

THE REFLECTION OF *WABI SABI* IN THE NOVEL *JOSEITO* BY DAZAI OSAMU

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ABSTRACT

The research examined the life's perspective of the author that was reflected in wabi sabi in the novel 'Joseito' by Dazai Osamu. The life of the Joseito character described by Dazai Osamu in the Joseito novel had individual values (honno), and Joseito desired to equate it with collective values (tatema). However, Joseito could not unite the two contradictory values and accepted the contradiction. The method used was descriptive qualitative, with the sociology of literature approach and focused on the sociology of the author using the concept of wabi sabi. Data on wabi sabi were collected from reading Joseito's novels. The research results find that Dazai Osamu sincerely accepts the contradictions in Japanese society because Dazai can place himself where he is. Dazai is willing to accept contradictions in Japanese society by understanding the meaning of wabi sabi. He learns to appreciate, accept what it is, and be grateful for the contradictions in society because these contradictions can establish harmony in a beautifully ordered life through wabi sabi.

Keywords: collective values, honno, tatema, Japanese culture

INTRODUCTION

Tatema and *honno* are the Japanese cultures that show different attitudes and behaviors to look perfect. *Tatema* and *honno* have been around for a long time in Japan and have become a culture until now. Based on the results of Huriyah, Febrianty, and Kurniawan's research (2020), it is known that this *tatema* and *honno* culture will create harmony between humans, especially in Japanese society. Japanese society is accustomed to placing someone where he/she is, at home and outside. When they are outside, such as in the school environment, work, or society, their behavior and words become different to be guarded and polite to people. However, when they are at home, they are free to show their attitudes and words as they are (Nilamsari & Nugroho, 2020). This is what is called *tatema* and *honno*.

Zorana and Jim (2020) have explained that *tatema* is behavior that is displayed in public, while *honno* is a genuine feeling of oneself. Therefore, *tatema* and *honno* are related to each other; if someone is at home, they can freely use *honno*, but if outside, they have to use *tatema* that is made by a group of

Japanese people. It becomes norms and rules to create harmony for them (Iqbal, 2018). Even though the rules are not made by themselves, they have to be humble in front of others or lie with small talk that must be followed even if it does not fit their life's principles. It can be said that Japanese people follow the rules not based on their awareness but are forced to follow the rules or applicable laws (Sudarsih, 2018). However, these rules have been made for the common interest to achieve an orderly society.

On the other hand, *honno* is the voice of conscience felt by someone (Prativi, Budiarsa, & Erawati, 2019). This *honno* can be done at home or alone because a person can express his/her feelings and thoughts without caring about hurting others at home or alone. Therefore, Japanese people always bury their feelings outside the house by being someone else to look perfect. They try to keep their feelings and hide so that others cannot see them in order to create harmony in Japanese society (Senen & Piri, 2019). However, there is self-principle resistance from the *tatema* and *honno* culture, especially when someone uses *tatema* outside (Ristiawati, 2019).

There is a contradiction in the cultural use of

tatema and *hon*ne, which is reflected in Dazai Osamu's *Joseito* novel. The main character is a 14-year-old girl and hereinafter referred to as Joseito. Joseito is a self-depiction of the author, namely Dazai Osamu. Joseito has personal values in her life so that there are contradictions in collective values, one of which is the *tatema* and *hon*ne culture. Joseito disapproves of this culture because she has to pretend to be someone else by telling lies that do not suit her life principles. In the novel, the main character says that Joseito likes the value of life that exists in Joseito's and wants to equate it with collective values when dealing with other people (Osamu, 1997).

From the previous statement, it can be seen that Dazai has a contradiction between personal values and collective values. He instead follows the collective values, even though he hates his actions. Increasingly, Dazai realizes that by carrying out collective values that are acceptable to society, he would accept them sincerely. Dazai realizes that he could not change this world himself at will and has to follow the culture in which he is. Therefore, Dazai understands that living in society is more about respecting and not worrying about living life because simply and slowly, it will get the true value of life (Cooper, 2018). By the concept of *wabi sabi*.

Dazai himself clearly does not explain the application of *wabi sabi* in his life due to the contradictions in *tatema* and *hon*ne. However, the depiction of Joseito's character, who tries to make peace and seeks harmony in interacting with the environment, shows that other values are reflected in Dazai life, namely *wabi sabi*.

Wabi sabi is a Zen Buddhism teaching, which is the concept of a perspective on life believed by Japanese people that this life full of imperfections that have something of beauty (Orgad, 2017). According to Cahyaningati (2018), *wabi sabi* is an imperfection or incompleteness by looking simply and inferiorly to create beauty in it.

Thus, the concept of *wabi sabi* can answer the question why is Dazai Osamu, through his character Joseito, willing to accept the contradiction between personal values and collective values in Japanese culture. Dazai, who originally wants to equalize these two values, is unable to accept these two values in his life. Besides, Dazai also always sees things as bad and not by the value of his life, but he increasingly realizes that bad is not always bad because there is also beauty in it. The research reveals the application of *wabi sabi* by Dazai Osamu through the character of Joseito, how Dazai is dealing with the contradiction of *tatema* and *hon*ne, and finds the meaning of *wabi sabi* in the novel *Joseito*.

The novel *Joseito* (female student), published in 1939, has brought the name of its author, Dazai Osamu, to prominence in Japanese literature at that time. Besides, many of his literary works have been translated into foreign languages outside Japanese and filmed (Odagiri, 2020). Dazai, in writing his works, mostly tells stories in an autobiographical style

(Mulyaningrum, Dian, & Haryono 2020) or is referred to as the author of the I-Novel (*watakushishosetsu*) (Gantar, 2017). That way, it is by the research to see the world view of the author about *wabi sabi* in the case of Joseito in the novel *Joseito* by Dazai Osamu. The research aims to reveal Dazai Osamu's views on life, which are willing to accept the contradictions in Japanese culture, namely *tatema* and *hon*ne, because Dazai understands *wabi sabi*. Therefore, to answer, it uses the concept of *wabi sabi* to be able to see the view of life from this wisdom.

METHODS

The research applies a sociological literature approach. There are three problems in the sociology of literature, namely the sociology of the author, literary works whose content is social, and the impact of literature that occurs in the community (Safari, 2018). The research focuses on the sociology of the author to see his ideology related to society, namely the *tatema* and *hon*ne culture, and to link with the concept of *wabi sabi*. Therefore, the research uses the concept of *wabi sabi* to see the author's views on the Joseito case in the novel. *Wabi sabi* comes from two separate words, namely *wabi* and *sabi*, both of which are related to each other that originated from the zen teachings of Buddhism.

Terao (1971) defines *wabi* as a world full of squalor, sadness, poverty, disappointment, loneliness, and winter scenery that is received with serenity, simplicity, and poverty that flows wealth that the world has many colors. Furthermore, the first *sabi* is faded, cold, lonely (unpleasant), the second *sabi* is an old inn, and the third *sabi* finally has the meaning of *sabi* itself.

Besides, there is a culture of *tatema* and *hon*ne, which causes contradictions in Dazai and wants to equate them with personal values, but he cannot. According to Doi (2005), *tatema* is a certain formal principle that applies to all the people concerned so that the harmony of a group is guaranteed, while *hon*ne is the feeling or opinion they hold privately regarding any matter.

Thus, the method used is descriptive qualitative. The qualitative descriptive method (Ratna, 2012) is a method that uses the object as the center of research by analyzing and describing it. The object used in this research is the novel *Joseito* by Dazai Osamu. Furthermore, the researchers read all of *Joseito*'s novels, collect data related to the concept of *wabi sabi*, and then classify them. After that, the data are analyzed to answer the problems in this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section describes the *wabi* and *sabi* accepted and approved by Dazai Osamu, thereby leading to accepting the contradiction between personal and collective values. Dazai has a personal

value to life that he thinks the values he understands are correct, and the people around him are wrong, so he wants to equalize personal values to collective values. The collective value is the *tatemae* and *honne* culture practiced by Japanese society at home and outside, such as at school, office, or in society. Japanese society uses *tatemae* when meeting strangers. As in the Joseito novel, when meeting other people, namely workers, Mother's guests, and Kinko, her best friend, the main character always applies the *ojigi* culture to greet them and *omotenashi* in serving guests.

The culture of greeting Japanese people has become a tradition, one of which is *ojigi*. It is a gesture of bowing as a sign of respect for other known or unknown people (Harun & Biduri, 2019). However, because Joseito has individual values, people who behave inappropriately by harassing him do not deserve to be greeted and respected. This is evidenced in this quote.

その労働者たちは、いつもの例で、言えないような厭な言葉を私に向かって吐きかける。私は、どうしたらよいかと迷ってしまった。その労働者たちを追い抜いて、どンドンさきに行ってしまうのだが、そうするには、労働者たちの間を縫ってぐり抜け、すり抜けしなければならぬ。おっかない。それと言って、黙って立ちんぼせて、労働者たちをさきに行かせて、うんと距離のできるまで待っているのは、もっともって胆力の要ることだ。それは失礼なことなのだから、労働者たちは怒るかも知れない。からだは、カッカして来るし、泣きそうになってしまった。私は、その泣きそうになるのが恥ずかしくて、そ者達に向かって笑ってやった。そして、ゆっくりと、そ者達のあとについて歩いていった。そのときは、それ限りになってしまったけれど、その口惜しさは、電車に乗ってからも消えなかった (Osamu, 1997).

("The workers, as usual, had unspeakable words to me. I wonder what should I do. I wanted to overtake the workers and leave indifferently, but to do so, I had to sneak past the workers. Horrible. Therefore, it was even worse to stand still, and send the workers forward, then wait until they were far away. The workers may be angry because it is rude. My body hurts and I almost cry. I was embarrassed and cried then smiled at them. And slowly, I walked after them. At that time, that was the limit, but the regret did not go away even after I got on the train.")

Whenever Joseito meets the workers, they always say inappropriate things to Joseito, so she tries not to bump into them and tries hard to smile if it cannot be avoided. Joseito thinks workers who always badmouthed themselves do not deserve to be respected, let alone greet them. However, because of the *tatemae*, Joseito has to follow a culture that has been created by smiling and forgetting his values. Likewise, when Joseito meets Kinko, her best friend at school. Joseito hates Kinko, who wants to be controlled by her parents. However, Joseito cannot tell Kinko her values, as it could damage their friendly relationship. Joseito continues to practice *tatemae* culture to maintain harmony for their friendship.

Joseito does the same with the mother's guest, who is two-faced. The mother's guest says that the dishes cooked by Joseito are the best even though it is Joseito's worst dish. Joseito hates the deeds that are good at saying sweet things, but because there is a culture of *omotenashi*, which considers guests as kings who must be served well (Palandi, 2020). Joseito hates pretense so that she thinks that mother's guests are not worthy of being served and doing good to them, but the *omotenashi* keeps Joseito serving them. This is evidenced in this quote.

よし、もう嘘は、つくまいと屹つとなつて、「こんなお料理、ちつともおいしくございませぬ。なんにもないので、私の窮余の一策なんですよ」と、私は、ありのまま事実を、言つたつもりなのに、今井田さん御夫婦は、窮余の一策とは、うまいことをおっしゃる、と手を拍たんばかりに笑い興じるのである。私は、口惜しくて、お箸とお茶碗ほおり出して、大声あげて泣こうかして思つた。じつとこらえて、無理に、にやにや笑つて見せたら、お母さんまでが、「この子も、だんだん役に立つようになりなしたよ」と、お母さん、私のかなしい気持、ちゃんとわかっているしやる癖に、今井田さんの気持を迎えるために、そんなくだらないことを言つて、ほほと笑つた (Osamu, 1997).

("Well, lies are no longer lies, and I said, 'This dish is not at all good. That's my lowest measure because it's nothing,' I put the facts straight. However, Mr. and Mrs. Imaida laughed as if they were clapping their hands, saying that one of the lowest measures is good. I'm sorry to say that and I feel like throwing the chopsticks and bowl and crying out loud. When I wanted to do it, I forcefully smiled and showed it, even my mother said, 'This child is becoming more and more useful,' he said. Instead, I said silly things and smiled with a smile.")

From the data, it shows that Joseito, who represents Dazai, uses *tatemae* in the surrounding community, but when talking to himself, Dazai uses *honne*. When using *honne*, Dazai has a personal value that people who demonize themselves do not deserve to be greeted. Likewise, people who are very evident in their speech do not deserve to be treated well. Dazai also thinks that women must have a principle in life, namely that women should not be matched.

Even so, Dazai keeps on doing his *tatemae*, meaning that Dazai wants to follow the collective values, namely the *ojigi* and *omotenashi* culture. Thus, Dazai could not equate personal values with collective values, so he accepts the contradiction. However, when he talks to himself, he maintains his values that he considers people who pretend to have hurt themselves to be like himself. Dazai does it because he understands *wabi*; he accepts the contradiction that where it is bad, there must be good.

Dazai feels *wabi*, so he accepts contradictions, which initially he hates rude people, double-faced people, and people who have no principles. However, he increasingly realizes that he accepts them all as they are and continues to carry out the *tatemae* culture. It is because Dazai thinks that humans must feel disappointment that someday will be replaced by accepting it with simplicity, like the concept of *wabi*, namely accepting differences.

Apart from using *tatemae* with other people, Joseito also uses *honne*, namely when looking in the mirror, being a model for Mr. Ito, and seeing women. When looking in the mirror, he sees his ugly and blurry eyes that he is wearing glasses, as seen in the following quote.

眼鏡をかけないで、鏡を覗くと、顔が、少しぼやけて、しっとり見える (Osamu, 1997).

(“Without glasses and looking in the mirror, my face is slightly blurry and looks moist.”)

However, she prefers not to wear glasses because she cannot see ugly people, and there is no need to speak ill of them. This is evidenced in the following quote.

それに、眼鏡をはずしている時は、決して人と喧嘩をしようなんて思わないし、悪口も言いたくなようなんて思わないし、悪口も言いたくない。た、 (Osamu, 1997).

(“Moreover, when I took off my glasses, I had never had to argue with anyone, nor did I feel the need to make snide comments...”)

Likewise, when she becomes Mr. Ito’s model, she does not fight back when Mr. Ito, the teacher, always teases him with words that are difficult to answer. It can be seen from this quote.

返事するのも面倒くさく、わずらわしい。ハッキリしない人である (Osamu, 1997).

(“I feel bothered and annoyed to reply. Someone who is unclear.”)

From the quote, Mr. Ito does not stop teasing her, so she could only listen and not fight back. Because in Japan, teachers are a highly respected profession so that no one will go against the teacher’s orders or what is called *sensei* (Fatonah, 2017).

Joseito also hates fakes and prefers simplicity, such as women full of falsehoods, wearing clothes full of accessories, and using thick powder. It is like a *geisha* who works to serve men by using thick makeup, beautiful faces, smooth skin, graceful speech, and gentle behavior (Puspitasari, 2018). It is all done because of work demands to get lots of guests. However, Joseito does not like women like that. When she sees a woman who is full of thick makeup in the novel, she mutters to herself by saying that the woman is disgusting, along with the quote.

けさ、電車で隣り合せた厚化粧のおばさんをも思い出す。ああ、汚い、汚い。女は、いやだ (Osamu, 1997).

(“Earlier, on the train, I remembered the aunt beside me who was wearing thick makeup. Ooh dirty, dirty. I don’t like girls.”)

Joseito represents Dazai’s personal values towards others, such as someone who behaved not according to his job and a woman who is too much in wearing makeup, but Dazai just mutters in his heart. He is still using collective values, namely *tatemae*, by not disclosing it to others about their values. Therefore, Dazai understands *wabi* that every human being is not lonely. It means that humans have a bad side in themselves and accept a world with various colors.

Apart from herself, Joseito does *honne* to her dog, Kaa, Mother, and the man with glasses. To Kaa, she does not hesitate to do and say inappropriate things to Kaa along with the data.

カア、早く、山の中にでも行きなさい。おまえは誰にも可愛がられないのだから、早く死ねばいい (Osamu, 1997).

(“Kaa, hurry up, please go into the forest. Nobody loves you, so you have to die quickly.”)

Kaa is a crippled dog with one leg and is dirty, so no one loves it. People tell Kaa to go to the forest and can soon die peacefully in the forest itself. Apart from that, to Mother, Joseito also says what has been stored in her mind that she has something more than her mother thought. She is now a grown child and can

exchange ideas if her mother wishes. Likewise, for the bespectacled man she meets on the train, she also uses *honne* because she is angry that her seat has been taken. This is evidenced in the following quote.

そうして坐ろうとしたら、眼鏡の男の人が、ちゃんと私のお道具をどけて席に腰かけてしまった。「あの、そこは私、見つけた席ですの」と言ったら、男は苦笑して平気で新聞を読み出した(Osamu, 1997).

(“And when I tried to sit down, the bespectacled man moved my things and sat on the chair. When I said ‘Oh, that’s the chair I found’, the man smiled and read the newspaper quietly.”)

Even though Joseito uses *honne* on Kaa, Mother, and bespectacled, she is still an obedient and polite child. Joseito feels guilty for saying inappropriate things to Kaa and promises to love Kaa, as seen in the following quote.

カアは、可哀想。けさは、意地悪してやったけれど、あすは、かわいがってあげます(Osamu, 1997).

(“Kaa, I’m sorry. Earlier I was cruel to you, but tomorrow I am sorry. I was going to be cruel to you, but tomorrow I am sorry.”)

Likewise, Joseito’s mother says that she is not a child anymore. It seems Joseito does not like that her mother still sees her as a child, but she realizes that she only has a mother. Because of that, she gives up if her mother still considers her a child. She also says her heart to the bespectacled man on the train. She just lets it go and do not get angry or take her chair back forcibly. She treats both with not much different. It can be seen in this data.

お母さんたら、ちっとも私を信頼しないで、まだまだ、子供あつかいにしている(Osamu, 1997).

(“But still mother always treats me like a child, without even believing in me.”)

In the end, Joseito, who represented Dazai, realizes that collective values are still done to loving pets, obeying parents, and being polite to elders. Because in Japan, the children have been taught to respect and manner others, especially the elders (Sudarsih, 2019). Therefore, Dazai accepts this collective value, even though he has expressed his heart because of his understanding of *wabi*.

In Dazai’s perspective, *wabi* is the feeling that sometimes to be yourself and accept the shortcomings because the world has many colors, some are good and some are evil. At first, Dazai feels that he is doing

something bad by saying what is in his heart and realizes he is wrong to do that. However, nothing is perfect; people must have made mistakes.

By looking at these data, Dazai accepts the contradiction in values in his life because he feels and understands *wabi*. That way, *wabi* can be taken as a lesson that the world is full of complexity where humans live with falsehoods and must accept it with a relaxed life.

Next, it examines the *sabi* in the novel *Joseito* by Dazai Osamu. *Sabi* explains that everything created in this world is beautiful even though it is ugly and worn out. However, behind that ugliness, there are interesting stories without human intervention. Likewise, Joseito always sees the ugliness of others, and Joseito does not like those who are two-faced, have no decency, and are harassing. Subconsciously, Joseito did the same thing, like when with Mother, she can pretend to be the child her mother wants. Apart from that, Joseito also pretends to be someone else in society. She is always nice to those she does not like. In this respect, Joseito also has the same ugliness as anyone else that she does not like.

Therefore, Joseito realizes more because she is used to be pretending so that she accepts the collective value because she understands the meaning of *sabi*. Everything is created because it has become a habit over time, and one understands that there is no perfection because there are stories or beautiful memories that can be told into a lesson.

Like when she sees the *furoshiki* and umbrella that her mother gives her, Joseito proudly brings a worn *furoshiki* to carry her things to school and a tattered umbrella. All these things have been stored in the cupboard so that they have faded, both in color and shape. However, she likes the *furoshiki* and the umbrella and takes them to school, as in the following quote.

綺麗な女らしい風呂敷。綺麗だから、結ぶのが惜しい(Osamu, 1997).

(“Pretty and feminine *furoshiki*. Because it’s so beautiful, it’s a shame to tie it up.”)

面白い傘を見つけて、私は、少し得意(Osamu, 1997).

(“I’m proud to have found such an attractive umbrella.”)

According to Joseito, the *furoshiki* and the umbrella makes her remember her mother while using them. She uses these things often because memories can be told in these two objects. That way, Joseito, who represents Dazai, understands *sabi*, which is accepting the ugliness of others and himself because, in this world, nothing is perfect. These differences make it more beautiful. Besides, for ugly things, Dazai appreciates them and is proud to carry them anywhere

because even though they are ugly and worn out, there are memories of using them in the past so that they learn to be grateful.

Wabi sabi explains that happiness is created by accepting everything that happens in life even though it is not as wished because there is always beauty behind all of them. Joseito, who represented Dazai Osamu, accepts the contradiction between personal values and collective values created by Japanese society, the *tatemaie* and *honne* cultures. Dazai always applies his arrangement when with other people. However, Dazai disliked them, which is incompatible with his values. Even so, Dazai does not oppose and follow this collective value, which is to remain polite, obedient, and respectful to them.

As for the *honne*, Dazai uses it on those closest to him and when he can no longer hold back his heart. Even though Dazai uses *honne* on them, Dazai feels guilty. Dazai does and accepts all the contradictions in him for understanding *wabi sabi*. Dazai understands that the world is complicated and that the human being is a fake. He cannot change it, so he follows it or accepts it sincerely. Humans are like that; there are good and bad. Therefore, by understanding the teachings of *wabi sabi*, one can accept it with a calm heart to live life in a relaxed manner and enjoy the beauty in this complicated world.

CONCLUSIONS

Dazai Osamu, the author of the novel *Joseito* indirectly describes himself in the novel. Dazai rejects the contradiction in the values of his life that are contrary to collective values and wants to equate them. However, more and more, Dazai realizes and indirectly applies collective values to him, even though he still uses his values when others do not know them. That way, Dazai accepts the contradictions in Japanese society, one of which is the *tatemaie* and *honne* culture.

Dazai continues to use the *tatemaie* when out with other people and uses *honne* when at home. Therefore, Dazai sincerely accepts the collective values created by the community. Dazai does it because he understands the meaning of *wabi sabi*, that there are aesthetics or life lessons that teach about a world that is mortal and imperfect, full of falsehoods and complexity. With this concept, there is a balance in it, and he can enjoy it in a relaxed way without rushing. At last, Dazai can see the complexities of this world with beauty by reconciling the contradictions of *tatemaie* and *honne* through *wabi sabi* and reflecting the *wabi sabi* through the novel *Joseito*.

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