

Unmarried Women and Illegitimate Children in the Ogawa Yoko's Novel

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Abstract. In Japan, children born out of wedlock are illegitimate children, so they are legally recognized as children of the mother who gave birth. They do not get any rights from their biological father, either living cost or inheritance. Likewise, women who give birth to children out of wedlock do not get a living from the men who impregnate them. This study examines the attitudes and actions taken by women who gave birth to children out of wedlock and their children's condition in Japan. This research is qualitative research with a sociological approach to literature using family concepts. The research method is a coding method by tagging data related to families and institutions. Ogawa Yoko's novels, *Hakase no Aishita Sūshiki* (2005) and *Kohaku no Matataki* (2015), are used as a resource of data. The results show that patriarchal power and control in Japan are still ongoing, silencing marginalized women such as pregnant women out of wedlock and eliminating the rights of illegitimate children.

Keywords: Gender, Japanese family, Japanese Literature, and Patriarchy

1 Introduction

Literature work has a message from the author to the reader. Some messages are written, and many are implied. There are hidden messages in literary works that the author realizes, and not infrequently, the author is unaware of it. These hidden messages can become issues to be discussed so that various meanings can be found. Ogawa Yoko is a Japanese female novelist who is prolific in writing about various issues in her work, including gender inequality in Japanese society reflected in the two novels, *Hakase No Aishita Shūshiki* (2003) and *Kohaku No Matataki* (2015). There are three female characters in the two novels which are pregnant out of wedlock and raise their children alone without getting support from anyone. They also do not seek help and alone provide for their children in limitations as mothers and the sole breadwinner for their families.

The silence and resignation of the mother character in both Ogawa Yoko novels towards the life she lives are not without reason. Under Japanese law, if a woman gives birth to a child out of wedlock, the child will be her dependents unless the man who is the biological father of the child she is born with recognizes the child by recording it on the *koseki* or family card to municipal office [1] [2]. Indeed, from the Japanese Ministry of Welfare and Population reports, the number of women who are recorded to be pregnant and give birth out of wedlock is small [3] [1].

However, from the government regulations above, it can be seen that there is no legal government support for women who are pregnant out of wedlock and the children they give

birth to. These children are even labeled as illegal and do not get any rights from their biological fathers, both the right to earn a living and the right to inherit [1]. The rules of marriage and the recognition of children born in Japan are stringent. Rules are formed from a patriarchal system that has been ingrained in Japan since the Tokugawa era (1603-1868).

The patriarchal system in Japan was increasingly embedded in Japanese society by being confirmed in the constitution when Japan began to enter modern times during the reign of Emperor Meiji (1868 - 1912). In 1947 Japan's constitution was changed at the insistence of the Allies. The amendment law abolishes the traditional family system and prioritizes democracy and gender equality. Although legally, women's rights are recognized as equal to men's, in reality, gender equality has not been fully implemented in the life of Japanese society until now [4] [5] [6].

Gender inequality can be seen through the mother character's attitude in Hakase No Aishita Sûshiki and Kohaku No Mabataki novel. Therefore, the issue discussed in this paper is how the patriarchy's power in Japan could see through the family and legal institutions and why the women who give birth out of wedlock are only silent in a state of concern. The current era gender equality, the rights of women and children have begun to be considered and protected by the state in the form of rules and legislation. However, the solid patriarchal power in Japan has not yet been able to make Japanese women dare to fight for themselves to get their rights as citizens both for themselves and the children they give birth to [1] [2] [5].

Research on children born out of wedlock and women giving birth in literary works has not been found, especially research using Japanese literature. Research related to children out of wedlock and women giving birth out of wedlock is primarily found in sociological research that analyzes data from the field, not from literary works. Several studies found several essential concepts related to marriage, the family system, and Japan's patriarchal system. These three concepts are the foundation that positions children born out of wedlock and women who give birth out of wedlock.

For every Japanese citizen who carries out a marriage, the groom will register himself and his wife with the municipal office. They get a koseki, a kind of family card that legalizes them as a family. This husband-and-wife couple will get out of the koseki of their parents and get a new koseki. The bride gets the groom's surname and acquires a new status as a member of her husband's family, and lives in the groom's house. If the wife gives birth to a child, then the husband will register his child with the municipal office, and the child will get the right as a citizen [1] [7].

Koseki owned by each family is a legal letter from the government, which makes the husband obligated to provide for his wife and children. The wife and unmarried children get guaranteed living expenses. Wife and children would get inheritance rights if the husband or their father died. The children get the right to obtain compulsory education up to secondary level for nine years from the state and other rights as legal citizens. Meanwhile, if a child is born to an unmarried woman, then legally, the child becomes the child's mother if the biological father does not register it in the koseki. The child does not get rights such as living costs and inheritance from his father. If the child is not registered by the mother who gave birth out of wedlock as her child, the born child will not get the right as a citizen either in education or allowance to fulfill basic needs and other rights as citizens [1].

Patriarchal society in Japan was formed in the Tokugawa era (1603-1868) when the traditional family system known as the ie system was applied in Japanese society. This family system was strengthened when it was confirmed in the Meiji constitution. The family system adheres to the notion that the first son is the heir to the family, who leads the family and is fully responsible to each family member, who runs the family business and is responsible for

educating the prospective heir. The son's priority is to become the heir and head of the family, while the daughter is prepared to be a good wife and wise mother. The Japanese women have an obligation to the men. When she was a child, she became the full responsibility of her father. When she got married, she became the responsibility of her husband. When she was old, she became the responsibility of her first son [5] [4].

Nowadays, Japanese society has been uprooted from family's institution due to the allies' abolition of the ie system from the Meiji Constitution in 1947. Japanese men and women are equal before the law. However, in reality, the patriarchal system already deeply rooted in Japanese society is still robust, and women are treated unequally to men. Nevertheless, the protection of Japanese women is not like the era when the ie system was still in effect. Women who are mature and independent are free to determine their destiny without following their father's wishes [6].

This gender equality does not make Japanese women strong, but even weak, especially when giving birth out of wedlock. Women do not have anyone to complain to or rely on when they do not have a legal father or husband, nor do they get complete protection from the state. Most Japanese women face alone to support their children due to this illicit relationship, especially those from ordinary families or women from the lower middle class [8] [9].

2 Method

This research is qualitative research using the sociology of literature approach. The research objects are two novels written by Ogawa Yoko, entitled *Hakase No Aishita Sûshiki* published in 2005, and *Kohaku No Matataki* published in 2015. Although these two novels have an interval of more than ten years, they both tell the story of unmarried women giving birth to children and the fate of their children. The research focused on the concepts contained in the family institution.

At the same time, the data sources consist of primary data sources, the two novels by Ogawa Yoko, and secondary data, the social context of Japanese society related to marriage, the family system, and the patriarchal system in Japan. The method used in this study is a coding method by tagging data related to women who gave birth out of wedlock and illegitimate children. The data is then classified and analyzed to answer the questions of this paper.

3 Results

In Ogawa Yoko's two novels, three women surrender to their fate. These three women were not married, then became pregnant and gave birth to children out of wedlock.

3.1 Unmarried women characters

The first character is a character who appears in the novel *Kohaku No Matataki*. We call this character Mama because that is how she told the children to call her. Mama's character has four children due to her relationship with her boss, who is the director of the office where Mama works. When the boss is healthy, and the company is still running well, Mama and her four children get attention and support for their daily lives from the biological father of their children, who is called Papa.

Papa loves his children, especially his legal wife cannot give birth to children even though he has made various efforts. Mama cannot be Papa's legal wife because Papa already has a wife. Their relationship was cut off when Papa started to get sick. Papa gave a villa in the mountains as a denotement of breaking up with Mama and her children [8].

The second character is a housemaid called Kaseifu. This character is told in the novel *Hakase No Aishita Sushiki*. Henceforth this character is called Kaseifu. Kaseifu is pregnant out of wedlock with a fellow part-timer. Her pregnancy is unknown to her boyfriend because her boyfriend, an electrical engineering student, never shows up at work again, and Kaseifu loses track of him. Kaseifu's mother was furious, and finally, after being pregnant, Kaseifu ran away from her mother's house and gave birth in the hospital without any family accompanying her. After giving birth, Kaseifu lived in a mother and child orphanage, and after her child grew up, she worked as a housemaid. Work as a housemaid is a job she can do because she has been used to it since childhood [9].

The third character is Kaseifu's mother, also told in the novel *Hakase No Aishita Sushiki*. Next, we call the character Mother. He single-handedly raised Kaseifu by working for a company that organizes weddings. Mother did not explain to whom the man had impregnated her. Mother only told Kaseifu that her father was a brave and intelligent man, but Mother could not marry him [9].

3.2 Raise children and earn a living

The women who are not married and give birth to children out of wedlock take care of and raise their children while working like the characters Mama, Kaseifu, and Mother. After Papa died, Mama resigned herself to reality and decided to live with her children in the villa. Mama then worked in a hot spring which was quite far from where they lived. The children were locked up in the villa while Mama was working. Children are not in school. Instead, Mama herself taught the children. Children are given the task of taking care of the house and doing their hobbies. Mama was so frugal with money that Mama sewed children's clothes herself and cut their hair.

Even when the children are sick, Mama takes care of them without taking them to the doctor. So that the children do not know information outside, Mama does not provide communication tools at homes such as telephones or media such as TV and newspapers. Mama did not even throw a birthday party so the children would not know how old they were [8].

The character Kaseifu gives birth and raises her son, who is named Ruto. After giving birth, Kaseifu left her child in a daycare center while she worked during the day. After Ruto entered school age, Ruto was no longer entrusted, but Ruto waited for Kaseifu to come home from work in the apartment alone after school. Kaseifu is so frugal with his money that she does not take Ruto on a trip to the zoo or a children's play area, which will cost money. Kaseifu also did not invite Ruto to eat at the restaurant. Ruto has a small body size of children his age. Ruto became an obedient child [9].

Meanwhile, the Mother character is busy working and making her child independent from the age of a toddler. Her daughter Kaseifu had already washed his wet-weed pants at the age of two. Entering the age of five, Kaseifu is already good at cooking simple meals for her breakfast. At the age of 11, Kaseifu was independent and able to do various housework and even attended meetings at the neighbourhood association as a representative of her mother [9].

3.3 Resigned to fate

The three unmarried women characters are just resigned to their fate. Mama is designed to accept the villa and live a tough life alone without asking or receiving help from anyone. Mama's attitude that was too restrictive for her children made the teenagers rebel and run away from Mama. The character Mama cannot do anything about it and commits suicide after realizing that her children are gone [8].

Kaseifu's character is also resigned to fate but tries to be diligent in getting recognition as a reputable housemaid from the housemaid organization where she belongs. Kaseifu resignedly accepted the unpleasant treatment from the employer where she worked. Kaseifu also does not ask for help from her son's biological father, even though Kaseifu reads a newspaper report about her son's father being awarded for his achievement as a scientist [9].

Likewise, the character of the Mother is resigned to accepting her fate as a single mother and raising her child alone. The Mother works very hard to support herself and Kaseifu. The Mother does not want her daughter Kaseifu to be seen as a poor girl. Mother picks up the remnants of the wedding dress material and sews a lovely dress for Kaseifu. Their house was decorated with flowers leftover from the wedding, and Kaseifu was made to learn the piano with a piano player, Mother's colleague. Mother's persistence in working and accepting the fate of being tarnished when Kaseifu became pregnant out of wedlock like her [9].

4 Discussion

From the analysis of the novel data above, it is known that three mothers are pregnant out of wedlock and raise their children alone with all the efforts they have. These three women tried their best to meet the needs of their children. Mama is so frugal that she sacrifices her children's education. Kaseifu pays less attention to physical health so that her son is smaller than his age. The Mother ignores letting Kaseifu do things that are not yet at her age alone. Therefore, Kaseifu grows up to become a woman who only accepts her fate as a housemaid and does not try to find a job that might generate more money to support herself and her children.

Mama only receives devotement of breaking up from her children's biological fathers; Kaseifu tore pieces of newspapers containing information about her son's biological fathers. The Mother is only busy with work. These three women are resigned to living life as unmarried women but living illegitimate children with all their limitations. These three mothers did not show any resistance to getting a better or more decent life for themselves and their children. These three mothers even forced their children to accept their fate as they accepted their fate without protesting to their biological father or the state.

Why did these three mothers resign? In the case of Mama and Mother, this could be due to the marriage law in Japan, which is that a man can only have one wife if polygamy is considered a crime as told by a mother to her child that she was pregnant with a man she admired but could not marry [1]. However, the novel does not explain why she cannot get married; from the marriage law in Japan, which considers polygamy a crime, the mother character designated and stays silent about the situation she faces.

Likewise, Mama is resigned and silent when receiving denotement of breaking because her lover already has a wife. At the same time, Kaseifu has not received news about her child's biological father for a long time. When reading the newspaper, just tore pieces of the newspaper. According to the civil registration law in Japan, this is done because if a child is

not reported to the state by his biological father in the koseki, then the child will be considered an illegitimate child and automatically become his Mother's child. Illegitimate children do not get living and inheritance rights [1]. So, if the Koseifu meets the biological father of their child, legally, their country will not be recognized and will not get any rights.

From the explanation above, it is known that pregnant women out of wedlock in Japan, if they do not get legal recognition by the man who impregnates them, cannot do anything but resign themselves to their fate. The state also does not defend these women. Likewise, with children who are born, if they are not registered with the state like Mama's children, then they do not get any rights from the state such as education and health.

Research on women who are pregnant out of wedlock and illegitimate children in Japan has not been found. This happens because Japanese women have indirectly been silenced by men who legally impregnate them, and the state also does not support their rights to be included in the law. Pregnant women out of wedlock and raising children alone seem small in number. However, it is possible; they are silent because the patriarchal system in Japan has indirectly silenced them [2].

Especially at this time, the family system no longer applies where women are under the care of their father when they are young when they are married; they are under the responsibility of their husbands. When they are older, they are borne by their first son. With gender equality prevailing in Japan but still adhering to a patriarchal system that weakens women, women who do not marry and give birth to illegitimate children are marginalized in Japanese society [1] [2].

5 Conclusion

It can be concluded that unmarried women who give birth to illegitimate children are marginalized in Japanese society and systematically silenced. The current gender equality in Japan does not liberate women; instead, it forces Japanese women to remain silent because there is no support in the patriarchal system and no legal protection from the state. Applying the modern Japanese family concept with the current marriage system in Japan to collect and analyze data can be used to reveal the cause of the resignation of the unmarried women character who appears in the novels *Kohaku no Matataki* and *Hakase no Aishita sushiki* to their fate.

This research is limited to two Ogawa Yoko novels. The subsequent research examines the works of other novelists who reveal the problems of pregnant women out of wedlock and the fate of their children. It needs to be known whether Japanese women are generally silent about the problems they face because they are silenced systematically by the patriarchy and Japanese state law.

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