Surely only a parent could take pity on such a good-for-nothing orphan as me. I couldn't stop my tears…" (43). Issa could have easily held grudges against him for having ruined his life by remarrying an unkind woman. Instead, Issa displays utmost compassion for his dying father, deploring the fact that he is unable to help him regain his health.

Conclusion

Journal is a short but important document in understanding the author's life, his worldview, and his poetry. Amid chaos in his life, Issa strove to create some degree of order out of chaos by turning to the teachings of Buddhism and Confucianism.[11] *Journal* is an intensely emotional narrative that does not have room for comedy. Indeed, the gloomy, despairing tone underlying the diary is a sharp contrast to his occasionally humorous Haiku. Psychologically, humor was his tool for coping with life's challenges. It is easy to read the following poems and then move on without thinking much:

> 蚊柱や是もなければ小淋しき
>
> without the column
> of mosquitoes...
> a bit lonely (Lanoue, *Haiku*)
>
> *
>
> 世の中や鳴虫にさへ上づ下手
>
> in this world
> among insects too...
> good singers, bad singers (Lanoue, *Haiku*)

Composed in 1814 and 1820, respectively, these poems reveal that Issa considered insects his friends to whom he could speak. It reflects his respect—and even sympathy—for critters.[12] Issa's humor, which comes from his desire for order, can be classified as "self-enhancing humor," which is good-natured humor used to cope with stress. According to Ronald E Riggio, self-enhancing humor happens when one laughs at oneself in times of personal crisis.[13]

When read in conjunction with Issa's humorous Haiku, his diary is a reminder that life is neither tragic

nor comedic; rather, life is tragicomic. In his article, "Comedy Is the Best Antidote to Tragedy," A. N. Wilson discusses the blending of tragedy and comedy in Charles Dickens' novels:

> The novels—even *The Pickwick Papers*—are drenched in tears and sadness. We weep quite as much as laugh over his pages. But the laughter, the jokes, the language itself, all confront life in a manner that compels us to share his robust attitude to the wretchedness of childhood, the humiliations of poverty, the dread of death.

The same thing happens when one reads Issa's Haiku alongside his diary, and that perhaps makes Issa the most popular—albeit not the most highly respected—haiku poet in history.[14)]

Notes

1) These dates are by the lunar calendar.

2) The Edo period saw a revival of Confucianism that emphasizes harmonious human relationships, social stability, and rationality. As in premodern China and Korea, Confucius' *Analects* was a must-read text for students. An anonymous senryu in the second volume of *Kawazoi yanagi* reads,

> *ashioto ga*
> *suru to Rongo no*
> *shita e ire*
> Each time footsteps
> approach, he puts it under
> the *Analects* (qtd. in Shirane 526; trans. Makoto Ueda)

3) In East Asia, a family name comes before a given name. In the name *Kobayashi Issa*, *Kobayashi* is a family name, and *Issa* is a given name. In the Western world, *Issa* is often used as if it were his given name, but it was his pen name. Initially, his pen name was 菊明, which means "chrysanthemum light." Later, he adopted the new pen name 一茶, which means "a cup of tea" or "a leaf of tea." The name change indicates that the poet felt lonely（一人ぼっち）and that he considered a human being's ephemeral existence as foams over tea. In a Urasenke tea ceremony, the host supposed to remove all the big bubbles with tea whisks before serving tea.

4) Other poems by Issa take note of motherly love which was missing in his life:

> 蚤の跡かぞへながらに添乳哉
>
> she counts flea bites
> while her child
> suckles (Lanoue, *Haiku*)
>
> *
>
> 渋い所母が喰けり山の柿
> Mother eats
> the astringent part...
> mountain persimmon (Lanoue, *Haiku*)
>
> *
>
> 寝せつけし子のせんたくや夏の月
>
> her child tucked in
> she washes his clothes...
> summer moon (Lanoue, *Haiku*)

Written in 1818, 1820, and 1823, respectively, these poems vividly embody maternal love. In the first one, a mother sadly counts the number of fleabites while nursing her child. The mother in the second poem eats the bitter part of a persimmon so that her child can eat the sweeter part. The third Haiku portrays a mother's love as she holds her child while washing his clothes, possibly his diapers (Ueda 146). Not surprisingly, even the moon seems to be happy to see the heartwarming scene.

5) Some critics believe that Issa exaggerates his case in *Journal*. For instance, Robert Huey discounts Issa's account as a reliable source of biographical information:

> It would be naïve to take everything Issa says in the Journal at face value. He has shaped the facts, either unconsciously because he genuinely mistrusts and resents his stepmother and half-brother, or—to take a more cynical view—consciously, because he wants a document that will help him in the inheritance dispute that is bound to follow his father's death. There is probably some truth in both of these propositions. (29)

6) In an added part of the diary, Issa wrote he "relied on Grandmother like a cane or a pillar." After his birth mother's death, his grandma looked after him, which made him not very friendly to other children and sometimes uncommunicative with people. On the other hand, the communication with the older generation made him intelligent, and he would find another way—a literary way—to express his feelings later. A Japanese saying goes, "お婆ちゃん子は三文安い" (*Obahchanko wa sanmon yasui*. People

raised by grandmas are spoiled and worthless.). Issa may have been a child spoiled by his proverbial grandmother.

7) A fitting Japanese maxim here is "瓢箪から駒" (*Hyotan kara koma*. A horse came out from a gourd.). People use this expression when they have unexpected good results. It is said that, in Edo, Issa became a servant of a person who wrote Haiku. He might have not been into Haiku if he had stayed in the rural part.

8) The legal battle was finally resolved in 1813, which allowed him to return to his native village and take a half of his father's house.

9) The original text reads, "父ありて明ぼの見たし青田原" (Lanoue, *Haiku*).

10) Because it refers to one of three Buddhist periods, the "Five Polluted Age" sounds better in English.

11) In Issa's diary, nature fleetingly provides Issa with a cure for emotional distress. The natural world, with which he was familiar from childhood, calms his nerves and gives him hope. The entry dated Fifth Month, Fourth Day, records a rare positive moment in the diary. Early in the morning, cuckoos' chirping gives him hope and makes him write two Haiku:

> Cuckoo—
> For me, too,
> This day feels good.
>
> How refreshing!
> The moon over the gate through which
> At last I'm free to pass. (Issa 38)

After this pleasant moment, Father's health continues to deteriorate, and Issa rarely mentions the natural world. Seeing the inevitability of his father's demise, Issa copes with his grief through his belief in Pure Land Buddhism and through the Confucian virtue of filial piety.

12) Issa's poems about underdogs in this world—including frogs, flies, fleas, and mosquitoes—exemplifies the Japanese virtue of 判官びいき (*hanganbiiki*, "sympathy to losers"). Most of Issa's Haiku are struck by his gentleness to the weak, which can be recognized in his work like "痩せ蛙負けるな一茶ここにあり." In this poem, he is cheering a very thin frog, but he must have also been cheering himself. The poet considered himself a lonely hick.

13) David G. Lanoue identifies four characteristics of Issa's Haiku: his comedy, his kinship with all living things, his transformation of the personal into the art, and his inclination to defend the weak (9-11). Lanoue rightly notes that, as "a master joke teller," Issa "approaches the universe with the comic gesture of not grasping: of letting go and surrendering to it with good humor" (10). Accepting pain and suffering as part of life, Issa displays the Buddhist virtue of enlightened resignation. He tries to make a miserable life livable through his humor.

14) An earlier version of this paper was co-presented at the 2018 Arkansas Philological Association Conference, University of Central Arkansas, Conway, Arkansas, USA, 19-20 Oct. 2018.

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