Modern Implications of the Concept of Career Education and the Vocational Values of Natsume Soseki, as Presented in His Lecture “Work and Pleasure” (1911)

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Abstract—The suggestions and observations of Natsume Soseki in his lecture “Work and Pleasure” are applicable to the contemporary situation in Japan, in which students frequently complete their schooling without having attained the skills necessary to embark on careers in an increasingly tight labor market. In this essay, I will clarify how the views of Soseki regarding working, as illustrated in his 1911 lecture “Work and Pleasure,” present an ideal picture of career education and how the necessity of introducing such views into contemporary Japanese schools should still be forcefully advocated. Finally, I will describe the types of experiences and knowledge that educators should offer students to guide them as they prepare to participate in the workforce.

Keywords: Career Education, Vocational Education, Soseki Natsume, Vocational Values

1. INTRODUCTION

Natsume Soseki (born Natsume Kin’nosuke; 1867-1916), whose lifetime began at the end of the Edo Period (1603-1868) and continued into the Meiji Period (1868-1912) in Japan, studied Chinese literature and haiku poetry in the English department of Tokyo Imperial University. After graduation, Soseki worked in Japan as a junior high school teacher in Matsuyama and then as a high-school instructor in Kumamoto. After he travelled through England, Soseki authored several well-known works, such as I am a Cat and Botchan, while working as a lecturer at Tokyo Imperial University. Later, Soseki wrote Sanshiro after he was hired by the Asahi Shimbun Company as a journalist. While writing The Gate, he developed what has come to be called his “serious illness at Shuzenji” and wandered the boundary between life and death. His literary style took an increasing turn for the serious and profound following his recuperation. Before long, Soseki completed what would later become known as a trilogy, made up of the novels Higansugimade (‘To the Spring Equinox and Beyond’), Kojin (‘The Wayfarer’), and Kokoro (‘The Heart’). In his final years, Soseki experienced a stomach ulcer and a nervous breakdown; his final work was Meian (‘Light and Darkness’).

“Work and Pleasure,” which I will discuss in this paper, is the title of a lecture given by Soseki at Akashi, Japan, in August 1911. The collected text (transcribed) has been assembled in Volume 16 of the Complete Works of Soseki. Within the works contained in this compilation, Soseki draws a strict distinction between working for oneself and working for others, clarifying the concept of work as essentially performing a series of tasks according to the standards of others, and highlights the isolation of individuals that results from the division and specialization of labor. Soseki praised the sweeping modernization and remarkable advancements in science and technology that were accomplished in Japan during the Meiji Period. However, he also expressed concern regarding the goal of Japanese society to replicate the Industrial Revolution, which had taken place within powerful Western nations such as England and the United States; he opined that this process was, in effect, a shift away from the pursuit of vocational expertise and that it resulted in people becoming professionally “crippled”. He also starkly described this new, modern version of civilization as “the daily breaking down of complete people into ‘damaged wheels’”.

In his lecture, Soseki laments that despite the rising complexity, subdivisions, and numbers of different occupations, many members of the intelligentsia at the time, such as college graduates, were not gainfully employed in the standard workforce and were “searching [for a job] from morning until evening, wondering how to put food on the table and how to make a living”. He proposes “vocational education” as a solution in the opening to his discussion. Soseki also offered several proposals for remedying the negative effects caused by people becoming “isolated and distanced” due to jobs becoming more specialized.

However, if one examines the state of Japan today, one can observe that contemporary career education consists of only the practice of the same proposals made by Soseki during the Meiji period. Despite this, the career-educational materials that educational experts recommend be introduced into elementary school, junior high school, high school, and university curricula in contemporary Japan exceed the scope of the content of Soseki’s lecture. Further, career education today addresses questions concerning the significance of working and the meaning of life, as well as issues that individuals should consider throughout their lives, such as the concept of career autonomy. This lecture by Soseki is not only significant because it sheds light on his views regarding working but it also has tremendously value as a document that contributes to greater understanding of the general views held by Japanese intellectuals during the Meiji Period regarding working and occupations. In this essay, I will clarify how the views of Soseki regarding working present an ideal picture of career education and how the necessity of introducing such views into contemporary Japanese schools nearly a century after his death should still be forcefully advocated. Finally, I
will describe herein the types of experiences and knowledge that educators should offer students to guide them as they prepare to participate in the workforce.

I. WHAT IS CAREER EDUCATION?

Before describing the relationship between the term vocational education, as championed by Soseki, and the contemporary concept of career education, I will explain precisely what the latter term means. Additionally, I will describe the background of the urgent need for introducing it in Japanese schools.

The globalization of the modern Japanese economy continues at a rapid pace, against the backdrop of the country’s prolonged economic slump and the continuing trend towards lower birthrates and an aging population. Diversity and fluidity are becoming more prominent in hiring patterns as a result of structural shifts in industry and the greater economy; the impact on the environment surrounding employment has been substantial. Companies have become extremely demanding in their hiring selections, which has wholly eviscerated the practice in the previous era of freely hiring new graduates. Also, the views held by young people, particularly new college graduates, with respect to working and the fundamental qualities of a working person do not lead many members of this demographic, before or after graduation, towards cultivating the skills and abilities demanded by society. Rather, many scholars have pointed out that these new graduates have not fully developed a work-related mindset, among other issues. Several reports indicate that an increasing number of individuals who make up this demographic are slow to build mental and social independence, and are unable to form beneficial social relationships; further, many lack the ability to independently solve problems or to set goals for their future. However, statistically, we have entered an era of “collegiate overflow”, in which the population of university-bound students exceeds the number of spaces available in all the institutions that could admit them; this is said by many scholars to be leading to increasingly prevalent moratorium trends in the higher-education community.

Thus, career education acts as a measure to improve the current situation, which is characterized by an increasing number of students progressing through their education with a diluted “why not?” sense of purpose and a poor sense of self-worth. Scholars and educators in Japan expect that career education will be introduced and implemented into school curricula in the future. If this occurs, career education would begin with primary learning in elementary school through junior high and high school and would continue during upper-level education, in institutions such as universities. Through this process, career education would encourage young people, particularly high school and college-age students, who are in the midst of their adolescent formative-development period, to cultivate beneficial views on working and career awareness. The academic material that young people encounter in school would be organically and comprehensively tied to their future careers so as to foster vocational sense, while integrating the career-related material into the regular curriculum in a systematic fashion. High school students would participate in hands-on, interactive programs designed to provide them with insight into ways to apply the academic knowledge they have gained in school to their lives in the wider arena of society. Students would visit companies and factories to experience actual workplaces, enabling them to develop mental pictures of what employment entails. Additionally, the experiences that students gain from such programs would be applied to their classroom studies.

Although it is necessary to clarify exactly what is meant by the word career in career education, its definition has not necessarily been settled among scholars and educators. In general, the word career is often used to refer to one’s job or one’s cumulative work history. However, in this essay, I will rely on the definition of career offered by the Japanese Central Council for Education (Special Task Force for Career and Vocational Education) in its 2011 report, “The Future of Career and Vocational Education in Schools,” as follows:

People live their lives while playing various roles with respect to their relationships with others and society. These roles include being an employee, a homemaker, and a member of a regional community, among countless others. Each of these roles undergoes changes over the course of people’s lives while accumulating with others; [the roles] are each intertwined with the others. In addition, although among these roles are those which have become habitual and taken for granted, particularly with respect to those given by the groups and organizations to which people belong and undertake in their everyday lives, people themselves judge their relationships to and the value of all of these roles, including those not at the forefront of their minds, and perform them while continuously choosing to select, reject, or create new roles. By acting to fulfill their roles, that is, by “doing work,” a relationship forms between people and society, with deviations from that relationship becoming what is known as “one’s personal lifestyle.” By fulfilling their various roles throughout their lives in this way, the cumulative pattern characterized by the relationship between the value that people place on their roles and on themselves, which becomes apparent [over time,] can be defined as one’s “career.”

Also, in a January 2004 report by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology entitled “Conference Report by Partners Conducting General Investigatory Research Concerning the Advancement of Career Education: To Cultivate Work and Career Principles in Each and Every Young Student,” the Ministry defines career as “the culmination of one’s valuation and relationship between oneself and his or her work, with respect to that person’s individual series of lifetime accomplishments from various standpoints and in different roles, as well as the overall progression”. Essentially, regardless of the definition used, one’s career decidedly begins at birth. Both definitions point out that from childhood through adulthood and until death, people’s careers represent the culmination of their continuous development as human beings through their efforts to meet the
needs of the various roles and positions that they hold during their lives.

This conception of careers is likely to have been greatly influenced by the views of Donald E. Super, specifically by his statement that “career development is a lifelong process, in which a person continuously plays various roles”. Super characterized careers in terms of “length” and “width,” clarifying the importance of the relatedness of career length, which is concerned with “stages and tasks related to vocational development” and career width, which is the “roles played in one’s life”. Further, regarding careers, Kanai (2002), states that they are “a pattern of future goals and prospects born out of hierarchical consideration at pivotal points in life as well as the various experiences from the vocational categories and functions unfolding out of long-term employment, forming the overall foundation of one’s life or lifestyle after reaching adulthood and beginning full-time work”. This statement arguably also defines the concept of the career in a fashion identical to that of Super.

Given this conception of the career as a foundation, the Central Council for Education report, mentioned previously herein, describes career education as “education promoting career development2 by cultivating the necessary foundational skills and mindset to foster social and vocational independence in individual students”.

In “Work and Pleasure,” Soseki suggests that people recognize their vocations, offers several pieces of advice to students seeking employment, and proposes ways to improve the hiring situation in Japan. Soseki also discusses the nature of one’s vocation while describing his views on the greater society that encompasses such vocations. Those views, which I have described previously herein, also point out the limits and problems of contemporary career education; many scholars and educators fervently believe that there is still great value today, nearly a century after his death, in considering the suggestions of Soseki.

II. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, AS PROPOSED BY SOSEKI

“Work and Pleasure” is a transcription of a lecture given by Soseki in August 1911, at a lecture symposium sponsored by the Asahi Shimbun Company, his employer at the time. In this speech, Soseki distinguishes work from pleasure, describing the former as “activities that one performs for others” and the latter as “activities that one does for oneself”, while simultaneously alluding to the meaning of the specialization of vocations and characterizing its impact on civilization as a whole. In doing so, Soseki mentions that during the latter half of the Meiji Era, “countless different types of professions and trades exist in Japan…and I fear there may be no one on this Earth with knowledge of just how many more there are now compared within eras past” and clarifies how “the various vocations around the world today are becoming increasingly complex”. Soseki also decries the ills of the employment environment facing even college graduates, who were considered to make up the elite stratum of society at the time:

“regardless of the distribution or positions of the unknown hundreds or thousands of different vocations under the sun today, or of the eager prodigy who should be able to meet anyone’s needs trying his [or her] luck everywhere, there are very few vocations to whom one should entrust one’s life”.

Soseki proposed that, based on this situation, “colleges should start offering lectures on vocation-related topics”. Essentially, Soseki believed that if we look at the situation in which the number and variety of vocations in the Meiji Era had increased to an in calculable degree, the pervasiveness of the Western idea of “conducting business by cleaning up your nails and getting dressed up nicely” and the emergence of “facial care experts in Japan today who will suck the dirt off your face, apply various creams, and apply makeup for you”, surely there must be value in a separate field of vocational studies. This field would be devoted to researching the answers to questions such as, “What kinds of vocations exist in the world?” “How are these vocations distributed amongst society?” and “Does this framework foster development and progress?” In a situation in which “all sorts of different vocations are springing up everywhere like weeds”, for students to search diligently and productively for jobs is no simple task. Soseki proposed that universities should offer lectures in vocational studies for this reason; he also asserted the necessity of ensuring that such lectures provide detailed explanations to issues such as how academic studies can help students to develop their vocations and which vocations will arise naturally out of the circumstances of the times.

Warranting caution here is the fact that Soseki did not propose his concept of vocational studies based on his view that “no one knows how many hundreds or thousands of different occupations there are under the sun today”. Rather, regardless of the tremendous increase in the number and variety of vocations that has resulted from the subdividing of the workforce, Soseki laments that “there are very few vocations to which one should entrust one’s life” and expresses sadness about the attitudes of many young people. Specifically because of these concerns, in the latter years of the Meiji Era, Soseki advocates vocational education as a possible means to improve the mindset of young people (referred here to college graduates, as part of the intellectual class) and to enhance the flow of employment-related information. I mention this point to link Soseki’s arguments to today’s hiring environment and the introduction of career education to college graduates.

The views of Soseki regarding vocations are also highly modernist; although Soseki presented his views more than a century ago, scholars and educators still consider them to be extremely sensible even amidst today’s cutting-edge career education theories. Soseki argued as follows:

I believe because there are hundreds of different pathways created by different vocations; in theory, they should intersect with each other, just as a man will surely find his bride somewhere in the world. Although, of course, one must endeavor to search for a spouse: if this search does not go well, a man could unintentionally allow his [participation in the institution of] marriage to be delayed forever. In the same way,
no matter how much talent one possesses, there is no reason not to simply take a job [of some sort].

At first glance, the words of Soseki appear to present mere common-sense ideas that are widely held among the general public. However, Dr. John D. Krumboltz of Stanford University in California has statistically verified what Soseki has argued. Krumboltz created an approach to career theory that he calls the planned happenstance theory. He conducted a study in which he statistically analyzed the relationship between the original plans of study participants regarding their occupations and their actual type of current employment. The results of the study revealed, surprisingly, that for almost all of the study participants, there was no relationship between their original career plans and the positions they currently held.

Stated differently, people’s vocational careers are overwhelmingly influenced by chance; the study results demonstrated that there is virtually no meaning in placing significant weight on balancing and evaluating different types of positions when seeking employment. As an analogy for the careful weighing and evaluating of different positions while seeking employment, the lesson imparted by the bride-seeking example presented by Soseki highlights the importance of simply taking a job and not being too choosy. Krumboltz suggests that, when seeking a job, people should first never hesitate in actively approaching their target. He further opines that, although people leave themselves subject to chance in doing so, they can still proactively steer themselves along their desired course, and that, with effort, people can independently build their careers.

During his lifetime of 49 years, Soseki endured a personal struggle between the secular and a pure soul amongst varied and numerous positions, such as his life in the East and in the West, modernity and tradition, and his relationships with family and money. This lifelong conflict led Soseki to argue that young people could develop an independent and proactive fatalism in their lives with respect to their vocational selections.

### III. VOCATIONAL DIVISION AND SPECIALIZATION

Although he acknowledged the inevitability of the division and subdivision of modern vocations, Soseki was deeply concerned about the impact of this phenomenon on individuals. Previously, the tobatsu-ya (Chinese-goods shops) were the only sellers of imported goods; further, shirts were sold at shirt shops, umbrellas at umbrella shops, and so forth. However, this arrangement changed; at some point, society entered a an era that some considered astonishing in which “there might be a place where one can eat both beef and chicken, or a place that serves all beef, or another place that serves nothing but chicken” . It is uncertain whether Soseki intended to be sarcastic; however, if we in the Heisei Era (1989-present) consider his comments, such as “eventually there may one day be bistros where one can eat only chicken feet, or restaurants serving nothing but beef-liver dishes”, we can admit that these exact kinds of shops have become a reality. The prediction of Soseki, encapsulated by his statement, “Who knows how far this division and subdivision will go?”, has already come true. Although Soseki opined that “something severe is bound to happen with the world reaching such extremes”, that “something severe” in particular was realized in the arrival of this sort of vocational division and specialization, to which we refer today as the commoditization and modularization of jobs.

Our generation has little choice but to live in a world facing an ever-advancing wave of globalization, made up of highly computerized, knowledge-based societies. In such a world, we can overcome the barriers created by our differences, such as those of nationality, language, or culture, by allowing for individual small products and mass quantities of fungible goods to be bought and traded. The creation of the latter occurs because companies seek to maximize their profit margins; they choose their production and investment foci accordingly while also striving to unitize and centralize their various production platforms as much as possible. The society that is organized according to such principles inevitably leads manufactured goods and their production processes to become increasingly unified. As a result, many vocations have become commoditized; in other words, these vocations have become such that anyone can perform them. Soseki, observing the subdivision of vocations and the increasing specialization of individuals, ominously predicted that various professions would likely become commoditized or wholly obsolete.

In the past, there existed craft and vocational guilds; for example, there were groups for gardeners or plasterers, as well as specialist vocational associations for tradespeople. These associations were created to organize people who possessed the expert skills and knowledge of their vocation that could only be understood within the membership. During the Meiji Era, knowledge of these skills and techniques was circulated throughout the general public via various publications, disseminating the know-how of vocations that were previously the reserved domain of the craft guilds; this ultimately resulted in the depreciation of the value of those guilds, skills, and techniques. In contemporary society, because of the development of information technology, particularly the Internet, not only the business know-how of closed organizations such as professional guilds but also information related to the activities of the businesses and personal information of members of such organizations has nearly become part of the public domain. The Meiji Era in which Soseki lived marked the end of the period in which the eldest son would inherit and continue the family business and (with the exception of the legally designated primary industries such as farming, logging, and fishing,) the second and third sons of the family would take up apprenticeships or become clerks in the business. The Meiji Era witnessed the rise of a society in which people could freely choose their vocation. In this new society, which experienced the growth of the media and the sprouting of democratic ideologies, the publication of expert vocational knowledge and the commoditization of jobs were natural consequences.
Paradoxically, this trend was caused by the creation of specialized vocations. By specializing vocations, jobs that had previously been wholly integrated were divided and subdivided into increasingly smaller workflow sections, with their associated skills and knowledge now being as portable and transferable as moveable type. Additionally, publications and various media outlets of the era rapidly proliferated and spread previously specialized information among the public.

As Soseki opines:

I would guess that it would be possible for one to speak of his [or her] needs alone if he [or she] obtained every single thing in life, down to the bare essentials, without the support of anyone anywhere in the world. That is to say, one can merely daydream about an age in which people can exist without the aid of anyone else. Therefore, would it not be inappropriate to use the phrase “true self-reliance” for any age other than that?

Although admitting the impossibility of such a phenomenon today, Soseki expressed envy for times long past when (as he believed) people were satisfied simply to work for themselves. He believed that such people were truly independent.

IV. ACTIVITIES PERFORMED FOR OTHERS VERSUS (OR SYNONYMOUS WITH) ACTIVITIES PERFORMED FOR ONESELF

Soseki further interprets the phenomenon of specialization as allowing people to undertake tasks beyond that which can be handled by a single person by splitting those tasks into multi-person sub-tasks and assigning portions to different people. However, Soseki also sees this phenomenon as enabling people to have others fill in for their own deficiencies. Soseki addresses this issue via the following explanation:

Becoming specialized could mean a variety of things: if it means an area in which one has additional ability, or an area in which one is a step beyond others, one explanation is that a person can take on a portion of a task and can bargain with someone else to do the other portion by enticing him or her with proportional compensation in an equitable exchange, filling in for the requester’s deficiency and allowing for his [or her] activities to progress.

Although there are also economic explanations for this kind of logic, in essence, it boils down to a sort of moral logic, which suggests that what we do for others ultimately is for ourselves. However, because the money that we use for our own purposes is also the compensation we receive by working for others, Soseki suggested to the audience in attendance at his lecture that “As each of you here exerts your best effort to work for others, you will also never stop building your own capacity to live in an increasingly luxurious manner. Therefore, as much as you can, you should distinguish the work you do for others.”

Remarks such as this offer the strongest case for career education in contemporary schools. Young people, particularly elementary school students, often ask their parents, “Why do you have to work?” When the parents reply, “I work to support my life,” this answer is insufficient because the basis of society, I argue, is mutual aid. Understanding society simply in terms of certain resources or possessions being allotted to oneself and others being allotted to other people does not adequately cultivate solutions for remedying the societal economic imbalance between the small segment of wealthy people and the poor masses. Recommending that one should work only for others, however, is also unrealistic.

Instead, Soseki said that “work for other people” is “what you do so long as you please others; put coarsely, whatever people say or want”. This does not mean charity; rather, Soseki is illustrating that, for example, employees simply carry out the instructions provided by their company, as ordered, and do their jobs. Contemporary career education sometimes emphasizes this concept; for that reason, it is sometimes misunderstood as a strong antithesis to the portion of the career education program that pushes students to follow their dreams and realize their goals.

V. THE IMPACT OF VOCATIONAL DIVISION AND COMPLICATION: WAYS THAT INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY CAN COPE

Soseki called attention to how the division and complication of vocations was rapidly advancing the specialization of jobs. Increasing job specialization involves a person working as far as is necessary, while simultaneously being supported by another person who performs the work that the first person is unable to do. In other words, the concept of work performed for other people turns around to become work performed for oneself. Additionally, although it seemingly presents another paradox, the subdivision and specialization of work tasks has led to the commoditization of different vocations and the lowering of the barriers to entry for workers performing various tasks.

This sort of progression illustrates the kind of devastating impact on people of the division and complication of jobs, as highlighted by Soseki. According to Soseki, the more the vocational “enlightenment trend progresses, or, the more the nature of people’s vocations continues to divide and fragment, the more we will become a society of crippled, ‘broken wheels’”. Also, the more specialized that vocations become, the more time will be needed for each task; as a result, “we will reach a point where we have no idea of what our neighbor or the person just one house over is doing”. Although Soseki made this statement during the Meiji Era, it certainly rings true today as well. Soseki offered an even sterner critique of vocations and society, stating with regard to people becoming highly specialized that “sometimes in one area or another, we know more than others. Because these skills and knowledge were things we used all the time in our daily lives, with specialization occurring now, people who are ‘complete’ are
fading away, ultimately becoming highly erratic [in their focus and behaviors]”. As a result, “the only certainty is that we are becoming more crippled with each passing day”; further, Soseki expressed misgivings over not “needing to live fully on one’s own”, leading to “an epidemic of strange people demonstrating an incredible lack of knowledge of even basic tasks”. In the 21st century, some may dismiss this bitter critique by Soseki as being no longer relevant. To the contrary, many others believe that the insight demonstrated by this prophecy by Soseki weighs even more heavily today, in light of the further division and complication of modern vocations, which surpasses that in the Meiji Era.

As I mentioned previously herein, career education can be defined as “education promoting career development by cultivating the necessary foundational skills and mindset to foster social and vocational independence in individual students”. In striving to foster social and vocational independence in young people so that individual students will be able to autonomously structure their own careers, career education particularly focuses on the cultivation of proactive habits, which empowers students to bring about and to capitalize on opportunities in their lives. As Soseki stated, students need a curriculum that will not produce unbalanced people who only understand a small part of the larger picture. To avoid developing this sort of lopsidedness in individuals, Soseki suggested that to “somehow correct the bad habits that [appear as a result of this situation]”, people could take useful measures such as “creating a kind of public hall to promote awareness of knowledge by periodically inviting speakers to give talks” or “[facilitating] mutual enjoyment by utilizing social organizations”. Career education in universities today reconsiders the excessive emphasis placed on technical training and strives to fill in the wide gaps between scholarly enrichment and vocational education, through steps such as inviting employed people and professional practitioners of various occupations to schools and requesting that they provide general job-related experiential events to students and discuss various fields with them. Also, students in the midst of job hunting are limited to their own experiences; thus, as a countermeasure against their becoming potentially isolated from surrounding advice and communication, Soseki proposed that schools establish, for example, “career cafés”, where students could discuss employment concerns in a break room or lounge setting, or an “encounter room”, where students could exchange ideas or have general interactions. Most of the suggestions put forth by Soseki, which he offered a century ago based on his predictions about the labor market, are now being put into practice in contemporary career education programs. The extent to which the ideas and concerns of Soseki demonstrated great foresight has become keenly apparent.

VI. VOCATIONS AND CAREER EDUCATION (PLEASURABLE WORK)

Soseki describes the nature of vocations in the last section of his lecture. One’s vocation is, from the outset, framed in relationship with others. Soseki explained the nature of a vocation as follows:

Because results for others become results for oneself, a vocation is, from the beginning, based on other people. Because a vocation is already framed in terms of others, all the choices one makes as to type of vocation must work generally within the criteria of others. This is not a business in which anyone will bend completely to your own needs or desires.

This statement can be seen as a truism; however, at the time when Soseki spoke it, it was considered novel; some today consider it to be shocking. During the era in which Soseki lived, the age of specialized workers had not yet arrived; general laborers were still the primary workers in most industries. Activities such as the gathering of natural resources and assembled goods during this period were performed at the discretion of individuals, with no oversight from other parties. At the time, increasing numbers of individuals graduated from college, making up a veritable reserve army of members of the intelligentsia; people in this demographic applied their specializations as part of the birth of a new organization of enterprise, which created the entirely new category of employee. This was the first instance that necessitated a reevaluation of the significance of working for others, or rather, working for oneself.

Career education involves a means for counterbalancing the notion that one’s vocation is the meaning of one’s existence, the purpose of one’s life, or even a very important component of one’s life. For this reason in particular, Soseki described the nature of a vocation as being performed for others and proposed various countermeasures for correcting the bad habits that would appear in the course of carrying out tasks. One can reasonably understand that each of these ideas from Soseki was a component of the concept of vocational studies, to which he alluded in the initial section of his lecture.

VII. CONCLUSION

In his lecture “Work and Pleasure,” Soseki did not propose to solely offer lectures in vocational studies as the means to help students find employment. The meaning of his term vocational studies lies in the question of what action should be taken by the individuals who comprised city governments during the Meiji Era, who had no recourse but to persevere while being tossed about on the violent waves of modern industrialization in the interstice between Japanese traditions and Western ideas and technologies. Although the term vocational studies sometimes serves as a bitter critique, based on the dictation of his lecture, one can also interpret that Soseki was filled with warm feelings for the general public. During his lifetime, Soseki witnessed the modern Industrial Revolution in England and, in his writings, distilled to its core the conflict between Eastern and Western Civilizations.
Japanese society was undergoing a paradigm shift during this period; Soseki experienced great anguish and anxiety at the crossroads between the past and the future, East and West, and authority and the common person. The lecture “Work and Pleasure” by Soseki endeavored to answer the questions of what specific qualities make up a vocation, with regard to the general public; beyond this, Soseki described how people should prepare themselves for carrying out their work. The content of this lecture makes up the essence of the career education that scholars and educators expect to be implemented in schools today.

Nevertheless, Soseki did not foresee problems apparent in the modern labor market, highlighted by today’s career education, in his lecture; this is likely because at the time, the concept of the labor force as a market did not yet exist. Today’s circumstances have indicated that, even if the skills, abilities, or other aptitudes of students and other job seekers are sufficient, if an employer lacks the resources to hire them, all their career education is wasted effort. Essentially, career education up to this point has heavily emphasized improving problems on the student side, or the supply side, of labor. However, the demand side of labor, namely, the hiring capacity of enterprise and the obligations surrounding it, has become and will increasingly continue to be important in the future. Of course, in following the notion that companies are designed primarily or exclusively to seek profit, we cannot expect companies to hire students to the point that those companies incur losses. Nevertheless, many have opined that enterprise has a social responsibility of systematically and continuously hiring young people, who are tasked with the future of the nation as vital community resources who will develop into producers and consumers. Ensuring that this comes to pass is the primary task of career education going forward.

At any rate, the proposals made by Soseki more than a hundred years ago have been of tremendous value in informing the proposals and subsequent implementation of career education programs today, particularly in Japan. In this essay, I narrow my focus on the lecture “Work and Pleasure” given by Soseki at Akashi, in which he centered attention on the relationship between his views concerning vocations and the idea of career education. However, among the numerous writings by Soseki, this essay did not address the question of how these views on vocations have changed or the comparison between the individuals who Soseki referred to in his lifetime as “high-quality idlers” and today’s unemployed young people (sometimes referred to as “NEET’s [Not in Education, Employment, or Training]”), as well as the relationship of both groups to career education. I intend to pursue these research topics in the future.

At the conclusion of his lecture, Soseki refers to his own vocation as a writer as “pleasure”, explaining that although it is “work performed for myself”, just like other types of “work performed for oneself”, it is a vocation that enables a lifestyle free from “sinking into disastrous circumstances” financially. Although Soseki called such vocations established through this sort of fortunate happenstance “pleasurable work”, it is also possible that his audience understood this idea as a highly enviable vocational circumstance; many modern audiences might agree. Hence, the debate on work, pleasure, fulfillment, and ability to earn a livelihood rages on.

Notes
1 Career autonomy is, according to Hanada and Miyaji (2004), “the ability to realize one’s goals [by] controlling one’s own activities and disciplining oneself, while understanding the needs of others and adjusting accordingly.”
2 Career development refers to “the process of achieving one’s preferred lifestyle while playing one’s role within society” (Central Council for Education, 2011).
3 The meaning of commoditization is, according to Nobeoka et al. (2006), “the reduction of prices by enterprise to the level of unprofitability as a result of price competition, which occurs when products become difficult to differentiate.” In the context of my paper, I am replacing the word product in this definition with the word occupation. Essentially, because the comparative value of certain occupations has been reduced, accordingly, the people participating in those occupations become freely interchangeable.

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