

Mizu Bunka in Traditional Japanese Society

Sriwahyu Istana Trahutami^{1*}, *Isnisa Redinafitra*¹

¹Japanese Language and Culture Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Indonesia

Abstract. It has its roots in the Shinto faith, one of the major beliefs of the Japanese population. *Mizu bunka* is a term for the reciprocal relationship between humans and water as a harmony in many aspects. This research uses a qualitative-descriptive method, discussing how water is an important element in Japan that affects the lives and culture of its people. This study discusses and describes the results of *mizubunka* in daily life (*shuukan*) from the data of Japanese cuisine, Shinto culture, traditional crafts, legends, and Japanese idioms as a form of harmony between water and Japanese society.

¹Corresponding author: sriwahyuistanatrahut@lecturer.undip.co.id

1 Introduction

Japan is an archipelago surrounded by sea on all four sides. To the east and south is the Pacific Ocean, the northwest is the Sea of Japan, the west is the East China Sea, and the northeast is the Sea of Okhotsk. 75% of Japan's area is mountainous and forested. Natural phenomena due to volcanic activity cause many valleys, rapids, rivers and lakes. Many of the rivers in Japan have a fast flow.

Based on the historical background, there is a deep connection between Japanese people and nature. This was already mentioned in Yaichi Haga's 1907 "Kokuminsei Jukkou" about the Ten Characteristics of Japanese People. It states that one of the characteristics of the Japanese is that they love nature, trees, and flowers. The same goes for water. The Japanese, since ancient times have been closely related to areas that have abundant water resources.

The word *mizubunka* (水文化) comes from the words *mizu* 'water' and *bunka* 'culture'. *Mizu bunka* is the reciprocal relationship between people and water and has become a way of life, how people utilize water in all aspects of life, protect and preserve it.[1]. This includes how water affects human life. *Bunka* or culture includes the notion of social values and norms, knowledge as well as the overall social structures, religious, and other structures that characterize a society. Culture is not only about good teachings (things) inherited from previous generations but also a process of activities carried out by humans to achieve their future desires.

The values that exist in culture are in the emotional area of the individual cultural community concerned. An individual since childhood has been impregnated with cultural values that live in their environment, so that the concept is rooted in soul. Therefore, the values in a particular cultural community cannot be replaced with other cultural values in a short time. According to F. Kluckhohn in Koentjoroningrat (2008), every cultural system contains five fundamental problems in human life which form the basis for the framework of variations in the cultural value system, which includes, (1) the problem of the nature of human life; (2) the nature of human work; (3) the nature of human's position in time and space; (4) the nature of human's relationship with their natural surroundings; and (5) the nature of human's relationship with other humans [2].

Human activities to intelligently utilize water have been going on for a very long period of time, giving birth to traditional cultures, both tangible and intangible, and each region has its own characteristics that different from one another. The types of traditional culture associated with *mizubunka* include festivals/*matsuri*, beliefs, crafts, waterwheels, dams and others. Water-centered living patterns and lifestyles are also *mizubunka*. These patterns and lifestyles are formed in the natural

environment and consciousness of the people, through a long historical process (Mizubushishin, Month 3, Year 12 Showa).

This research on the history about current situation and future perspectives of water reclamation and reuse in Japan is a result of the Core Research for Evolutional Science and Technology (CREST). A project was conducted in Japan to develop an energy-efficient water reclamation process utilizing membrane technology and an ozonization process with the goal of water reuse as a way to conserve water resources, reducing the cost and energy involved in water resource management.

Another research on water was conducted by Ike Iswary Lawanda (2008) entitled "The Interpenetration between Amaterasu Oomikami and the Japanese"[3]. Ike explained about the relationship between Amaterasu Oomikami, which is believed to be the ancestor of the Japanese emperor. Through a symbolic approach, an understanding is produced that Amaterasu Oomikami and the environment are a system of relationships in Japanese culture that has a relationship between one another connected through a set of values and actions.

This research uses a descriptive method through a qualitative approach. The research stage includes data collection, analysis, and presentation of analysis results. Written sources used as data are references that contain the topic of environment, water resources, history, and traditional culture related to *mizubunka*. The data collected is then described in depth about how Japanese people's relationship with water is seen from examples of historical facts, as well as traditional culture formed because of this relationship.

In addition to CREST and Ike Iswary Lawanda's research described above, the previous research used entitled "Water Resources as One of the Natural Factors Supporting the High Life Expectancy of Japanese People" by Sriwahyu Istana Trahutami (2021). This research explained the relationship of water in the lives of Japanese people related to culture, religion, and even technological development.

Traditional culture, which is a manifestation of Japanese people's relationship with the surrounding nature, especially water through *shuukan* or living habits, examples of language use as well as tales or traditions that exist in it. Through the above process, it is hoped that the objectives of this research can be achieved.

2 Result and Discussion

Japanese people's daily life (*shuukan*) depends heavily on water. From cultural customs to things related to the necessities of life such as food, cleaning, etc. The following describes *mizubunka* (the relationship between humans and water in various cultural forms (*mizubunka no shurui*)).

2.1 *Mizu bunka* in Traditional Japanese Culture

2.1.1 *Water in Japanese Cuisine (Washoku)*

Japanese cuisine is synonymous with its distinctive taste and nutritional fulfillment. The role of good quality water in Japanese cuisine is also an element of the delicious *washoku* [4]. One of the examples is the use of good quality water used to make *sake*, an alcoholic Japanese drink made from fermented rice. The *sake* brewing process has many things to consider such as water, rice, brewing technology, and wind. But of the four, water and rice are the most important. As explained by Yong Sook Lee et al, as much as 80% of the alcohol content is water, so water is very important in sake brewing because it determines the quality of the flavor. [5].

Another Japanese cuisine that uses water in the making process is *tofu*. *Tofu* in Japan is one of the most readily available and inexpensive foods. In the mid-1800s, Buddhism as the majority religion prohibited its believers from eating red meat. So many people switched to eating *tofu* because it is easily available, low-calorie, and cholesterol-free. [6]. *Tofu* is also widely combined with *washoku* or other Japanese foods. About 90% of *tofu* is water, so the flavor of *tofu* is highly dependent on the quality of the water used and the quality of the soybeans.

2.1.2 *Mizu Bunka in Shintoism*

One of the Japanese habits during summer is splashing water on the streets and areas around houses or temples. This habit is called *uchimizu*. This is done by the Japanese not only to cool down the temperature around the sprinkled area, but also have traditional cultural aspects related to the Shinto religion to the purification of the area. As mentioned in the journal Education About Asia, this *uchimizu* custom has its roots in Shinto teachings that watering a garden, house or shrine can make a harmony between humans and also nature with water being involved in Shinto religious rituals [7].

In addition, there is also a process where Shinto believers clean themselves first before entering the shrine to pray. The ritual of purification with water is called *harae*. The use of water in *harae* symbolizes the washing away of all bad things such as calamity, bad luck that previously stuck to humans. *Harae* is performed by cleaning the mouth and one hand with water drawn from a wooden dipper. The place to perform *harae* is usually seen in front of temples in Japan. There are other contexts in which *harae* is performed such as during the *Shichi-go-san* festival where *harae* is performed to purify children to bring health,

as well as with regard to business to keep away from poverty or bad luck[7].

2.1.3 *Mizu Bunka in Traditional Crafts (Dentou Kougei)*

Japanese crafts are processed traditionally use much water as an ingredient—for example *washi* or traditional Japanese paper. *Washi* is a traditional Japanese paper that requires water as an ingredient. [8]. Water in *washi* making mixed with other chemical substances. *Washi* is known as a thin yet strong paper, it does not wrinkle or tear easily. Because of this great durability, *washi* is not only used for gift wrapping or handicrafts but also as a material for making *kimonos*, or even an important aspect in making *fumemono* (traditional Japanese sliding doors).

In terms of fabrics, water is used for fabric making (*nuno*), one of which is using the *nuno* felting technique popularized by Sachiko Kotaka with its traditional method, wet felting. In the manufacturing process, the water-soaked wool fibers bonds with the *washi* that also use water to make it. [9]. The finished *nuno* can then be used to make various traditional garments.

2.1.4 *Mizu Bunka in Japanese Folklore*

Shintoists believe that human's relationship with water has a spiritual aspect and consider that there is a water god [10]. Suijin-sama is a water God believed by Shinto believers to take the form of a *kappa*. *Kappa* comes from the words *kawa* (river) and *warawa* (a child around 10 years old). Many people think that *kappa* is real and have seen him. Considered to be the incarnation of the water God, Suijin-sama, he is considered a helper, and can bring rain during the dry season. In another story, *Kappa* as an antagonist is portrayed as a creature that likes to pull children into the water.

Kappa is often described as having the stature of a ten-year-old child with finned arms and legs. The overall body resembles a frog with a scaly body and a beaked mouth. On the head there is a plate-like indentation called *osara*. It is believed that *osara* holds water and is the center of the *kappa*'s magical powers. The water in the *osara* must always be full so that their powers last whenever the *kappa* travels on land. If *kappa* runs out the water inside it *osara*, they will lost their magical powers and the worse, they can also dead.

2.1.5 *Water and Japanese Idioms*

Japanese vocabulary also contains water in it. Japanese idioms (*kanyouku*) interpret water in various meanings. Explained by Nur Ainun, et al in

2020[11] some examples of idioms related to water and their meanings. Water can mean many things according to the context of the sentence. As in the idiom 水に流す (*mizu ni nagasu*) where water is explained as 'life', the meaning of this idiom itself is to live life as it is. Another example of the use of the word *mizu* as a meaning of life is in the idiom 水積みもりて魚聚まる (*mizu tsumorite sakana atsumaru*) which means that if you live a good life, there will be many people who like you. Besides being related to life, water also symbolizes 'human relationships'. As in an idiom 水が合わない (*mizu ga awanai*) which means not fitting in with the neighborhood. Another idiom is 水と油 (*mizu to abasu*) which means not being able to get along. Apart from those mentioned above, there are still many examples of water idioms with various contexts that can be explored.

3 Conclusion

Based on this research, it was found that water is an important element in the lives of Japanese people and is something that builds their traditional culture. Closely related to Shinto religious teachings, *mizubunka* is a harmony between humans and water that has given a lot of meaning to Japanese life. Not only in terms of fulfilling primary and secondary needs, *mizu* has also become a word element in the Japanese language and can be interpreted in various contexts. This research shows that *mizubunka* is a harmony where both (Japanese society and water) have a close relationship from various aspects of life.

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