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Meiji and Taisho period Japanese Literature

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I propose to write an analytical essay examining and exploring the impact that the West and the Westernization of Japan had on Meiji (1868-1912) and Taisho (1912-1926) period Japanese literature. The works I will be using include *Kokoro*, *Sanshiro*, and *Sore Kara* written by Natsume Soseki. In addition I will be using *Some Prefer Nettles* by Junichiro Tanizaki, *The Five Storied Pagoda* by Koda Rohan, and several essays written by Lafcadio Hearn and Natsume Soseki. Following the Meiji Restoration, in a period of just 77 years, Japan underwent vast political and socioeconomic change. The Meiji and Taisho eras reflect an unprecedented acceptance of western culture into mainstream Japanese society. However, vast cultural change was not restricted to Japan. During this period the entire world was experiencing societal reorganization at an extremely rapid pace. Traditional values in many societies were diminishing and being altered or altogether destroyed. Both Tanizaki and Soseki were extremely popular during their own, which suggests to me that their works may have reflected ideas and sentiments that a large number of Japanese citizens agreed with or felt themselves. The purpose behind my senior thesis is to identify how these authors represented the West in their writing in order to better understand the impact that the rapid Westernization of Japan had on Meiji and Taisho period literature.



During the summer semester of 2011 I spent six weeks living in Yokohama, Japan conducting an ECP titled *Japanese Literature in Context*. The time that I spent in Japan studying Japanese literature is the main reason behind my wanting to pursue it as a thesis topic. Many members of my host family in Japan were avid readers of early 20th century Japanese literature and we spent much time discussing Soseki, Tanizaki, and others. It was because of the literature that I was able to connect with my host family and discover my passion for Japan and Japanese literature. I plan to begin my thesis with a short introduction giving some details about my time in Japan and how it impacted my study of Japanese literature, as well as a brief history of the Meiji Restoration and the literary

society that appeared in its aftermath. From there the thesis will be broken into six chapters. The first three will be a close reading and analysis of each the works by Soseki that I have selected. Soseki lived in London on a government scholarship from 1901-1903 as Japan's first official Japanese-English literary scholar. Because of his time spent in London I believe his works are the most beneficial to study when examining literature and the Westernization of Japan.

The fourth chapter will be devoted to Junichiro Tanizaki's *Some Prefer Nettles*. The fifth will be used to provide contrast to the chapters about Soseki and Tanizaki by examining authors such as Koda Rohan who chose to defy the literary trends of the time and write stories in a more classical Japanese style. The final chapter will examine the essays of Lafcadio Hearn, who was one of the first modern Western scholars to live in Japan and document his experiences. In this chapter I will use Hearn's essays to support my own commentary on my experience as a Westerner in Japan