

Moral Values in Rieko Nakagawa's Children's Story "Kujiragumo"

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Abstract. Morals are the principles that direct people's behavior. Hence, moral education should be taught from an early age. One of the alternative moral delivery is through children's stories. Therefore, this paper focused on moral values in Rieko Nakagawa's children story "Kujiragumo" in the Japanese language textbook *Kokugo* for 1st graders in elementary school. The moral values discussed in this paper are based on Japanese moral education for elementary school by Klaus Luhmer because the story's characters are an elementary school teacher and his students, set in a school, and the readers are elementary school students. This qualitative literary research used the sociology of literature design. Data were collected using the close-reading techniques by identifying and categorizing the moral values found in "Kujiragumo". The results found in this study are that the actions performed by all characters have fulfilled Luhmer's four points of moral education and can be used as discussion material for teachers with the students. Those points are on the level of understanding of elementary school students, so the students who read it can identify themselves with the characters in the short story, and the morals conveyed can be internalized.

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1 Introduction

Character is a moral advantage that is the prime mover of a person in acting to do something based on good, noble, obedient, and efficient values [1]. Many child education experts think character education must be given early and continuously, from elementary to tertiary education, because character development will encourage people to be productive, creative, and innovative in thinking, acting, and working. Thus, they can contribute to the nation's and humanity's interests [2].

As a well-known strong character nation, traditional Japanese education seeks to perfect character through the growth of mental, moral, and physical development. Each is known individually as *chi-iku* (cognitive development), *toku-iku* (development of virtue), and *tai iku* (physical development). The revised 1947 Fundamental Law of Education (FLE), that has undergone some changes in 2006 addressed the importance of broad knowledge, creativity, self-direction, the love of the country, and respect for tradition and culture. Furthermore, the revised law officially declared that moral education is a subject matter with clearly defined objectives and guidelines [3].

Moral education in Japan has been and will continue to constitute a core goal of education, officially and unofficially [3]. As Noviana concluded in her study about moral values in Studio Ghibli's *Spirited Away*, the Japanese government has successfully given moral education in elementary school, at least in that anime [4]. Moral values will affect students' emotional intelligence, hence affecting their achievements. Emotional intelligence relates to moral conduct, thinking, problem-solving, social interactions, personal emotion, and academic performance [5]. Therefore, Sari stated that children should be taught morals as early as possible [6].

Morals can be delivered alternatively through children's stories because anyone can easily understand the values. Furthermore, children's stories are believed to be rich in examples of moral values because each children's story aims to convey positive messages related to morals, ethics, manners, appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and other messages. Therefore, children's stories are widely used as educational material for developing positive character in children or for parents and teachers who use them to educate children [1]. Kaur [7] stated that schools play an important role in moral education for students in a multicultural society. However, it is not only teachers in schools who should give moral education to children; parents also play an important role in making children aware of the importance of living an ethical life.

Children can learn, imitate, and follow the intention of the stories through habituation as a common mechanism, as stated by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their theory of the construction of realities [8].

The theory mentions three mechanism levels: internalization, objectivation, and externalization, that apply in every matter children learn. Children learn by imitating because they still have limitations in assessing, analyzing, and filtering things from the outside. What they imitate becomes a reference that sticks in their minds until they grow up. Therefore, it is important to show good examples to children [1].

Good examples of children's stories can be found in the Japanese language textbook *Kokugo* for 1st graders in elementary school [9]. One of them is "Kujiragumo" [10] or The Cloud Whale, which has been used as teaching materials in elementary schools in Japan for over fifty years [11]. "Kujiragumo" tells the story of a whale-shaped cloud in the sky over an elementary school when 1st-grade students exercise during gym class. The cloud whale seemed happy to participate in sports activities from above the sky until it finally invited the students and their gym teacher to ride on its back and play in the sky. When gym class ended, the cloud whale returned them to the school grounds, and it went back to the blue sky.

As a good example of a children's story, we chose "Kujiragumo" to be analyzed its moral values based on Klaus Luhmer's statement about objectives in Japanese moral education for elementary school [12]. According to Luhmer, in Japanese schools, moral education is divided according to the school level: elementary, junior high, and senior high. For the elementary school, there are three parts of objectives for the "catalog" of virtues to be fostered, one set for each of the first/second, third/fourth, and fifth/sixth grades. Each of the three sections is subdivided into four groups of desirable traits, which are (1) matters belonging to oneself; (2) relationship of self to other persons; (3) matters related particularly to nature and sublime things (i.e., life, beauty); and (4) matters concerning the group and society (i.e., truthfulness, respect for parents and grandparents, teachers, good relations with classmates). Therefore, this study aims to identify the moral values delivered in Rieko Nakagawa's children's story "Kujiragumo" in the Japanese language textbook *Kokugo* for 1st graders in elementary school.

2 Method

This research design uses qualitative methods. Data were collected using the close-reading technique by identifying and categorizing the moral values found in "Kujiragumo". Those data were in the form of phrases, speeches, and events related to the actions of 1st-grade students and their gym teacher. At the same time, recommended traits in the four groups of desirable traits are used as a reference. Data collection uses the close-reading technique, while the data

analysis uses the sociology of literature design. Collected data were then classified into the actions and the speeches of the cloud whale, the students, and the gym teacher. Those data are then compared with the first/second grade's desirable traits and recommended traits to draw conclusions.

3 Result and Discussion

The character actions in the children's story "Kujiragumo" fall within the categories of Luhmer's four groups of desirable traits related to moral values for Japanese elementary schools for first/second-grade students, as discussed below.

3.1 Matters belonging to oneself

The desirable traits found are self-advancement and sincerity. Self-advancement is shown through the behavior of the students and the gym teacher, as seen in the following quotation.

みんなは、手をつないでまるいわになると「天までとどけ、一、二、三。」とジャンプした。でも、とんだのは、やっと三十センチぐらいです。「もっとたかく。もっとたかく。」とくじらがおうえんしました。「天までとどけ。一、二、三。」今度は、五十センチぐらいとべました。「もっとたかく。もっとたかく。」くじらがおうえんしました。「天までとどけ、一、二、三。」そのときです。いきなり、かぜが、みんなを空へふきばしました。そして、あっというまに、せんせいと子供たちは手をつないだまま、くものくじらにのっていました。(Kujiragumo, pp. 6-7)

Everyone held hands, formed a circle, and jumped, saying, "Reach to the sky, one, two, three." However, they only jumped about thirty centimeters high. "Higher, higher," the cloud whale encouraged. "Reach to the sky. One, two, three." This time, they jumped about fifty centimeters high. "Higher. Higher." "Reach to the sky, one, two, three." That is when. Suddenly, a wind blew everyone up into the air. And in no time, the

teacher and the students were on the cloud whale, hand in hand.

From the quotation above, it is shown how the persistence of the students to get what they want. They did not complain and gave up when the cloud whale encouraged them to jump higher than before. They learned that getting something requires a gradual process and earnest effort; this is a form of self-advancement. Furthermore, from the quotation, the cloud whale shows sincerity in encouraging the students and the gym teacher to jump higher so they can climb on its back and play together, making them more enthusiastic.

3.2 Relationship of self to other persons

The desirable trait found is courtesy. Courtesy is shown through the students' behavior toward the cloud whale and vice versa, as seen in the following quotation.

「さようなら。」みんなが手をふったとき、四じかんめのおわりのチャイムがなり だしました。「さようなら。」くものくじらは、また、げんきよく、青い空のなかへかえっていきました。
。(Kujiragumo, p. 13)

"Sayonara". As everyone waved their hands, the chime marking the end of the fourth period began to ring. "Sayonara". The cloud whale then returns to the blue sky with high spirits.

After the cloud whale sent the students and the gym teacher back to the school ground, they did not forget to wave and say *sayonara* to the cloud whale, and it said *sayonara* back. The word *sayonara* is frequently translated as goodbye, yet several different goodbyes in Japanese exist. The Japanese phrase *sayonara* means "Goodbye forever" or "Goodbye, I don't know when I will see you again," unlike the English. Japanese people will, therefore, infrequently use the word. Even though kids will occasionally use it to talk to their teachers after school, they quickly pick up on the subtlety and avoid doing so as adults because it implies that someone never wants to see them again or in break ups situations [13]. In this case, *sayonara* means that both parties, the students with the gym teacher and the cloud whale, feel that they might not see each other again, so they wish good to each other.

3.3 Matters related particularly to nature and sublime things

The desirable trait found in this story is appreciating nature, as seen in the following quotation.

「ここへおいでよう。」みんながさそうと、「ここへおいでよう。」と、くじらも さそいました。「よし、きた。くものくじらにとびのろう。」男の子も、女の子も、はりきりました。

(Kujiragumo, p. 7)

"Come here," everyone said. "Come here," said the whale also. "Okay, here we go. Let's jump to the cloud whale." Both boys and girls were excited.

Cloud whale appears above the sky while following the students' gymnastic movements. Those who saw it became interested and happy and invited the cloud whales to play together. The cloud whale did not refuse the invitation; it even invited them to climb on its back and play together in the sky. These acts show the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. If humans are kind to nature, then nature will also be kind to humans.

3.4 Matters concerning the group and society

The desirable traits found in this story are cooperation, respect for the rules, and responsibility. Cooperation was seen when students were holding hands in a circle and jumping while happily screaming so they could play on the back of the cloud whale in the sky. Their teamwork paid off; the wind blew them away, and they managed to climb onto the cloud whale's back.

Respecting the law is shown when the gym teacher invites his students to return to school before the fourth period is over (Kujiragumo, p. 12). From this, the teacher shows his obedience to the rules that apply in school and sets an example for his students. The students towards their sports teacher also show a form of obedience. They follow orders, such as stretching, running around the field, and stop their activities when the whistle is blown.

Meanwhile, the teacher's act of responsibility towards his/her students is evident when the gym teacher accompanies his students playing with cloud whale until they return to school safely. As the wind blew them away, the gym teacher held tightly to the hands of his students until they all climbed onto the cloud whale's back (Kujiragumo, p. 9).

4 Conclusion

The actions performed by all characters in this story have fulfilled Luhmer's four points of moral education and can be used as discussion material for teachers with the students. Those points are on the level of understanding of elementary school students, so the students who read it can identify themselves with the characters in the short story, and the morals conveyed can be internalized. Delivering morals that are not patronizing must also be considered so that children can well receive the values.

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