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### Exploring Natsume Soseki's Critical Perspective on Japan's Modernization: A Study of 'The Civilization of Modern-day Japan' and the Novel 'Kokoro'

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#### Extended ABSTRACT

This article delves into the critical perspective of the Japanese writer and thinker Natsume Sōseki regarding the process of Japan's societal modernization in the latter half of the 19th century and the early 20th century. To scrutinize Sōseki's viewpoint, we have chosen two of his works—The ‘Civilization of Modern-day Japan’, a non-fiction treatise, and the novel ‘Kokoro’, a fictional narrative. This selection aims to explore Sōseki's comprehensive assessment of modernization, presented theoretically in his non-fictional piece and vividly illustrated through narrative events in his fictional work. In ‘The Civilization of Modern-day Japan’, Natsume classifies and articulates his perspective on modernization broadly, using theoretical discussions without providing concrete examples for his opinions. Throughout the treatise, he cautions against the repercussions of hastily embraced modernization, highlighting the psychological stress and nervous breakdowns experienced by Japanese society members. Conversely, ‘Kokoro’ portrays the consequences of modernization in the lives of Japanese individuals through tangible and practical story events. The novel provides concrete examples of psychological pressures and breakdowns, ultimately leading the character Sensei to suicide. While ‘The Civilization of Modern-day Japan’ presents a wholly negative view of modernization, Kokoro reveals some positive aspects, such as increased individual freedoms in matters like marriage and relative equality between men and women. However, both works underscore the disadvantages and shortcomings of modernization. Consequently, these two pieces complement Natsume's reflections on the juxtaposition of modernity and tradition. The examination of these works reveals Natsume's overall pessimism about modernization, asserting that, in an environment where most people considered modernization inevitable for human happiness, it failed to alleviate human suffering, making life even more challenging. Furthermore, unlike Western modernization, Natsume perceives Japan's modernization as imported, borrowed, non-native, and unnatural, lacking affinity with Japanese culture. The swift introduction of this foreign modernization has altered social contracts, affecting relationships, the marriage system, and education. The abrupt transformation of traditional lifestyles has resulted in materialism, alienation, pessimism, isolation, mistrust, selfishness, despair, and guilt within Japanese society. Natsume contends that the overpowering waves of Western culture have left Japan unable to confront it, leading the weaker culture to imitate the stronger. Without the intellectual insights provided by figures like Natsume Sōseki in the early 20th century through his fiction and non-fiction works, Japanese culture and national identity might not have endured in its current form, emphasizing the critical role played by such intellectuals in shaping the course of societal development.

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