

Normal Standard of the Norm Ethic Within Japanese Society in Murata Sayaka's Novel *Convenience Store Woman*

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Abstract: This research examines the portrayal of normal standard issue of the norm ethic within Japanese society in the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata. The author uses sociology literature, especially Sakai Junko's theory in terms of *Make'Inu* (loser) and *Kachi'Inu* (winner) to see deeply how the normal standard of norm ethic in Japanese society is described in the novel. This research uses qualitative descriptive methods as methodology of the research. The data of the study are dialogues and narrations that are related to the issue. The findings show that there are several standards that appear in the novel, namely normal standard in terms of Good Child, Normal Standard in term of Success Person, and Normal Standard in term of Married Status. Thus, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that in terms of the normal standard of the norm ethic in Japanese society, the novel describes several standards for people in order to make them have normal labels from society.

Keywords: convenience store woman; normal standard; norm ethics in society; sociological analysis.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

This study examines the first novel from one of the Japanese writers, *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata, which was published by Grove Books, in order to explore the portrayal of normal standard issue of the norm ethic within Japanese society. First published in 2018, the novel itself has succeeded by selling over a million copies around the world and has been published in thirty-one different countries (Interview with the translator Ginny Tapley Takemori, 2019). This success, one of the reasons was because although a fictional tale, *Convenience Store Woman* is based on social reality with issues that are criticized and overcome (Sara, 2019). Therefore, in this context, the literary work comes from some cultural contexts in the societies (Afrianto & Gulö, 2019; Suprayogi, 2019). In addition, the writer believes that the picture of society, especially Japanese society is quite well represented in this novel. It was also highlighted by Sara Doel (2019) who stated that *Convenience Store Woman* "depicts several issues facing Japanese society today: the pressure to conform, labor shortages, and a decreasing marriage rate, coupled with the growing number of unmarried singletons". Specifically, the setting used by the author is the modern era or the contemporary era, which specifically shows the issue of "standard normal" of norm ethic in Japanese society.

Japanese cultural norms are based on concern for harmonious relationships with others, and self-regulating behaviors are essential for maintaining harmony (Hashimoto & Yamagishi, 2013; Yuki, 2003). Efforts to maintain this harmony can take the form of several rules in

society, because not infrequently, to maintain harmony, community members need to act and act according to applicable norms. We can see this depiction of society and norms in the story in this novel. Described, there is a woman named Keiko Furuhashi, who spent 18 years of her life as a part-time worker in a convenience store. Another fact, Keiko is a 36-year-old woman who is still single and not in a romantic relationship with anyone (Murata, 2018). From these facts, the public then views Keiko as a figure who is outside of normality, which is illustrated as “abnormal” or outside the limits of “reasonableness”. In other words, these issues are related to the term in Japanese society itself. According to Sakai Junko's opinion, there are two terms that are good and bad for a person (woman) in Japan, namely Make'Inu (loser) and Kachi'Inu (winner). Both terms target the status of Japanese women, that for those who have not (or are not) married until over the age of 30 and do not have children, they are seen as losers (Make'Inu), even though the woman has a successful career (Junko, 2004).

However, the existing rules are not only related to one's marital status or one's status, as said by Sakai Junko, but also from the normal standards that exist in a family, school, workplace, and society itself. In the case of Keiko from this novel, who is someone who is far from the “normal” label, other people or society would probably force her to change herself and adjust to become someone who is accepted in society. This is what will be analyzed in this study. And to see this issue further, the author looks at it from a sociological perspective of literature. It is because the sociological approach is more concerned with individuals and their relationship with society, like cultural, economic or political aspects (Setyaningrum & Samanik, 2018). In other words, sociological approach is sociological criticism literature in the cultural, economical, and political context in which it is written or received (Kennedy, 1995). This approach was chosen because Keiko and the description of Japanese society in it are related to sociological issues that involve a group of people in a particular community. Therefore, this approach becomes the scalpel used by the author to look at the social issues represented in this novel. In addition, the purpose of this research, despite revealing how a normal standard occurs in society, is also to provide other interpretations of literary works in order to broaden the horizon of knowledge for others.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The ethics of Japanese society is dominated by sociocultural rules and norms rather than religious instructions (Ghotbi, 2015). Tanida (1996) suggests that in Japan an act may be considered as good/right when it is commonly done and considered bad/wrong when nobody else does it. The rationality behind Japanese social ethics has been to allow their collective society to maintain harmonious relationships among its members (Ghotbi, 2015). In its application, there are several sociocultural aspects that play a role in regulating “how” a person acts and behaves. These rules exist around or in places that contain groups such as schools, workplaces, and communities. As for when someone is seen displaying behavior that is not as usual, then he or she can be seen as abnormal.

In order to make understanding about that, so this research has focused on revealing social issues in society with a sociological approach. It is because the sociological approach is more concerned with individuals and their relationship with society, like cultural, economic or political aspects (Setyaningrum & Samanik, 2018). It is able to help researchers to draw an understanding of a literary work and its correlation with certain phenomena that exist in society (Heaverly & Kasih, 2020). However, the part of sociology of literature that will be the main theoretical basis in this research is the Sakai Junko theory. Society is the main target of this theory. According to her opinion, there are two terms that are good and bad for a person (woman) in Japan, namely Make'Inu (loser) and Kachi'Inu (winner). Both terms target the

status of Japanese women, that for those who have not (or are not) married until over the age of 30 and do not have children, they are seen as losers (Make'Inu), even though the woman has a successful career (Junko, 2004).

Furthermore, to support this research, the researcher also looks at other studies that have been carried out on the same work. The researcher feels the need to mention two other studies to be compared and look for connections between them, so that a new understanding can be found that literary works can be seen from various different angles. The following is an explanation of the two studies. First, an article with the title *The Problems of the Absence of an Inner Self and of Moral Education in Contemporary Japan Echoed in Convenience Store Human* by Nam Sang-hyon & Yo Jaejin. This research was discussed about the lack of inner self of the character in Convenience Store Human with question, "How can we make ethical judgments if we do not have an inner self?" The finding itself found the answer could be, "if we do not have inner self, we cannot make ethical judgments but just become a human following the manual." This research deals with the story of the character in the novel *Convenience Store Human* who is seen as abnormal by the public. The author highlights the absence of an inner self in the character, then looks for the implications of the choices that the main character makes in the story. Thus, the writer finds that the absence of an inner self in the main character makes it difficult for him to distinguish between right and wrong, or in other words, he does not really understand "how to be a normal person", so that the main character can only imitate the behavior of others. so that he can be seen as normal a little.

The last, a thesis with title *Sayaka Murata No Sakuhin No "Konbini Ningen" No Shousetsu Ni Okeru Keiko Furukura No Shujinko NO Shakaiteki No Bunseki" or Sociological Analysis of the Main Character Keiko Furukura in the Novel "Konbini Ningen" by Sayaka Murata* by Dyffrensy Bunga Lorena. This thesis examines the main character Keiko Furuvara in a sociological review of literature. The author highlights the character from his point of view as part of society, the author's representation, and the sociological situation of Japanese society. From this research, the authors found that Japanese society labels Keiko as an abnormal person, because she takes several actions that are contrary to the norms that apply in that place. This abnormal figure, furthermore, reveals that Keiko is a person who must be healed so that she can become part of society and her existence can be accepted by those around her.

Thus, based on the theory and previous studies above, the researcher will conduct a research to reveal the portrayal of normal standard issue of the norm ethic within Japanese society in the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative in its methodology. There are several qualities related to this research, one of which is the ability to generate general issues from a particular phenomenon or event (Aryangga & Nurmaily, 2017). In addition, this research is also library research as other data collecting which is carried out by reading data sources comprehensively and identifying data related to the issues raised by the authors (Amelia & Dintasi, 2017). As for collecting research data, this study uses qualitative data sourced from two types of data, namely primary and secondary. Primary data was obtained from the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata, as for the data taken in qualitative research, we can take it from texts including narratives and dialogues (Kardiansyah, 2016). Therefore, it takes from its narration and dialogue. Meanwhile secondary data was obtained from others writings related to the novel and the theory used by the author, so besides scripts or texts, books, articles, and

journals are also included in the text data sources (Afrianto, 2018). From these two data sources, the author also carried out this research by noting quotes that were symptoms of the issues that the authors raised. After that, the writer collected them and analyzed them.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

With a sociological approach to literature, the writer finds several normal standards of norm ethics that occur in this novel. The standard experienced by the main character in the novel, Keiko Furuwara, revolves around daily events that occur in society, family, school, and workplace. As part of a society, Keiko gets an indirect influence on many things related to her status and existence. From childhood, Keiko was introduced to the concept of "normal" which is embraced by the people around her, including family and society. The concept then provides certain standards that must be met by Keiko. This concept shackles Keiko, starting from trivial things such as dressing, talking, communicating, and developing her career and status in society. Thus, indirectly, there are rules that apply in the society where Keiko lives. Those rules must be fulfilled so that he can get the title as a "Normal" person.

What Keiko didn't know was that the standard of normalcy that existed in society didn't just happen. That standard has passed through many ages and religious types of people. And of course, that standard cannot be separated from the influence of Japanese culture in general. From another novel by Sayaka Murata, *Earthlings*, society is considered an inherent part of Japanese culture. Although Japanese society is considered as a separate society individually, they are actually a group of people who adhere to the rules, norms, values, and standards that were created (Murata, 2020). In Japanese society, the culture that puts forward the norms of "agenc" is still a consideration taken by someone as part of society. Thus, the existence of certain norms or standards can be binding.

Meanwhile, to take a deeper look at this issue, these are the normal standard of norm ethic within Japanese society that showed in *Convenience Store Woman*:

1. Normal standard in term of Good Child

Normal standards appear in many aspects of a person's life. Society and the surrounding environment give a certain measure of a person's behavior, attitudes, and habits so that he fits with existing standards. Japanese society itself has one standard towards children that they must be kindhearted or *yasashii* (Linda Bennet, 1995). There are various types of standards installed. It depends on the circumstances of the society itself, as well as the age or status of a person who is the object of emphasis from a standard of normality. In this context, the writer finds a standard that exists in the novel. This standard appears in the childhood of the main character, Keiko Furukura, who is emphasized to be a good child and is expected not to do things that are outside the standard or standard. We can see it in the following two scenes or images.

First, one day Keiko and mother found two dead birds. Instead of intending to bury him, what actually popped into Keiko's head was that she intended to make birds as food (*Yakitori*), as depicted in this scene:

"Let's eat it!" I said.

"What?"

“Daddy likes yakitori, doesn’t he? Let’s grill it and have it for dinner!”

She looked at me, startled. Thinking she hadn’t heard properly, I repeated what I’d said, this time clearly enunciating my words. The mother sitting next to her gaped at me, her eyes, nostrils, and mouth forming perfect O’s. She looked so comical I almost burst out laughing. But then I saw her staring at the bird in my hand and I realized that one of these little birds probably wouldn’t be enough for Daddy.

(Murata, 2018: 9)

From this description, we can see that Keiko displays a strange and strange child. She has thoughts outside of the normal surroundings displayed by her mother. Normality is represented by a person's attitude when she finds a dead bird. Her mother and friends looked sad and wanted the bird buried immediately, but according to Keiko, the bird could be taken to be used as food. This thinking was wrong, according to her mother's standards, so she rejected Keiko's wishes and emphasized behavior according to the existing standard of normalcy. This emphasis from her mother, we can understand in another sense to make Keiko a good child.

In addition, we can see the emphasis on being like a good child in other scenes. In the scene when Keiko is at school and finds two boys fighting, Keiko wants to stop them. However, the method used was out of the ordinary, because Keiko threw a brick at one of the children to stop them fighting. We can see it in the following scene:

The other kids started wailing, “Get a teacher!” and “Someone stop them!” And so I went to the tool shed, took out a spade, ran over to the unruly boys, and bashed one of them over the head. Everyone started screaming as he fell down clutching his skull. Seeing as he'd stopped moving, my attention turned to the other boy, and I raised the spade again. “Keiko-chan, stop! Please stop!” the girls shouted at me tearfully. Some teachers came over and, dumbfounded, demanded I explain myself.

“Everyone was saying to stop them, so that's what I did.” (Murata, 2018: 10)

This action becomes a new problem for Keiko, because she was summoned by the school. Keiko's parents were asked for an explanation about Keiko's condition, they were told that Keiko had just harmed people with her out-of-normal actions. Hearing this, Keiko's parents seemed disappointed with the behavior he did. We can see it in the following scene:

“I wonder why you can’t understand, Keiko ...” she muttered helplessly on the way home, hugging me to her. It seemed I’d done something wrong again, but I couldn’t for the life of me understand what was the problem. (Murata, 2018: 11)

At that point, Keiko still didn't understand what kind of wrong thing she did. However, from these scenes, we indirectly get the impression that the people around Keiko, especially her parents, want Keiko to grow up as a normal and good child. The standard of normality that surrounds her is the emphasis on being a good child according to the morals and rules that society believes in.

2. Normal Standard in term of Success Person

Normal standards apply to a person's status, both related to social status and status in terms of success. As Junko (2006) said, Japanese society has special standards regarding the status of a

person's success, especially women. They have certain standards regarding what kind of work is seen as a sign of someone's success or not. As for looking at the identity of Keiko's figure, he is a representation of those who are far from the impression or standard of one's success. We can see it in the following sections:

"I'm working part-time in a convenience store. My health ..."

I was about to give the usual excuse my sister had made for me, when Eri leaned forward. "Part-time? Oh, so that means you got married!" she said, as if it were self-evident. "When was that?" (Murata, 2018: 50)

The scene occurred when Keiko gathered with her friends at a reunion. Each of them tells of the successes and successes that have been achieved. When it was Keiko's turn, they found a status that was outside the normal standard, because Keiko's job status was a part-time worker at a convenience store, while she was still single at the age of thirty-six. Leaving single status aside, we can see that Keiko's work is seen as something odd. The impression of part-time work is considered a distraction for housewives. Therefore, Keiko got a strange impression from her job status. From there, he also received an emphasis that when it comes to a person's success status, society has certain standards that must be achieved.

3. Normal Standard in term of Marriage Status

Normal standards also exist in a person's marital status in society. As Junko (2006) said, Japanese women should ideally be married before they touch their 30s. Otherwise, they are considered a loser figure. Referring to this standard, the status attached to Keiko Furukura is considered as unusual or abnormal. This is illustrated in the party scene that Keiko attends with her siblings and friends. As illustrated:

He stared at me as though I were some kind of alien. "What, you never ...? I mean, if finding a job is so hard, then at least you should get married. Look, these days there are always things like online marriage sites, you know," he sputtered.

(Murata, 2018: 51)

In this scene, there is a situation when Keiko's friends are surprised by Keiko's unmarried status at the age of thirty-six. In their eyes, Keiko is seen as an alien, a figure that represents how foreign and unusual Keiko is. That impression arises because of one main thing, that Keiko's status is not yet family. This status is very rare in society, especially considering Keiko's part-time job status and her age of over thirty years. Therefore, as a result of their response, some friends also suggested Keiko to find a partner. In fact, some of them suggest looking for it on an online website. As depicted in this scene:

Miho's husband whispered in her ear, then forced a smile. "Oh, but all my friends are married now ... no, it's impossible. There's no one."

"So why don't you register on a marriage site? We should take a photo now for you to use. For that sort of thing, it's best not to use a selfie. You're much more likely to come across as likable and get lots of responses with a photo of you surrounded by a lot of other people, like today's barbecue."

From the depiction of the scene, it is clear that friends want Keiko to get a partner to support

her status in society. That desire may seem subtle, but the writer believes that it implies their pressure as a representation of society that one of the normal standards is married status. When there are other people, whether relatives or friends and their friends who have not received this status, they also put emphasis on immediately looking for a partner until married status can be obtained. Because otherwise, like Keiko, one would be labeled as abnormal as a part of society. She will be labeled as an anomaly in society. This can be seen from the use of the word “alien” which is impressed on Keiko. Based on that, married status becomes a status that must be owned by someone so that she can be seen as a normal person.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and finding, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that in terms of the normal standard of the norm ethic in Japanese society, the novel describes several standards for people in order to make them have normal labels from society. The label includes three main things, namely normal standard in terms of Good Child, Normal Standard in term of Success Person, and Normal Standard in term of Married Status. From these three things, society views that there are several things that are considered for someone to be labeled as normal or not. In the label of Good Child, Keiko's character is under pressure to be kind and obedient, because it reflects the norms prevailing in her family and school. Meanwhile, in the label of Success Person, Keiko's character is under pressure regarding her status or career path, because people think that there are several jobs and achievements that must be achieved when someone is thirty years old. And finally, in the Married Status label, Keiko's character is under pressure from society, especially her friends, that people her age should be married, because women who don't marry at the age of thirty are still considered outside the norm.

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