

## Exploration of Doubts in Showa-Era Japanese Literature History: Focusing on the Historical Evaluation of Yokomitsu Riichi

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**Abstract:** The current Showa literature history views the "New Sensation School" as the beginning of Showa literature. The "New Sensation School" and "new psychologism literature," represented by Riichi Yokomitsu, are seen as exemplars of modernist literature in Japan. This narrative of Showa literature history is widely accepted as a fundamental premise in research. However, this interpretation of Showa literature history was essentially constructed by Sei Itoh and others around 1950. Through the analysis in this paper of statements made by individuals such as Riichi Yokomitsu, it becomes clear that Yokomitsu did not acknowledge the "New Sensation School" as an independent literary movement and had a definitive opposition to "new psychologism literature" and modernist literature. After Yokomitsu's death in 1947, Sei Itoh, the founder of "new psychologism literature," reshaped Yokomitsu's image, positioning him as a representative of "new psychologism literature." This repositioning elevated Itoh's own status in Showa literature history, an influence that persists to this day.

**Keywords:** Riichi Yokomitsu, Showa Literature History, New Sensation, New Psychologism, Sei Itoh

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Formation of the Current History of Showa Literature

Regarding the state of early Showa-era literature in Japan, the literary critic Ken Hirano detailed the rise of Showa literature in the fifth chapter titled "Literature of the Early Showa Era" of *An Overview of Modern Japanese Literature History* published in 1949: Both the New Sensation School and Marxist literature shared a commonality in their rebellion against the naive realist literature that emerged after Naturalism (Hirano, 1949). Each movement aimed to revolutionize the established literary tradition, with the New Sensation School focusing on a revolution in technique, while Marxist literature aimed at a revolution in worldview. These avant-garde literary movements were aligned in their desire to break away from conventional literary norms. Their social foundation stemmed from an anarchistic movement of artistic destruction, which took root in the period following World War I and was influenced by events such as the Great Kanto

Earthquake. This movement crystallized into what is known as the New Sensation School in one aspect, and evolved into Marxist literature in another. Consequently, these two literary schools became the two major factions that defined Showa period literature, making it distinctively representative of that era. According to Ken Hirano (Hirano, 1949), the rise of Showa literature in Japan was closely linked to the social context of the First World War and the Great Kanto Earthquake. In an effort to counter traditional naturalist literature, Showa literature underwent a revolution both in terms of technique and worldview. As a contemporary witness of the same era, the writer Sei Itoh (Itoh, 1950) further elaborated on this perspective in his commentary in the 43rd volume of *The Complete Works of Modern Japanese Novels* published in 1950. Based on Hirano's views, Itoh provided a more detailed explanation of the emergence of the "New Sensation School" and Marxist literature : During this period, a series of unsettling conditions appeared in Japanese society. These included the formation of the "Japanese Socialist League" in 1920, the financial crisis of 1921, and the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. Against the backdrop of social unrest, new literary movements began to emerge. One was the linkage between class ideology and literature that arose with the clarification of class consciousness. Another was a literary reform movement reflecting the modernization of life consciousness in line with the intensification of capitalism. The former's genesis was in *The Sower*, first published in February 1920 at Tsuchizaki Port in Akita, which later evolved into *The Literary Front* in September 1924, laying the foundation for proletarian literature. The latter began with the publication of *Bungei Jidai* (*The Literary Era*) in October 1924, which became the origin of the New Sensation School of literature....In this context, *The Literary Front* and *Bungei Jidai* marked the starting points of two opposing literary factions that emerged simultaneously: the proletarian literature and modernism literature streams....This influence of these new artistic tendencies was also evident in the group of anarchist poets of the time. Sei Itoh pointed out that the "New Sensation School" marked the beginning of modernist literature in Japan, emphasizing its significant influence from new artistic tendencies in the West. In another article published in 1950, titled *The Emerging Art School and New Psychologism Literature* (Ara, 1952), Itoh evaluated the subsequent developments of Riichi Yokomitsu, a writer from the "New Sensation School." : In 1930, Riichi Yokomitsu suddenly underwent a transformation. This is evident in "Machine" published in the September issue of *Kaizō*. This coincided with the appearance of the translation of *Ulysses*, and was

clearly influenced by Marcel Proust's work featured in *Bungaku* magazine. When I began reading "Machine" while walking along the train tracks in Ushigome with the magazine I had just bought, I received a strong, suffocating impression. He abruptly stopped using the jumping technique of the New Sensation School that he had followed until *Shanghai*, and adopted a flexible, associative method described by Tetsuzo Tanikawa as an "Arabesque pattern", with a writing style that continued without breaks, resulting in a densely packed text....Strangely, there seemed to be no criticism that mentioned Yokomitsu's work was influenced by the new French and British literature, which had been persistently introduced by *Shi to Shiron (Poetry and Poetics)* for the past two years. To put it accurately, Yokomitsu had adopted a new method and was nurturing a mature thought capable of enriching it, mastering the ability to use the method as his own. The trend of new psychologism was due to the influence of Western European literary styles introduced by *Bungaku*, *Shi to Shiron*, and *Shi to Genjitsu (Poetry and Reality)*. In 1950, Sei Itoh, also noted that Yokomitsu abandoned the writing methods of the "New Sensation School" in 1930 while defining the "New Sensation School" represented by Riichi Yokomitsu as modernist literature that emerged under the influence of new artistic tendencies from the West. Influenced by Marcel Proust, Yokomitsu turned towards a Western "new psychologism literature" approach. Itoh expressed surprise that no one had pointed out Yokomitsu's influence by Proust until then. In 1956, seven years after first presenting his views, Ken Hirano deepened and summarized these perspectives through his book *Introduction to Showa Literature*: The new literature of the Showa era is primarily characterized by its rebellion against the established literary world. This rebellion originated first from what is known as proletarian literature and secondly from the New Sensation School of literature. While the former can be called a literary movement, the latter might be more aptly described as a literary school. However, both aimed at overthrowing established literature and establishing new literature, and in this sense, they were aligned in the same direction. However, it's important to note that these two literary forms, both emerging in the late Taisho period—proletarian literature and the New Sensation School—did not form a united front against the established realism centered around I-novel (personal novel). Instead, they engaged in mutual criticism and attacks....The early years of the Showa period in the literary world are marked by this fact. It wasn't a simple history of a two-sided conflict but rather a triangular standoff involving three parties. When constructing the

theory of Showa literature history, Ken Hirano discarded the viewpoint that two major schools jointly shaped Showa literature. Instead, he included the established literary circles in the category of literary opposition and proposed the "triangular standoff" theoretical framework. The establishment of this framework marked the formation of the current foundation of Showa literature history theory. Following this, most subsequent interpretations and studies of Showa literature have been based on this "triangular standoff" theory. Sei Itoh's interpretation of Riichi Yokomitsu and the "New Sensation School" as well as "new psychologism literature" were also incorporated into the framework of Showa literature history, positioning Yokomitsu (Yokomitsu & Kataoka, 1932) as a representative figure of modernist literature in Japan. However, these descriptions and interpretations of Showa literature mainly focus on works published around 1950, which is quite distant from the era being described. Additionally, the literary histories compiled by critics and writers are not based on objective documentation but rather carry strong subjective colors and impressionistic evaluations. The purpose of this article is to analyze the issues present in the current Showa literature history based on specific documentary analysis and to attempt to restore the true face of early Showa literature.

## 2. THE PROBLEMS WITH SHOWA LITERATURE HISTORY

Most research on Showa literature history tends to accept it wholesale, with few questioning it. However, in the Japanese academic sphere, voices challenging the Showa literature history based on the "triangular standoff" are not absent. Early on, when Ken Hirano proposed his views, Tatsuzō Nasu pointed out in "The New Sensation School's Writing", published in 1950: "Unlike naturalism or the Shirakaba School, they do not have a common stance on life and social issues," and "Rather than saying the New Sensation School was a literary school that emerged in the late Taisho period, it's more accurate to say it was just a naming for a group tendency (Nasu, 1956)". He argued that the "New Sensation School" did not constitute a literary school. Hideo Odagiri (Odagiri, 1957) wrote in his 1957 article "The Formation of the New Sensation School": "As a literary movement, the New Sensation School did not have a clear concept or plan at its inception, and even as a faction, their collective advocacy consciousness was relatively weak." Shigeki Senuma (Shigeki, 1966), in his 1966 article "The New Sensation School and the Emerging Art School",

mentioned: "Terms like 'New Sensation School' originated from journalistic language, even when used to refer to the content, tendencies, or characteristics of a certain literary school. These terms need to be reconsidered academically to determine if they are indeed suitable for accurately describing certain events in modern Japanese literary history." Senuma regarded the "New Sensation School" as merely a term used in journalistic commentary. This view was clearly a critique of the Showa literature history advocated by Ken Hirano and Sei Itoh, which was receiving significant attention at the time. In his 1967 article "Kameo Chiba and Riichi Yokomitsu: The Meaning and Substance of the 'New Sensation' Theory", Yoshiki Kuritubo (Kuritubo, 1967) stated: "When 'New Sensation' was first proposed, Kameo Chiba himself did not present a clear theoretical stance, and the members of *Bungei Jidai* did not have immediate awareness or content to respond with." Dennis Keene (Keene, 1982), in his 1982 publication *Yokomitsu Riichi: The Modernist*, argued that the "New Sensation School" was merely a means of publicity for a controversial magazine, asserting that "this group known as the New Sensation School never existed." Ritsuo Taguchi (Taguchi, 1988) also emphasized in the first volume of *Lectures on Showa Literature History*, published in 1988, in "The Inverted City": "The New Sensation School" "was not a literary school formed on the basis of a common ideology". The critiques questioning the existence of the "New Sensation School" almost universally focus on its lack of a common ideological theory. If the "New Sensation School" indeed did not exist, then the "triangular standoff" theory, which forms the basis of the current Showa literature history, would naturally be subject to questioning. Criticism within the Japanese academic circle regarding Showa literature history is not limited to the question of the existence of the "New Sensation School" but also extends to the "triangular standoff" doctrine itself, with many sharp criticisms raised. Takaaki Yoshimoto, in his publication *What is Beauty for Language*, evaluated the "triangular standoff" doctrine as follows: Of course, dividing literature in the early Showa period into proletarian and bourgeois literature, and seriously considering the occupation of the literary world by the proletarian literary movement, was a decisive mistake. It was an error to use this for organizing literary history (Takashi, 1965). Also, it is clear from the works themselves that the representative works of proletarian literature's leading authors, such as Shigeharu Nakano, Yuriko Miyamoto, and Taizō Kobayashi, were not particularly different or special compared to the representative works of the so-called "bourgeois literature" of the same period. Of course, while there are differences in individuality and interest, the fact that the more

excellent the work, the more it tends to share the same quality as the representative works of the so-called "bourgeois literature" also clearly indicates that the classification methods of dividing literature into proletarian and bourgeois or the triangular standoff are erroneous. Takaaki Yoshimoto believed that distinguishing literature based on different factions or theories is problematic and an erroneous method for organizing literary history. From the perspective of the works themselves, if there is no essential difference between the specific works of proletarian literature and bourgeois literature, then the classification method of "triangular standoff" is evidently flawed. Yoshiki Kuritubo (Yoshiki, 1977), in his 1977 article "Riichi Yokomitsu and Naoya Shiga," provided the following critique of the "triangular standoff" doctrine: Ken Hirano explicitly stated, "The beginning of Showa literature starts with the suicide of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa", and notably, he identified Akutagawa's suicide as a death symbolic of the era. This forms the basis for his famous "triangular standoff" theory. He positioned the "classical personality" of Naoya Shiga, the "Marxist" existence of Shigeharu Nakano and others, and the "modern decadence" of Riichi Yokomitsu as the "three poles" in a standoff. By using Yoshihiro Inoue's contemplation, "How Should We Live?", as a foundation to determine these three poles, he incorporated this structure into the flow of literary history. This resulted in the relationship between Naoya Shiga and Riichi Yokomitsu being popularized as one aspect of the "triangular standoff." The qualitative involvement of their literature has become difficult to discern due to this kind of conventional understanding....Itoh also merely proved that he viewed Shiga and Yokomitsu as part of the "triangular standoff." All three, by having a preconceived concept of literary history, and then trying to capture the characteristics of the authors from there, have limited their evaluations to no more than conventional understanding. Yoshiki Kuritubo believed that both Ken Hirano and Sei Itoh first established a framework of literary history and then understood authors and literary works within that framework. This approach limited their ability to reach conclusions beyond the pre-established framework. More precisely, it involved first determining a conclusion and then using that conclusion to interpret the works themselves. In his 1989 article "Avant-Garde Art, Its Absorption and Development (Part One): The Path to the New Sensation School", Tetsuya Hatori (Hatori, 1989) provided the following evaluation of the "triangular standoff" doctrine: Even though we often present avant-garde poetry and New Sensation School works side by side, we don't delve deep into their underlying meanings. Perhaps, until now, there hasn't been

enough leeway to do so. This might be why there's a lingering perception of them as merely unusual in expression, and why their spirit hasn't reached a common understanding and remains largely ignored. However, what seems to be an even more important reason is the influence of the prevailing view of Showa literary history. For example, the Showa literature history by Ken Hirano has had the strongest influence so far....It appears to properly position the literature within the "triangular standoff," but when Showa literature is captured from the intersection of politics and literature, schools like the New Sensation School are actually marginalized as inconsequential. This has likely contributed to the long-standing situation where the New Sensation School is understood merely as a form of literature characterized by bizarre expressions, without involving deeper thought or recognition. Tetsuya Hatori believed that the existence of the "triangular standoff" theory not only predetermined conclusions but also led to the long-standing perception of the New Sensation School as a form of literature that lacks thought and merely seeks to be novel and unique. In his 1991 book *Riichi Yokomitsu*, Akimasa Kanno (Kanno, 1991) further evaluated the "triangular standoff," stating: "As an overview of literary history, even if it is effective in terms of accuracy, its practicality is not always guaranteed when delving into the interior of each work." The criticisms of the "triangular standoff" theory can almost all be summarized as follows: they tend to detach from the literary works themselves, which are the objects of study, and instead determine their essence based on external factors like the era's environment and political background. The Japanese academic community has also critiqued Sei Itoh's assertion about Riichi Yokomitsu's transition from the "New Sensation School" to "new psychologism literature". Specifically, Masao Hosyō (Hosyō, 1966), in his 1966 book *Riichi Yokomitsu*, analyzed Itoh's claim that "Yokomitsu underwent a sudden change in 1930." It is commonly said about Riichi Yokomitsu, even as noted in reference sources like "Kōjien," that he "developed the New Sensation School movement and then moved on to new psychologism literature". This phrase "then moved on" is often interpreted as indicating a change. In this context, the work "Machine" is frequently cited as convenient evidence. This piece was also presented between the "Harbor Chapter" and "Woman" in *Shanghai*. It is considered an ideal work to signify Yokomitsu's turning point or shift, chronologically speaking. However, Yokomitsu did not write "Machine" after completing the entirety of *Shanghai*. Despite this, aren't there tendencies to evaluate "Machine" and *Shanghai* as if they are entirely different works? Moreover, this interpretation that *Shanghai* represents the culmination of his work as

part of the New Sensation School and "Machine" marks a clear shift to new psychologism, treating the writer's stance as part of the New Sensation School and his attitude grounded in new psychologism as entirely separate entities, might necessitate thorough examination and correction. Masao Hosyō, using Riichi Yokomitsu's representative work of the New Sensation School period, *Shanghai*, as an example, pointed out that "Machine" was published during the serialization of *Shanghai*. He used this to refute the claim that "Yokomitsu underwent a sudden change in 1930," and argued that this assertion needs more in-depth exploration and revision. Ritsuo Taguchi (Taguchi, 1986), in his 1986 article "On Riichi Yokomitsu's 'Machine': The End of an Urban Incomer," noted that the discourse on Yokomitsu's transition from the "New Sensation School" to "new psychologism literature" was "widely used without thought" and termed it an unfounded "speculation." The criticism of Sei Itoh's viewpoint is not limited to the assertion that "Riichi Yokomitsu underwent a sudden change in 1930." It also focuses on his opinion that Yokomitsu was influenced by Marcel Proust and thus turned towards new psychologism. In the 1962 publication of "Spring on a Horse-Drawn Carriage & Machine", Takeshi Matsumura (Takeshi, 1962) expressed the following in his commentary: Some critics explain "Machine" as being influenced by Marcel Proust, describing it as a Proustian psychological novel, but this is nothing short of absurd. Regardless of what the author thought of Proust, "Machine" and Proust are entirely unrelated. Proust was an author who believed in reaching reality through the pursuit of psychology, and therefore his writing is filled with shadows and nuances, resulting in long, persistent sentences. In contrast, Yokomitsu attempts to represent psychological tactics as a kind of schematic diagram. The two are fundamentally different in direction, and this difference is clear even when comparing their styles. Takeshi Matsumura pointed out, "Some critics explain 'Machine' as being influenced by Marcel Proust" clearly referring to Sei Itoh as one of those critics. He further expressed criticism of this notion, asserting that Riichi Yokomitsu and Marcel Proust were completely opposite in their thinking and even showed clear differences in their writing styles. Matsumura categorized the statement that "Machine was influenced by Proust" as "absurd". Rintaro Hinuma (Rintaro, 1963), in his 1963 publication "The Will to Fiction," asserted: "There is no similarity to be found between Yokomitsu and Proust." He also scoffed at the idea of "Machine" being an imitation of Proust, dismissing it as a "joke." Hiroyoshi Sone (Sone, 1981), in his 1981 article "'Machine' and 'Crystal Illusion'" argued: "It is difficult to consider that the style of 'Machine' was influenced by Proust." Hidemi



Suga (Suga, 1988), in his 1988 book "The Detective Critic" noted that "Machine" is not "an interior monologue in the sense of Joyce, nor a stream-of-consciousness narrative." He speculated: "Shocked by the innovation of what is called the interior monologue in the final chapter of *Ulysses*, Sei Itoh (Sei, 1947) tried to find a Japanese equivalent, harboring a preconception that Proust too was about interior monologue. He attempted to place 'Machine,' seemingly influenced by this, in such a 'global simultaneity.' In short, Itoh misunderstood 'interior monologue' as the revelation of the unconscious." Critics opposing the view that Riichi Yokomitsu imitated Marcel Proust generally believe that there is no similarity between the two. They used strong negative terms such as "absurd," "joke," and "misunderstand" to express their dissatisfaction with this notion. Based on the analysis above, the main problems with the current Showa literature history can be summarized in three points: 1. The writers of the "New Sensation School" did not share a common theory. 2. The "triangular standoff" theory, which presupposes conclusions, attempts to determine the essence of works based on their external environment. 3. "Machine" has neither a relationship with nor similarity to Marcel Proust's work. As Ritsuo Taguchi stated, the current Showa literature history is "widely used without thought." Scholars who have questioned its validity have denied its effectiveness. Without properly addressing these three issues, the rationality of the current Showa literature history remains questionable.

### 3. THE TRUE CONDITION OF EARLY SHOWA PERIOD LITERATURE IN JAPAN

As stated in Section Two, since the establishment of the current Showa literature history, it has continuously faced criticism but this has not shaken its mainstream status. The reasons for this are mainly twofold: Firstly, the criticisms are abstract and fragmented, lacking systematic analysis based on specific literature. Secondly, these criticisms are primarily directed at the Showa literature history of Ken Hirano and Sei Itoh, without delving into the actual situation of early Showa literature. To negate the current Showa literature history, it is necessary to focus on examining the specific conditions of the early Showa literary world. Next, we will reconstruct the true state of early Showa period literature in a chronological order, primarily using the statements and perspectives of contemporary figures such as Riichi Yokomitsu as the main narrative thread : In October 1924,

a group of writers including Riichi Yokomitsu, Yasunari Kawabata, Tetsuji Kataoka, and Yoichi Nakagawa (Nakagawa, 1950) founded the magazine *Bungei Jidai*. The following month, Kameo Chiba (Chiba, 1924) commented on the writers of *Bungei Jidai* in the magazine *Seiki (The Century)* as follows: And the reason why they feel a special joy in such artistic tendencies is because their psychological functions have the strongest receptivity to mood, tone, nerves, and emotions, more than anything else. And this is because the art of culture inherently has an inner life that should naturally lead to that point. Therefore, the novelty in their sensations and the liveliness of their leaps naturally make the new cultural person feel joy in appreciation. In this respect, this "New Sensation School" should have naturally emerged much earlier, and even if it was somewhat delayed, the sensory perception of the people of the *Bungei Jidai* faction is undoubtedly far newer, living in a sense of vocabulary, poetry, and rhythm, than any other sensory artists who have appeared to date. Kameo Chiba sensed a completely new literary feeling from the writers of *Bungei Jidai* and dubbed them the "New Sensation School." His comment is considered a landmark in the birth of the "New Sensation School" movement in Japanese literary history. Although it is well-known that the term "New Sensation School" was assigned by those outside the group, there has been little in-depth exploration into whether the writers of *Bungei Jidai* themselves identified with this label. Although Sei Itoh defined the "New Sensation School" as the starting point of modernist literature in Japan, Riichi Yokomitsu (Yokomitsu, 1924), a representative figure of this movement, expressed the following viewpoint in his 1930 essay "How Will It Develop?": Absurd names like "nonsense literature" "modernism literature" - it's better not to label them with such ridiculous names. Yasunari Kawabata said that he doubts the nerve of anyone who uses the word "modernism" I found that very interesting. Riichi Yokomitsu not only considered the concept of "modernist literature" to be foolish, but also quoted his close friend Yasunari Kawabata, saying that those who use the term "modernism" have a problem with their nerves. These remarks indicate that Yokomitsu was not a representative of modernist literature; rather, he stood in opposition to it, becoming a critic of modernist literature. In 1932, Riichi Yokomitsu and Tetsuji Kataoka, both key writers of *Bungei Jidai* had the following conversation during an interview: Kataoka: "The New Sensation School had no theory. It was all just done on intuition. That's why there was no confidence." Reporter: "So, after being labeled as the 'New Sensation School', did the members start to consciously use the title and techniques of the 'New Sensation School'?" Yokomitsu: "No, it wasn't like that. After

being labeled as the 'New Sensation School', I felt quite labeled. So, out of a kind of stubbornness, I just took on that name. It was all out of stubbornness." Tetsuji Kataoka's viewpoint aligns with those scholars who believe that the "New Sensation School" did not exist as a literary movement. He explicitly denied that the New Sensation School had any theoretical ideas. Riichi Yokomitsu, on the other hand, regarded the "New Sensation School" as a mere label, indicating that his use of the name was entirely due to "stubbornness." Another key writer of *Bungei Jidai*, Yoichi Nakagawa, expressed similar views in his 1950 article "The Movement of the New Sensation School": Looking back on the New Sensation School movement, if you ask what its characteristics were, I think it had no particular ideological basis, and when considering what kind of influence it has left on the present day, it seems like there wasn't anything particularly special. Yoichi Nakagawa also believed that the "New Sensation School" lacked a "ideological basis" and considered that it did not have a significant impact on later generations. Given that this article was published after Ken Hirano's "Literature of the Early Showa Period," it can be seen as a direct rebuttal by a member of the "New Sensation School" to the notion of considering the "New Sensation School" as the origin of Showa literature. Not just later scholars, but all the main writers of "Bungei Jidai" unanimously believed that the "New Sensation School" lacked a theoretical basis and agreed that it did not have a significant impact on subsequent generations. Therefore, it can be clearly stated that the "New Sensation School" was neither a literary movement nor the origin of Showa literature. Based on this, the concept of "triangular standoff" in Showa literature history also lacks a solid foundation. After establishing that the "New Sensation School" does not constitute a separate literary movement, the focus of research shifted to exploring whether Riichi Yokomitsu belonged to "new psychologism literature." As mentioned in the first section, Sei Itoh proposed in 1950 that Yokomitsu's "Machine", published in 1930, was influenced by Marcel Proust and identified it as a typical example of "new psychologism literature". Itoh also expressed surprise that no one had previously pointed out the fact that Yokomitsu was influenced by Proust. However, in reality, Sei Itoh was not the first to suggest that Riichi Yokomitsu was influenced by Western psychological novels. As early as the month following the publication of "Machine", Shigeki Senuma (Senuma, 1930) detailed the then-current characteristics of "new psychological literature" in his article "The Development and Trend of Psychologism": If we summarize the characteristics of these new psychological literatures, they consciously reject the pursuit of psychological processes through a

unifying spiritual quest. As a result, human psychology is no longer considered in relation to its deeper reality but is rather dissected into as fine a temporal sequence as possible. In this arrangement of individual, dissected elements, i.e., in a form detached from content, they believe it's possible to grasp human essence. Turning a deaf ear to the spirit of the times, they find solace in such mechanical psychological descriptions. Whether in the works of Yokomitsu (Yokomitsu, 1931), Kawabata, or Itoh, in exploring the reality of humans, they use Freud's biological psychoanalysis, which considers humans as psychological and physiological beings, detached from overall life consciousness. While this approach is indeed convenient for their purposes, it actually stems from a fundamental breakdown of individualistic worldviews, representing nothing more than a kind of hedonistic life led between real and ideal lives. Shigeki Senuma not only mentioned Riichi Yokomitsu (Yokomitsu, 1932), but also Yasunari Kawabata and Sei Itoh (Itoh, 1931b), categorizing their works as "new psychological literature" based on "Freud's biological psychoanalysis". In response to this classification, Riichi Yokomitsu published an article in June 1931 titled "Psychologism Literature and Science," where he addressed this categorization: If you ask what a new psychological novel is, many people seem to think it involves the incorporation of science. But that becomes a mistake, leading astray into the wrong path of literature. Literature should always remain literature, not become pure science itself. Even if one drags Freud's biological psychoanalysis into literature and applies it, it's not clear how much of it can be relied upon as truth. Riichi Yokomitsu not only opposed the use of "Freud's biological psychoanalysis" in literature but also referred to it as "the wrong path of literature". In his May 1932 article "The Vicinity of Reality" Yokomitsu offered even sharper criticism of *Ulysses* and *In Search of Lost Time*: The attempts in *Ulysses* and *In Search of Lost Time* are quite simplistic. It's just that no one else had the foolishness to undertake such a thing (Bazheir, 2023).

Spending a whole day capturing a day's actions of a person is like using a real pigeon for sound effects when trying to mimic the sound of a pigeon. How is that different from circumventing the rules of mimicry? Riichi Yokomitsu considered the concept of Western psychological novels to be actually quite simple, suggesting that previously no one was willing to undertake such "foolish" endeavors. Just as with his attitude towards modernist literature and the "New Sensation School," Riichi Yokomitsu's approach to so-called "new psychologism literature" was not only to label it as "the wrong path of literature" but also to demean it as "foolish" in representation. Whether it's the "New Sensation School" influenced by

new artistic tendencies or "new psychologism literature" imitating the style of Proust, despite their different names, their essence as followers of Western culture remains the same. Around 1950, Sei Itoh (Itoh, 1931a), based on Ken Hirano's "triangular standoff" theory, vigorously portrayed Riichi Yokomitsu as a representative figure of modernist literature in Japan. However, in reality, Yokomitsu did not support modernism; instead, he often used terms like "absurd" and "foolish" to criticize modernism, indicating his opposing stance.

#### 4. SEI ITOH'S PERSONAL BIAS

Considering the above analysis, it's evident that the current narrative of Showa literature history does not accurately reflect the actual situation of early Showa literature. From a certain perspective, it may even diverge significantly from the truth. If we simplify the issue with the "triangular standoff" theory to a misunderstanding of the "New Sensation School" as a literary movement with a common ideology under a specific historical context, then understanding why Sei Itoh portrayed Riichi Yokomitsu as a representative of modernist literature in Japan becomes key to clarifying the gap between the current narrative of Showa literature history and the actual situation of early Showa literature. Next, we will organize and examine the statements of Sei Itoh from the early Showa period, especially focusing on why he portrayed Riichi Yokomitsu as a representative figure of modernist literature in Japan. In 1931, Sei Itoh published an article titled "Today's Literature and the New Sensation School Movement": Contrary to the lack of developmental potential in the New Sensation School movement as a whole, the writers belonging to the movement, due to the absence of a methodological approach as a group or their desire not to have one, led to the result of individually developing their works. This is significant because a group that did not split into two or more groups, but instead immediately fragmented into individuals, on the one hand, demonstrates the typical characteristics of an individualistic art collective. On the other hand, it also indicates the absence of a developmental theory within the group. At this critical juncture in 1931, Sei Itoh did not regard the "New Sensation School" as a literary movement with a "methodological approach", but rather simply as a group. This view aligns broadly with the perspectives of the writers of *Bungei Jidai* at the time and with those of later critics of Showa literature history. This indicates that Itoh's views contained contradictions across different temporal and contextual backgrounds. Also in 1931, Sei Itoh first commented on

"Machine" in his work "Three Publications": I am one of those who affirm that his recent novels are psychological novels. Despite the tremendous effort shown in his latest work 'Machine', it is impossible to overlook the fact that his method of selecting phenomena is deliberately biased. It seems to me that there has been no author in Japan who knows as much about the oppressive force of the spirit as he does. However, the greatest flaw in his work when this operates negatively is that it aims solely at the accumulation of mental pressure, ignoring other aspects of the spirit (no matter how broad and rich they may be, even if they are exhaustive at times, and even this exhaustiveness is not realistic), especially aspects that might hinder the accumulation of pressure. The charm of his work seems to lie in applying and intensifying this pressure until it explodes. However, the spirit does not seem to increase its pressure in such a straight and linear manner.

In this sense, the various works in 'Machine' are stumbling. I believe that the phenomenality of his earlier Shanghai works was on the right track. Sei Itoh acknowledged "Machine" as a psychological novel, but he criticized Riichi Yokomitsu for only "aims solely at the accumulation of mental pressure, ignoring other aspects of the spirit", suggesting that he had strayed from the right path. The "other aspects of the spirit" emphasized by Itoh are precisely the core elements of the "new psychologism literature" that he advocated. From June 1930 to March 1932, Sei Itoh published several papers introducing Western "stream of consciousness" literature and compiled them in 1932 in his collection of critiques *New Psychologism Literature* where he defined the "new psychologism literature" genre. This literary movement was proposed and created by Itoh himself. Regarding "Machine" published during the same period, Itoh did not consider it to be influenced by Western "stream of consciousness" literature; rather, he thought Riichi Yokomitsu had deviated from the correct path in this respect. This indicates that Itoh believed "Machine" to be fundamentally different from Proust's works. Itoh's views on whether Yokomitsu was influenced by Proust appear contradictory across different time contexts. In 1947, Itoh further evaluated "Machine" in his article "'Machine': Mr. Yokomitsu's 'Machine'" was a representative work that bore fruit from the impulse of Japanese novels in the early Showa period trying to escape from naturalistic methods. There, we find a cold, correlative interpretation of human relationships similar to what Stendhal did in *The Charterhouse of Parma*, and it also became a negation of the old descriptive novel method. Around the end of the Taisho era, when Ryunosuke Akutagawa wrote "Kappa", doubts had already begun to be cast on descriptive narrative as a

method in modern Japanese novel-writing. Is imagery truly sufficient to portray the truth of existence? In what space and in what relation do thoughts and imagery confront each other? Mr. Yokomitsu frequently wrote experimental works in such a context. "Machine" was undoubtedly a trial piece brought about by such experiments, and it seems Mr. Yokomitsu attempted to grasp the prototype of human relationships through the method of psychological relativity. Methodologically, it is in the style of Stendhal, but the humans captured were in a typical, socially lower stratum in Japan. And the novel's abstract expression opened new possibilities, which can still be recognized today, more than ten years after its publication. As the advocate of "new psychologism literature," Sei Itoh, in his analysis, did not mention the idea that "Machine" was influenced by Proust.

Instead, Itoh believed that "Machine" stemmed from a negation of naturalist descriptive novels and exhibited characteristics of the Stendhal style. This indicates that between 1930 and 1947, a span of 17 years, Itoh did not interpret "Machine" as "new psychologism literature" or modernist literature. However, in the three years following Riichi Yokomitsu's death (1947 to 1950), Itoh's viewpoint underwent a significant change, and he began to advocate that Yokomitsu had made a major shift in 1930. In fact, while Yokomitsu was alive, Itoh correctly understood that the "New Sensation School" lacked a common ideology and believed that "Machine" was fundamentally different from Western psychological novels. However, after Yokomitsu's death, Itoh quickly changed his stance, beginning to portray Yokomitsu as a representative figure of modern Japanese literature. Although "Machine" is considered an important work of "new psychologism literature" in the current narrative of Showa literature history, there are hardly any other works from this movement that have been passed down. Moreover, after Itoh proposed this theory, the movement almost vanished from the literary scene. As a result, Itoh's deliberate construction of a history where "Machine" was influenced by Proust significantly elevated the status of "new psychologism literature" in Showa literature history. Therefore, Itoh's change of stance is more likely motivated by considerations of personal status elevation rather than a true understanding of the essence of the work.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The writers of *Bungei Jidai*, led by Riichi Yokomitsu, did not recognize

the "New Sensation School" as having a unified theoretical basis. Yokomitsu himself held a clear critical attitude towards modernist literature and "new psychologism literature," expressing a different standpoint. Sei Itoh, a contemporary, initially described the true situation of early Showa literature accurately. However, after Yokomitsu's death, Itoh changed his position, based on Ken Hirano's "triangular standoff" theory. He reinterpreted the "New Sensation School" and "Machine" as products influenced by Western new artistic tendencies and Proust, portraying Yokomitsu as a representative of modernist literature in Japan. He also used the influence of Yokomitsu and "Machine" to incorporate his "new psychologism literature" theory into Showa literature history, making it a significant component. On the surface, the problems with the current narrative of Showa literature history stem from Hirano's misunderstanding of the "New Sensation School" and Itoh's considerations for elevating his personal status. The fundamental issue lies in using the era's background and social changes as the premise for determining the essence of literature. In this approach, specific documents and works are often overlooked, and conclusions are predetermined, limiting discussions that transcend these conclusions. However, the era's environment, just like specific documents and works, should be the object of study, not a means to explain the truth of literature. Literature, as a component of each era, has the potential to change our understanding of the era's environment through the study of specific documents and works.

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