



ISSN: 0976-3031

Available Online at <http://www.recentscientific.com>

CODEN: IJRSFP (USA)

*International Journal of Recent Scientific Research*  
Vol. 9, Issue, 4(B), pp. 25625-25627, April, 2018

**International Journal of  
Recent Scientific  
Research**

DOI: 10.24327/IJRSR

## Research Article

# SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF LIFE IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF YASUNARI KAWABATA

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijrsr.2018.0904.1894>

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2018  
Received in revised form 21<sup>st</sup>  
February, 2018  
Accepted 05<sup>th</sup> March, 2018  
Published online 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2018

#### Key Words:

Socio-Cultural, Wartime Literature,  
Modern, Tradition.

### ABSTRACT

My research is based on Japan's about the Wartime Literature of Yasunari Kawabata's selected novels. Kawabata's fiction combines elements of modern and traditional literature. Kawabata often focused on retaining traditional culture in the face of the modern world as the subject of his fiction. He presented and defended such traditional Japanese forms as the tea ceremony in *Thousand Cranes*, the game of Go in *The Master of Go*, folk art in Kyoto in *The Old Capital*, and *Snow Country* his farewell to the geisha as artisan and feminine ideal. Kawabata never wrote about political turmoil, but instead focused on personal and spiritual crises. His major themes included loneliness, alienation, the meaninglessness and fleeting nature of human passion, aging, and death.

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### INTRODUCTION

Yasunari Kawabata's *The Thousand Cranes* is a luminous story of desire, regret, and the almost sensual nostalgia that binds the living to the dead. In the background, there is the symbol of the tea ceremony. It is a symbol of Japanese tradition that outlines the brief human life. The performers of the tea ceremony may die eventually but the utensils, such as the tea bowls, remain intact as they are passed on, generation after generation, along with the practice of the ceremony. However, there is also the deterioration of such a tradition derived from the introduction of western values. While simultaneously exploring the fragile nature of the broken heart, fragmented identity, and eternal longing all elements caged by existential decay. The tea ceremony provides a beautiful background for ugly human affairs, but Kawabata's intent is rather to explore feelings about death. The tea ceremony utensils are permanent and forever, whereas people are frail and fleeting.

There is gnawing sentiment of loneliness embedded in the core of the tale. This isn't unusual of Kawabata as most of his works are meditations on some form of loneliness, alienation, and silent submission. Kawabata lived in a time that was characterized by drastic shifts. On one hand, much of the Japanese society was moving towards a rapid modernism both

in attitude and art while on the other, still trying to retain their cultural and historical identity.

Yasunari Kawabata called *The Old Capital* the product of his ideological alienation which told a group of Kyoto people's pains and joys in changing times as well as expressed his regret of the traditional features that were then being lost in the ancient capital and his concerns about the city's future development trends. He was good at fusing nationality, internationality and sense of the times together in his work. Therefore, in Kawabata's literature, Japanese tradition, Japanese history, Japanese cultural accumulation and Japanese aesthetic consciousness can be all captured through his keen senses.

*The Old Capital* is set in post war Japan and as the translator points out is filled with a melancholy feeling about Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan. The old capital refers to Kyoto. The delicate novel traces the legacy of beauty and tradition from one generation of artists to the next as they navigate, with an ambivalent mixture of regret and fascination, the complex world of postwar Japan. This simple story of chance, art, and devotion resounds with deep spiritual and human understanding. The novel necessarily was closely related to a series of changes after Japan's defeat. It showed Kyoto people's state of life in the transitional period. The novel depicts the loneliness and rootlessness. It was known as the

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place in Japan where many of the innovations from the west were first adopted. Kawabata's novel can be seen as a declaration of love to Kyoto. The city is a symbol of high art and cultural heritage and the heart of traditional Japan. Kyoto is known for its cultural refinement in every way you can think of Japanese art. The most important works of art and traditional Japanese culture are located in Kyoto. He is describing the nature minutely detailed. He emphasizes nature, because it is stronger than man himself. The meeting of tradition and modernity is one of the central themes to the old capital.

Yasunari Kawabata's *Snow Country* is to promote the beauty of landscape in Japan, the Japanese culture and to lead the readers to reach an ultimate conclusion that nothing or no one in this universe is totally sincere, honest or pure and nothing or no one is completely false or fake. The author tries to promote Japan where he puts his eyes on the traditional Japan. He puts culture, feminism and aspects of love in harmony. Kawabata created a play of dualities. He juxtaposes real and unreal, past and present, city and country, summer and winter, youth and ageing, pleasure and pain, art and amateurism, a wife and a lover, material beauty and intangible beauty, fire and snow, light and darkness, and life and death.

It presents the complexity of human relationships, isolation, loneliness. One of the abstruse themes of the novel is the theme of change. The most basic of interpretations will situate snow country as traditional Japan. It symbolizes conservatism. People live in traditional neighbourhood that shares pure values of living together. The place is built under the idea to serve visitors, to make them feel the hospitality of the villagers wrapped by the nature.

In Japanese culture, women are expected to be obedient to men. The beauty of women, not only physical, but also their intellectual capability and talents was highlighted in the novel. Women's helplessness as a sign of being weak is also manifested. The entire culture supports masculine authority in all areas of life. Patriarchy really affects the lifestyle of Japanese where men take more superior role than women.

*The Master of Go* is an example of Kawabata's theme of tradition versus modernization, using the traditional Japanese game of Go. Go symbolized an entire way of life, both literally and figuratively. Kawabata uses the two players to reflect images of a Japan that is fading and the Japan to be. It conveys a feel for the ruptures of broader cultural change as well as the intensity of the individual conflict. Go is Japan's ancient game of strategy and a Go match is concerned with the game itself, and with respect for tradition and ancient rites. Kawabata's retelling of the match reflects the tension between old traditions and new pragmatism. He of course acknowledges its origins in China, but argues that the game was refined to its highest level in Japan. The novel can be read at many levels between old and young, love and power, traditional and modern, art and science, the past and the future, life and death.

The master is a symbol of a Japan that disappeared in world war second. The game can be viewed as a symbol of the fall of imperialist Japan against the new era of modern rationalism. It can be fairly regarded as his major work on the theme of the loss that he observed in the historic change. The novel is obviously a critique of modernization. Japanese tradition

against modernism and the story was also interpreted as the loss of Japanese aristocratic values.

Kawabata memorably depicted Japanese ceremonies, traditions and landmarks and developed some idiosyncratic artistic methods. Kawabata invoked the cultural riches of traditional Japan, such as the tea ceremonies in *Thousand Cranes* or the refined go strategies in the *Master of Go* in order to question the place of such riches in an evolving modern world. Yasunari Kawabata, is often cited as one of the representative Japanese novelists of the modern era, especially in light of his concern with the conflict between tradition and modernity. To enjoy Kawabata is to embrace ambiguity yet he is clear about the loss of tradition. Many of his works are concerned with the decline of traditional Japanese cultural icons. *Snow Country* treats the decline of the institution of the geisha, *Thousand Cranes*, the decline of the tea ceremony, and *The Master of Go* the decline of the traditional system of Go.

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**How to cite this article:**

Sanaa Afreen H.G.2018, Socio-Cultural Aspects of Life in the Selected Novels of Yasunari Kawabata. *Int J Recent Sci Res*. 9(4), pp. 25625-25627. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24327/ijrsr.2018.0904.1894>

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