THE SERVANT SONGS — A REVIEW
AFTER THREE DECADES

KOKI NAKAZAWA*

I have set myself the task to review major works and articles concerning the so-called 'Servant Songs' in Deutero-Isaiah every decade since I published my study in that theme in 1954. The past reviews are appended in the new edition of my book.(1) In the last decade 1970–1981 I am pleased to find some Japanese contributions made toward the solution of this famous riddle in Old Testament prophecy.

I

Firstly I should mention two articles by S. Sekine: (1) Daini-Isaiah-sho Henshūshi Shiron (An Essay on Redaction-History of the Book of Deutero-Isaiah), Seishogaku Ronshu 13, 1978. (2) Daini-Isaiah ni okeru Kunan no Shingiron (Suffering Theodicy in Deutero-Isaiah), Rinrigaku Nempo 26, 1977. In the former article Sekine proposes the following hypothesis which he bases for the most part upon P.-E. Dion’s analysis of the Songs and their relevant passages.(2)

I. Basic Stratum A — Deutero-Isaiahic origin before 539 B.C.
II. Basic Stratum B — Deutero-Isaiahic origin after 539 B.C.
III. Servant Songs I, II, III — Latest Deutero-Isaiahic origin
IV. Servant Song IV — Deutero-Isaiah’s disciple’s origin
V. Appendices to Songs I, II, III — The same disciple’s origin
(N.B. Hereafter the following abbreviations are used: B.S. for Basic Stratum, D-I for Deutero-Isaiah)

In order to verify this hypothesis Sekine starts with an examination of the terms which signify sin and salvation in the B.S. and the Songs. For instance,

* Professor Emeritus, Rikkyo University.
ga'al is frequently used in B. S. A primarily in terms of politics, but it also implies the expiation of sin in terms of ethics and religion. According to Sekine, under this terminology lies the conception of the retribution dogma which regards the suffering in the exile as divine punishment and the liberation as remission of sin. In this regard B. S. B differs little from B. S. A. Another instance is the term yešu'ah which is used only once in the second Song: “I will give you as a light to the nation, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (49: 6) In this passage the Servant’s mission is the qualitative transference from political salvation unto religious salvation. Such a religious point of view is introduced only in the Songs and culminates in the fourth Song. The central idea of the latter is the mystery of vicarious suffering. The term ‘āšām (an offering for sin) used only in the fourth Song (53: 10) reveals that mystery. By the self-sacrifice of this innocent Servant as ‘āšām the sin of ‘the many’ is to be remitted and the divine purpose accomplished. This idea of salvation differs essentially from that of B. S. in that it is the liberation from grief and suffering by virtue of the Servant’s vicarious suffering. It is not like Cyrus’ liberation of the exile; the latter pertains to politics whereas the former deals with religion.

Further Sekine, after examining the concept of sin in B. S. and the Songs, explains that the recognition of sin as seen especially in the fourth Song is far more profound than that of B. S. In conclusion Sekine regards the Servant in the Songs as altogether one and the same figure, i.e., D-I himself. The obstructive term ‘Israel’ in the second Song (49: 3) is dismissed as an editorial gloss. But he says, “the Servant in analogous to Israel in his election as well as in his suffering, so much so that the figure may point to Israel also.” In other words D-I could be interpreted as a symbolic core of Israel. Thus the redactor may have intended to keep the term ‘Servant’ deliberately equivocal.

As for the relation between the redactor and the author of the Songs, Sekine assumes that B. S. A, B and the Songs I, II, III were written by D-I himself, whereas the Song IV as well as the appendices to the Songs I, II, III (42: 5–9, 49: 7–12, 50: 10–11) were written by a certain disciple of D-I who was also the redactor of the D-I’s prophecy as a whole. He says, “that disciple in bringing together his master’s prophecies added to it the fourth Song and the appendices written by himself. By so doing he manifested an unexpected conception far beyond his master’s horizon: the correlation of politics with religion crystalized in the figure of D-I as the symbol of Israel.”
of politics with religion is basically shown in the present collocation of the
four Songs with the appendices to the I-III Songs, and the appendices as well
as the fourth Song point to the direction toward politics from religion. This
direction is called by Sekine “the retuning phase.” In the fourth Song the
returning phase is clearly seen in the beginning: “so shall he startle many
nations” (52: 15) and in the end: “therefore I will divide him a portion with
the great” (53: 12). Incidentally Sekine sees in “we” the speaker (53: 1 ff.)
the nations and the Israelites whose center consists of D-I’s disciples and in
“Our griefs and sorrow” (53: 4) a Paria situation where the nations’ sins are
to be expiated at the expense of Israel. Furthermore Sekine goes on to gainsay
the present writer’s interpretation of “the many” (53: 11 ff.) as Israelites, and
prefers to regard “the many” to be redeemed by the Servant as the nations.

In the closing part of his first article Sekine mentions M. Weber’s suffering
theodicy and that theme is developed in his second article. His criticism of
Weber is epitomized in four points: 1) Weber’s interpretation of the Servant
is so much centered around Israel as a collective that it makes little of the
significance of individual suffering. 2) Weber emphasizes not so much the
vicarious nature of the Servant’s suffering as his undeserved suffering while
unduly depreciating the importance of the former. 3) Weber equates the theo-
dicy motif in the Songs with that of D-I as a whole. 4) Concerning the que-
stion of whether or not we may assume D-I himself as the final redactor, Weber
reserves judgment. Sekine discusses these points one after another in detail,
but his discussion is largely on the same line as his former essay separating
the Songs from B. S. According to Sekine it is the retribution dogma that
runs through B. S. as a whole, where “an aporia of religion estranged from
ethics” is exposed. On the other hand the second and third Songs show “a
locus tiding over that aporia” by renouncing the retribution dogma. While
the second and third Songs are an agonizing confession of D-I who submitted
himself to divine will because of his desperate task, the fourth Song intends
the qualitative transference from the old “doom theodicy” to “an utterly new
suffering theodicy.” In this connection its author cannot be D-I himself but
must be one of his disciples and the redactor as well. It was this redactor—
disciple’s intention to retain in the text the double sidedness of the Servant as
the individual and at the same time as the collective. Weber’s theodicy of
“the glorification of Paria situauion” becomes acceptable only by this duplicate
character of the Servant.

Vol. XVIII 1982
Now let me make some comments on the above summary of Sekine's discussion. Already in the prelude of D-I it is clear that the major theme of D-I's prophecy lies in the liberation of the exiles, remission of their sin, and the Lord's dominion, but at the same time the opening verse provokes a crucial problem: "that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (40: 2) In this regard it is good that Sekine starts with examining the problem of sin and salvation, but his judgment that B. S. completely lacks a concrete comprehension of sin due to its rigid retribution dogma is apparently wrong. In my opinion sin means for D-I primarily the obstinate rejection of the prophet's warning and the perpetual renunciation of the Sinaitic covenant ever since the forefather's days of the exiles. Secondly against Sekine's proposition that the changing over from political to religious salvation occurs in the second and third Songs and culminates in the fourth Song, it seems to me that from the beginning political and religious salvation more or less go parallel, and that it is hard to maintain a rigid division between B. S. and the Songs at this point. The idea of "the return to politics" in the fourth Song deserves attention, but the central motif in the fourth Song is, as Sekine himself emphasized above, vicarious suffering, and that the Servant suffers for Israel's sin. Salvation will without doubt come upon the nations, though whether politically or religiously it will cannot be determined. The disputed term "the many" does not have to be taken as the nations, as we see that the terms "many nations" (52: 15) and "the great" (53: 12) stand for the nations more adequately. Therefore I still take "the many" as indicating Israel. As for the reading of the very important clause "'im tāšm 'āšām naphšō" (53: 10 b) Sekine follows the traditional reading, i. e., "When he makes himself an offering for sin." According to Sekine's interpretation, when the Servant after his death was made aware of truth by God, he became "satisfied" (yaskil) and again voluntarily wanted to offer himself as a sin-offering to God. However, in my opinion, such an interpretation based on the traditional reading of the verse is too much influenced by the Pauline view of Jesus' death and resurrection. If we read the verse exactly following the Masoretic text, i. e., "If you (Israel) make his life as a sin-offering" as I did in my work, it may largely affect the interpretation of the passage as a whole.

Finally, concerning the question of the author and identification of the Servant, Sekine's fluid view appears to me precarious. His proposition that
the Servant stands for D-I as well as Israel is after all equal to a corporate-personality theory. Moreover, by his identification of the author of the fourth Song with a certain disciple of D-I and the redactor Sekine defies the whole prophetic mode of thinking, because, for one thing, “No Old Testament prophet, not even Deutero-Isaiah, could say that Israel suffered innocently, or that she bore her sufferings silently and patiently ....”,(4) for the other, there is never such case in the Old Testament that a prophet’s own suffering was interpreted as vicarious one by his disciple. Consequently, it would be an easy way out if we were to take up the Weberian “glorification of a Paria situation” from the opening verse, “that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (40: 2). Again it appears rather forced to take that verse into “an utterly new suffering theodicy”. Apparently Sekine’s view owes much to Dion as well as to Weber, but I wonder if such a strange combination of quite different approaches might prove adequate to solve the problem. Be that as it may, the current method of redaction-history is getting popular among Japanese Biblical students too.

II

M. Wada, a catholic student made much of the Dion-Sekine approach and developsthat line in his two recent papers. One is entitled “Shu no Shimobe no Uta — Tadashii Kenkyuho o Motomete” (The Songs of the Lord’s Servant — groping after the right method of interpretation) in Kirisuto o Shimesu (Pointing to Christ) edited by S.Takayanagi, 1980. The other is “Is. 42: 1-4 ni okeru mišpāt no Saikento” (A Re-examination of mišpāt in Is. 42: 1-4), Seishogaku Ronshū 16, 1981. In the first paper Wada begins with a brief survey of the achievements of four Catholic scholars. Among them J. Coppens’ attempt(8) seems to me worthwhile though very complicated. His analysis differs greatly from Dion’s in that he regards the first and second Songs as the disciple’s earlier addition and the third Song as a later one, whereas the fourth Song is an original part of B. S. Each unit of the Songs themselves is almost the same as the traditional one. Even by taking a glance at this fundamental difference in results, we can see how gratuitous and precarious the current redaction-historical method is in its present stage, although Wada himself insists on the methodological legitimacy of his approach. Of course the present writer would not deny that the D-I’s chapters have been subjected to some re-
dactional arrangement and, as Wada says, “the Songs should be read as the final editorial product of the final redactor”, yet it is not clear to me that D-I achieves its present form through the redactional working of several authors as those of the redaction-history school believe. In any case, Wada tries to clarify the context of the Songs by relocating a number of verses before and after them as follows:

1) 41: 28, 29, 42: 8, 9, 42: 1–4 (first Song), 42: 5–6a, 7, 6b (originally belongs to the oracle to Cyrus)
2) 48: 20, 21, [22], 49: 9b–12 (New Exodus theme), 49: 8a [8b¿], 8b¿, 9a, 7 (originally the oracle of salvation to Israel), 49: 1–4, 5b (second Song), 49: 5a, 6.
3) 50: 3, 9b, 50: 4–9a (third Song)
4) 52: 13–53: 12 (fourth Song)

The issue whether the Songs (or any one of them) belong to B. S. or to another author is not discussed by Wada in this paper, where he presents only his tentative translation of the Songs. Let me pick up a few words or phrases worth mentioning.

1) One of most pregnant Hebrew words “mišpāt” is rendered in Wada’s paper as “ho” (—@)—a term with wide connotations in Chinese and Japanese, but in modern Japanese usually equated with “law”. Seeing that this word is repeated three times in the first Song, it is certainly a key word there and has various wide ranging connotations in Hebrew too. Wada in his second paper made a semantic study of this term. He calls our attention to a number of similar relevant usages of its equivalent found in the ancient Near Eastern documents such as the Sumero-Akkadian Hymn to God Šamaš or the Code of Hammurabi. The meaning of mišpāt in the first Song, according to Wada, should be determined in the light of these Near Eastern ideas. As a result, the term mišpāt in question is to be interpreted in terms of general religious categories rather than with the theological or forensic connotations hitherto so popular among many commentators.

2) In the second Song he retains “Israel” in that crucial text (49: 3).
3) He renders the most important text in the fourth Song (53: 10a)
as follows: “Indeed [he] made his life atonement for sin.” The well-known corrupted text (53: 11a) he reads as follows: “he was filled with his life’s suffering, and wearied with his sweat.”

Wada’s rendering of these disputed verses can hardly be considered unique because several Western critics have previously done almost the same thing. With regard to the identification of the Servant figure, he argues with the collectivists. For him the Servant stands for the righteous Jews deported to Babylonia in 587 B.C. Whether one considers this the collective or corporate view, the same difficulty is implied, as I stated above in my comment on Sekine’s view. Suffice it to say now only that such an interpretation may be inappropriate in view of the history of Biblical thought.

III

Next let me turn to a series of K. Kida’s essays on the same theme. In the first one entitled “Daini Isaiah to Kunan no Shimobe” (Second Isaiah and the Suffering Servant—a new proposal for solution), Orient Vol. 22–1, 1979, Kida mentions three persons who played or may have played a leading role in the release from exile: 1) Cyrus the great, the Persian king who paved the way for repatriation from exile, 2) a prophet who prepared spiritual conditioning toward repatriation, 3) a political leader who presided over the people. Apart from the question of Cyrus, for Kida it is a matter of great importance how 2) and 3) are interrelated. By way of explanation he points out the relation between Samuel and Saul. As we know, in the ancient Israelite tradition it was a prophet that anointed and installed a king in front of the people. Kida wants to see in this tradition a key to unlock the riddle of the Servant. After all, he regards the Servant in the Songs II and III as the prophet D-I himself and the one in the Songs I and IV as a political leader who is identified with Sheshbazzar, a ruler of the returning exiles. Sheshbazzar brought back a vast amount of sacred vessels to Jerusalem by the order of Cyrus, when the exiles were released to return home (Ezra 1: 8–11). After the return, the people’s intrigue to raise him to their king became public, and he was arrested and put to death. That such an event took place is not recorded in any historical sources. Kida says that he wants to reinvestigate the mystery of these Songs in the light of this hypothesis.

According to Kida, the literary structure of the book of D-I is divided into
two parts. The first part consists of 14 units and the second of 9 units. Out of these units, these most relevant to the theme are: Part I — (1) 40: 1–11 the calling of the prophet, (4) 41: 21–42: 13 the installation of the Servant of the Lord, (10) 44: 24–45: 13 release by Cyrus; Part II — (1) 49: 1–6 the new task of the prophet, (2) 49: 7–13 the re-installation of the Servant, (4) 50: 4–11 the suffering of the prophet, (7) 52: 13–53: 12 the breakdown of the Servant. The prophet's task as seen in the calling (1) was the proclamation of the release and the installation of the herald of the good tidings who was afterward to become the Servant of the Lord. In the installation of the Servant (4) Kida points out the motif of herald-seeking (41: 27) in comparison with the precedent shown in the case of King Saul or David (I Sam. 9: 15 ff., 16: 1–12) as well as that of Cyrus (see Cyrus-cylinder). In the first Song the Lord introduces his Servant in the third person and tells him how to carry out his task. In the following verses (42: 5–13), the Lord speaks to him in the second person installation address (6), tells him his task (7), asseverates that it is God who installs him (8), explains the aim of installation (9), exhorts the coastlands in hymnic style (10–12), and emphasizes divine zeal (13). Part two begins with the second Song in which the prophet himself speaks in the first person about his newly appointed task. It is a twofold mission that he should carry out the exiles' repatriation and afterward himself as a light to the nations spread out God's salvation to the ends of the world. The following verses (49: 7–13) in parallel with 42: 6–13 show the re-confirmation of the Servant's task as a political leader. Furthermore restoration of the country as well as inheritance of the land is added to this role (7–8). Finally it closes with God's promise of protection for his returning people and effulgent praise to God. The third Song also describes the prophet's confession of his distress on his way to perform the task, while the following verse 10 is the exhortation to his people to walk through with him. The fourth Song reveals the meaning of the Servant's death for the sake of the people's guilt which they have occasioned in their conspiracy to raise him up as king against the Persian government.

In order to corroborate this hypothesis Kida, after examining Sheshbazzar's role in Ezra 1: 8, 11; 5: 14–16 contrasted to that of Zerubbabel in Haggai 2: 20 ff., goes on to presume that the abrupt appearance of Zerubbabel in Ezra 3: 8 suggests Sheshbazzar's downfall. Thus Kida says, "it would be most natural for us to take the figure of the suffering servant as that of the unhappy Sheshbazzar."
Kida’s second essay is written in English with the same title but with slightly modified contents (Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute, Vol. 5, 1979). Here he above all tries to point out the relevance of the prophetic office to that of a king, especially referring to Jeremiah 22: 24 f., 41: 1–3, Ezekiel 19: 1–14, 34: 4. Kida discusses the historical background and literary structure of the Deutero-Isaiahnic prophecy in rather lengthy unit including the first Song (41: 21–42: 13), although this unit-division is peculiar to him. In his opinion, the servant’s twofold task is clearly shown here, namely, on the one hand to encourage the exiles and prepare for their returning home — this task is symbolized by the phrase “a covenant of the people” (42: 6), and on the other to bring forth justice to the nations — this is again symbolized by the phrase “a light of the nations” (ditto). Here Kida urges us to pay special attention to the prophet’s appeal to the coastalnds, and says, “We may infer that Second Isaiah intended to re-construct Jerusalem not only to be the center of Juda but also to be the religious and political center of the coastlands, to whichever specific district this term may refer.” (p. 59)

In the oracle of the reinstallation of the Servant (49: 7–13), a royal motif is conspicuous, and the servant’s task here corresponds to the shepherd figure pictured in Ezekiel 34. In the opening scene of the fourth Song the Servant is awarded political dignity corresponding to the re-enthronement of the God of Israel, Yahweh, and this new status is also announced as applicable to the surrounding nations (52: 13–15). The prophet intended to make Juda independent of the Persian government and have the nations recognize the Servant as the ruler of Juda. “In the light of this situation”, Kida says, “it is most probable that the cause of the Servant’s death lies in this premature attempt to re-establish political autonomy in Jerusalem”. (p. 63) “...... Such a conjecture may help us to understand why the text of the Suffering Servant (52: 13–53: 12) is written in so ambiguous a way. The words show an unmistakable intent and cannot be simply accidental. The prophet could not openly describe the actual process of the event. Moreover he had to try to interpret the death of the Servant from the religious point of view. It has certainly made the text more difficult to understand.” (p. 64) In short, the fourth Song is regarded as a dirge dealing with the Servant’s death and dedicated to him by the prophet.

Kida’s third essay “Daini Isaiah to Cyrus” (Second Isaiah and Cyrus), Kirisuto-Kyo Gaku, No. 22, 1980 points out in the first place that the main defect of past approaches to the Songs lies in their negligence of historical research. In Vol. XVIII 1982
view of this defect, he proceeds to historico-literary criticism of the perplexing
description in the Book of Ezra. The first problem there is the relation between
Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, namely the question of why the name Sheshbazzar
in Ezra 1: 8, 10; 5: 14, 16 was replaced with Zerubbabel in 3: 1, 8; 4: 2, 3.
Kida’s answer is that it was to conceal the conspiracy involving Sheshbazzar and
that because for the same political reason the prophet had to remain anonymous.
The second problem is related to the so-called edict of Cyrus in Ezra chapters one
and six, namely, whether or not the contents of the edict were limited to the
reconstruction of the temple and the replacement of the sacred vessels, or whether
it referred in addition to the return of the exile. Kida refutes the opinion of
famous German critics such as von Rad and M. Noth(6) who denied the return
in the edict without noticing D-I’s activity there at all. Kida believes that in
post-exilic Israel, a Messianic movement aiming at political independence was
suppressed at least twice, once in the event led by D-I and Sheshbazzar and a
second time in the movement by Haggai, Zechariah, and Zerubbabel. Finally,
Kida remarks that D-I’s identification of Cyrus as a Messiah (45: 1) seems to us
to show a shockingly political attitude on the part of the prophet, which however
we should accept as demonstrating vehement political zeal on the part of the
returning exiles as well.

As summarized above Kida’s conjecture reads almost like mystery fiction.
However, some question cannot but be raised against his interpretation of the
text. It is appropriate for him to try to interpret the four Songs within the
context of Deutero-Isaiahnic prophecy as a whole. We can also appreciate
his attempt to reconstruct the prophecies by making a new division of their
literary units; what causes us to wonder is the Servant’s task, identification,
and his relation to the prophet.

Taking up the text in the order it appears, to begin with, it is questionable
whether the opening unit (40: 1–11) could be understood as the calling of the
prophet. Next it appears too hasty to regard “a herald of good tidings to Zion”
(40: 9, 41: 27) as a prefigure of the Servant, because this phrase in 40: 9 can be
read as appositional, i.e., “O herald of good tidings, Zion”, to say nothing of
the corrupted text in 41: 27. Although a “seeking motif” may well be detected
in the latter, “a herald of good tidings” who is a messenger bearing good news
of the release could be considered as the prophet himself or his messenger at
least.

Secondly, to combine the introduction of the Servant in the third person
(42: 1-4) and the installation of the same Servant in the second person (42: 5-13) by prolonging the unit of the first Song (42: 1-4) up to verse 13 leaves no small contextual gap as well as an awkward style. Those passages cited by Kida to support his theory such as I Sam. 12: 3, Is. 11: 1-5, Ez. 34: 1-4, Ps. 72: 12-14 do not seem to me so effective. The Servant's task and his way of performing it can hardly be explained as exclusively political aside from verse 5 f.

As to the second Song in chapter 49, there is a distinctive division between the Song proper (vv. 1-6) and the following verse (7-13). According to Kida, the former describes a new task for the prophet and the latter the re-installation of the Servant as a political leader burdened with a new task. In such a setup the prophet's and the Servant's roles look alike, perhaps complementary but rather indistinguishable from each other. Moreover, the text of verses 5 f. is greatly complicated, and 'Israel' in v. 3 still stands in the way. Similar complexity is seen in the third Song in chapter 50; while if verse 4-9 are considered the prophet's confession of his suffering, the following verse defy easy exegesis. Even though v. 10 is the prophet's exhortation to the people, as Kida proposes, to obey the Servant whom the prophet has designated, what was actual historical situation in which he spoke?

In the case of the fourth Song (52: 13-53: 12), Kida works up a quasi-historical frame associated with the units before and after: namely, the exile’s return, Yahweh's re-enthronement, and the subsequent premature venture of raising Sheshbazzar as king. It is a great surprise to me that 52: 13-15 is taken by Kida as the declaration of Sheshbazzar’s enthronement. There is no question that the first half of chapter 53 describes the unhappy growing up and fateful suffering of the Servant, but there has been no agreement yet among critics about whether or not the description can be taken as the actual death and resurrection of the Servant. Even though it may be a dirge to his memory with veiled intent, is it possible to extol any historical person in such a way as to raise him to a Messiah? The explanation becomes all the more difficult because the figure presented here is not so much political as a religious Messiah.

With regard to the relation between Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, as set forth in the Book of Ezra, Kida's critical observation may be right, yet it is even beyond our ability to conjecture whether Sheshbazzar possessed in fact capability of ruling not only Juda but also the coastlands. If he had been a man of such great caliber and yet subject to so tragic a destiny, one might wonder why there has been no mention whatever about him besides the Book
of Ezra. By the way, as for the identification of the Servant with Sheshbazzar, Kida had a predecessor in the early days of this century. It was Hugo Winckler,\(^{(7)}\) a great German Orientalist, but he withdrew that theory afterward. Kida's conjecture appears superior to that of Winckler in that he used form criticism to strengthen his historical study. Certainly his application of the form-critical pattern may prove to be appropriate to some extent, but I must say that in the case of the prophecies of D-I paradox seems more preferable as an explanation than analogy. That is to say, in spite of the seeming resemblance a completely different substance is often meant. Consequently I would say that the Suffering Servant in D-I should be understood as a paradoxical Messiah\(^{(8)}\) over against the royal Messiah in the first Isaiah (chs. 9 and 11). Be that as it may, in Kida's theory the political character of the Servant figure comes to the foreground more than the religious one. The present stage of discussion about this theme throughout the world requires, however, that though we may disagree in part, we should understand Kida's bold challenge to the riddle of the Servant from the viewpoint of historical individualism.

IV

Finally allow me to mention my own short paper entitled "A New Proposal for the Emendation of the Text Isaiah 53: 11", read at the Eighth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament at Edinburgh in August 1974. It is well known that verse 11 is most crucial to chapter 53 and probably corrupt. This is even better illustrated by how variously recent translations\(^{(9)}\) try to elucidate the original meaning of this verse. The basic issue is the structure of the first line; in other words, the division of the stichos: whether the controversial word \(br-da'atō\) should be attached to the previous word \(yisba'\), or whether it should be attached to the following word \(yasādāq\). The second point at issue is the meaning of \(yir'ēh\): whether its root is \(\sqrt{rēh}\) in the ordinary sense of 'to see', or should be equated to the root \(\sqrt{rēh}\) in the sense of 'to drink one's fill', i.e., 'to be saturated'. The third point is the object or complement of \(yir'ēh\). The fourth point is the meaning of \(da'at\). The fifth point is whether the Masoretic text of this verse is intact in its present wording and word order. These five points are involved with each other to some extent. I examined them separately, regarding the
position of each of the translations above and then presented my own reading by slightly emending the one consonant, namely, changing yasdiq to masdiq. Thus the whole verse reads as follows:

"After his mortal anguish he will see light,
He will be satisfied with knowing the vindicator (masdiq).
My servant is righteous over against the many,
Their iniquities he bears indeed."

Let me make some comments on my translation and explain why I attempted it. Firstly a niggling question cannot but be raised concerning the meaning of da‘at and its personal suffix ô (his). Is this 'his' subjective genitive or objective? I cannot tell for the present. It is quite difficult to decide 'either / or' when this phrase is taken by itself. It is equivocal, quite ambiguous by itself, whether we should attach it to the previous word yisba‘ by reading: "he will be satisfied with his knowledge"; or attach it to the following word yasdiq by reading: "by his knowledge he will justify". In either case the meaning of ‘his knowledge’ remains ambiguous. Therefore, in order to overcome this difficulty, not a few British scholars interpret the meaning of the word da‘at as ‘humiliation’, as seen in some translations(9). In this case certainly it makes sense, but sticking to the primary meaning of da‘at (‘to know’), I tried to make out the object of ‘knowing’ from the direct context.

Some years ago when I was struggling over and over again with this crux, an idea came to me that bēda‘atô could be connected with the next word by slightly changing consonants in this way: bēda‘at ŝidqî in place of bēda‘atô yasdiq. Still later another possibility struck me that it could better be construed as bēda‘at masdiq rather than bēda‘at ŝidqî. In the latter case of emendation, it reads as follows: "he will be satisfied with knowing my righteousness". Remember that the speaker of this verse is Yahweh himself. So the first person possessive ‘my’ refers to Yahweh of course. A cogent piece of evidence which supports this connection of the word da‘at with ŝedeq (righteousness) is found in Isaiah 51: 7, yōd‘ey ŝedeq, “you who know righteousness”. Also the word ŝidqî is found in the same chapter 51: 5, qārōb ŝidqî, “my righteousness is near”. Yahweh speaks in this passage, too.

According to the former case of emendation, i.e., yisba‘ bēda‘at masdiq, it reads as follows: "he will be satisfied with knowing the vindicator". The
word *masdiq* appears in the third Servant Song, 50: 8, *qārōb masdiqt* (near is my vindicator). This would be cogent internal evidence, too. Unfortunately there is no connected phrase with *da'at* and *masdiq* in the Old Testament, but there are many similar phrases such as *da'at 'elohim* (Hosea 4: 1, 6: 6; Proverbs 2: 5), *da'at Yahweh* (Isaiah 11: 2, 9), *da'at 'oti* (Jeremiah 22: 16), *da'at qedōsim* (Proverbs 9: 10, 30: 3), *da'at darkēkā* (Job 21: 14). All these personal suffixes refer to Yahweh, of course.

From the theological or exegetical point of view, either *beda'at sidqi* or *beda'at masdiq* will do. In Yahweh's utterance *sidqi* may be more appropriate than *masdiq*, but I prefer *masdiq* from the technical point of view of emendation. Let me explain the reason for this. The present Masoretic text is *beda'ato yasdiq*. In case of emending the text to *beda'at sidqi*, we have to delete the last letter of *beda'ato* and the initial one of *yasdiq*; moreover the last two letters of *yasdiq* must be transposed. On the contrary, in the latter case, the emendation process is very simple. We only have to annex one letter to another like this: בדאתו יתידי. While the original text having been בדאת יתידי, the lapse of time possibly has dissolved one letter מ into seemingly two letters: מ and מ. Once a certain scribe might have written separately בדאת יתידי, thereafter the successors followed this line. This is very likely to happen in the course of written transmission of the text. Anyhow, this reading fits very well in the line of theological context.

As to the remaining point, namely the integrity of the present wording or word order of the following stichos: *saddiq 'abdi larabbim*, I was glad to know that G. R. Driver in his article(10) reassured me of the grammatical impossibility of the traditional translation of *saddiq 'abdi* as 'my righteous servant'. So he transposes *saddiq* after *beda'atō* yasdiq. However, for my part, when *yasdiq* is attached to the previous word, as I stated above the subsequent wording as it stands is perfectly all right. Instead of taking *saddiq* as an apposition to *'abdi*, to say nothing of deleting it as dittography, it should be taken as a predicate. So we read the second line as follows: “righteous is my servant over against the many, while he himself carries their iniquities.”

In this connection, I should like to mention Mowinckel's reading of this line. In Norwegian it reads: “med rett står min tjener for de mange, skjønt det var deres brott han bar” (S. Mowinckel, Han Som Kommer, 1951, p. 136). In the English translation of this book made by G. W. Anderson this line is rendered as follows: “my servant will stand forth as righteous before the many,
because he bore their iniquities” (He That Cometh, 1956, p. 199). Claus Westermann seems to follow this in his commentary. According to his translation it runs: “als Gerechter wird mein Knecht vor vielen bestehen, denn ihre Sünden er trug sie” (Jesaja 40–66, ATD 1966). Mowinckel and Westermann also interpret yāšādiq not as an ordinary hif’il but as an ‘internal causative’, i. e., “my servant will show himself to be righteous.”

With all respect for Mowinckel and Westermann, I cannot but wonder whether yāšādiq in this case can really be construed as an ‘internal causative’. A much simpler solution would be to separate sāddāq from yāšādiq and make it a predicate to ’ābdī as is shown above: “righteous is my servant over against the many.” So simple is this reading, however, that a question may arise concerning the preposition la of lārabbīm. In case of the traditional reading: “by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify the many”, this preposition la is taken as an accusative, while in my reading it signifies a dative of relation, especially of contrast; thus it can be rendered as ‘over against’ rather than ‘for’ or ‘before’. What kind of contrast is there in the present context, then? Apparently we notice the emphatic contrast between the servant and the many. The noteworthy term rabbīm appears twice in the next verse 12, and twice again in the opening verses of the Song: 52: 14–15. In either case the speaker is Yahweh addressing the people about the dramatic reversal of the servant’s fate. In this situation rabbīm, i. e., ‘the many’ is always depicted as the opponent or the opposing multitude against the servant. Obviously they are godless, unjust people, while the servant is righteous. When he was alive, however, the servant was thought to be godless, wicked and deserving to be afflicted even unto death. But now people come to know by the judgment of God that it was not so; far from it, he is truly righteous over against the many and not only that, but he bears their iniquities.

In this connection I must give a more substantial reason for considering the traditional reading ‘to justify the many’ inappropriate. ‘To justify the many’ or ‘to make the many righteous’, if we so translate it, should be interpreted in close connection with the last line of the verse 12, where it says; “yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” Apparently here rabbīm (many) and pōšē’tīm (transgressors) are parallel, almost identical. The significant function of the servant is to play a role of a guilt offering, ’āšām, as it is shown in the verse 10; so here we can be assured that his role is played between God and the people, so to speak, as a mediator’s.
one. But here it is not the servant but Yahweh, the ultimate judge and vindicator, who can justify the many.

Throughout the four Servant Songs, even outside the Songs in Second Isaiah, the servant’s mission is always subjected to his Lord’s hidden purpose. In the last Song the servant’s mission is finally achieved by the so-called ‘vicarious suffering’. He himself, however, may not know its true meaning until it is revealed by God. “Because he was numbered with transgressors” is true, even at the time of death (v. 12). “When his mortal anguish is over, he will be satisfied with knowing the (his) vindicator.” means that only then he will come to realize that he was right before God and men. It is the servant himself that needs to be vindicated before men, and it is God who vindicates him. My translation of the latter half of v. 11 indicates precisely this vindication: “righteous is my servant over against the many.”

Of course there are many problems yet to be discussed in this regard. But finally I want to call attention to the dialogical structure of this magnificent poem. As in the opening strophe where Yahweh speaks to Israel, so in the closing strophe again Yahweh addresses Israel. In my opinion, the closing strophe begins not from v. 11 as most scholars see it, but from the second stichos of the line of v. 10, which I translate like this: “if you make a guilt offering of his life, he shall see offspring…” Most critics would read this stichos as: “if he gives his life as a guilt offering…”, or “if his life is given as a guilt offering…”, probably following the reading of the Vulgate; however, this is not only unnecessary but distorts the dialogical structure of the original poem. The original text: ‘im tasîm ‘âšam nafṣō should be rendered most naturally as: “if you give his life as a guilt offering,…” Then, to whom does this second person ‘you’ refer? It is addressed to the people Israel. The same is true also with the second person in the opening strophe: ka’âšer šâmemû ‘alêykhâ rabbîm. In this case again almost all the critics would read it as the third person: “as many were astonished at him” instead of ‘at you’. But no change should be made either, if we recognize the dialogical structure of the original poem. The second person here addressed corresponds precisely to the one in v. 10.

In this dramatic poetry we can see four dramatis personae: God Yahweh, his servant, the many (multitude), and the personified Israel (including the prophet).

In the opening strophe (52: 13–15) God speaks.

In the second strophe (53: 1–6) Israel or the many speak.
In the third strophe (53: 7–10a) the prophet speaks.

In the closing strophe (53: 10b–12) God speaks once again. The whole poem centers around the servant, and his role remains passive throughout. Consequently we must interpret the opening line of v. 10 not as; “if he gives his life”, but “if you (Israel) give his (the servant’s) life as a guilt offering.” That means: Israel rather than the servant needs a guilt offering for the remission of her own sins.

Notes

(1) K. Nakazawa, Kunan no Shimobe (The Suffering Servant), Tokyo, Yamamoto Shoten, 1975.
(3) Biblical quotations are mostly from the Reformed Standard Version.
(9) Wegen der Mühsal seines Lebens ....

Durch seine Leiden schafft er [der Gerechte] [mein Knecht] vielen Heil, und lädt ihr Vergehen auf sich. (G. Fohrer, Jesaja 40–66, Zürich, 1964)

Aus der Mühsal seiner Seele sieht er ‘Licht’, sättigt sich ....

Als Gerechter wird mein Knecht vor vielen bestehen, denn ihre Sünden — er trug sie. (C. Westermann, Jesaja 40–66, ATD, 1966)

After his sorrowful labours he shall see light and have fullness of knowledge; my servant, himself righteous, shall bring righteousness to many, and himself bear their iniquities.


His soul’s anguish over he shall see the light and be content. By his sufferings shall my servant justify many, taking their faults on himself. (The Jerusalem Bible, London, 1966)

After his life’s travail he will see light, he will be sated with his humiliation; The righteous one, my servant, will bring righteousness to the many, And their iniquities he will carry.

(I. Blythin in The Bible Translator, Jan. 1966)

Because of his soul’s agony he will see himself satisfied. Through his obedience my servant proves to be truly righteous to the advantage of the multitude, for he bears their iniquities.

(Bo Reicke, “The Knowledge of the Suffering Servant”, BZAW 105, 1967)

For his toils he will see light and be satisfied; By his knowledge my servant will deliver many, and he will bear their transgressions. (J. L. McKenzie, Second Isaiah, The Anchor Bible, 1968)

After his pains he shall be flooded with light, through his humiliation he shall win full justification; so shall my servant justify many, himself bearing the penalty for their guilt.


When he shall have drunk deep of his anguish, when the righteous one shall have received his
ful measure of humiliation, my servant will make many righteous, and their punishment he will bear. (D. W. Thomas in De Mari à Qumran, 1969)

After all his pains he shall be bathed in light, after his disgrace he shall be fully vindicated; so shall he, my servant, vindicate many, himself bearing the penalty of their guilt.

(The New English Bible, 1970)