

Kesetaraan Gender dalam Novel *Tsubame Kinenbi* Karya Shigematsu Kiyoshi

Gender Equality in Shigematsu Kiyoshi's Novel *Tsubame Kinenbi*

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Abstrak

Novel *Tsubame Kinenbi* karya Shigematsu Kiyoshi, yang diterbitkan pada 15 Maret 2008, mengeksplorasi kehidupan sebuah keluarga yang menghadapi tantangan pengasuhan anak dan tantangan profesional di Jepang. Narasi ini berfokus pada ibu Yuki, yang menghadapi hambatan besar dalam reintegrasi ke dunia kerja setelah cuti melahirkan dan cuti pengasuhan anak, menyoroti hambatan sosial dan di tempat kerja yang sering dihadapi oleh ibu yang bekerja. Studi ini menganalisis bagaimana novel ini membangun kesetaraan gender dan menggambarkan peran gender, menggunakan deskriptif analisis untuk menyelami makna narasi dan pemikiran karakter. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun ada kebijakan pendukung seperti cuti melahirkan dan cuti paternitas, peran gender tradisional dan ekspektasi sosial tetap ada. Novel ini juga membahas reaksi komunitas terhadap aktivitas pengasuhan anak dan menggambarkan dinamika pernikahan yang mendukung di mana kedua pasangan aktif berpartisipasi dalam pengasuhan anak dan pengembangan pribadi, menantang norma gender konvensional. *Tsubame Kinenbi* mengadvokasi pergeseran menuju tanggung jawab orang tua yang dibagi dan sistem dukungan yang lebih baik, mempromosikan pendekatan yang seimbang terhadap kesetaraan gender dan menekankan kompleksitas berkelanjutan dalam mencapai kesetaraan tersebut di Jepang modern.

Kata kunci: Kesetaraan Gender, Novel Jepang, Pengasuhan Anak, Shigematsu Kiyoshi, *Tsubame Kinenbi*



Abstract

Shigematsu Kiyoshi's novel Tsubame Kinenbi, published on March 15, 2008, explores the life of a family navigating child-rearing and professional challenges in Japan. The narrative focuses on Yuki's mother, who faces significant hurdles reintegrating into the workforce after maternity and childcare leaves, spotlighting the societal and workplace obstacles that working mothers often encounter. This study analyzes how the novel constructs gender equality and portrays gender roles, using descriptive analysis to delve into narrative meaning and character thought. The findings reveal that despite supportive policies like maternity and paternity leave, traditional gender roles and societal expectations persist. The novel also addresses community reactions to child-rearing activities and depicts a supportive marital dynamic where both partners actively participate in parenting and personal development, challenging conventional gender norms. Tsubame Kinenbi advocates for a shift towards shared parental responsibilities and better support systems, promoting a balanced approach to gender equality and emphasizing the ongoing complexities in achieving such equality in modern Japan.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Japanese Novel, Raising Children, Shigematsu Kiyoshi, Tsubame Kinenbi

INTRODUCTION

First, I will introduce the short biography of Shigematsu Kiyoshi, and then provide a summary of the story to make the analysis easy to understand. Shigematsu Kiyoshi was born in 1963 in Okayama and graduated from the Department of Education at Waseda University. He made his debut as a writer in 1991 with his first work, 『ビフォア・ラン』. In 1999, his work entitled 『ナイフ』 /*Naifu* won the 14th Tsubota Jouji Bungakushou Literature Prize (第14回坪田譲治文学賞/*Dai 14kai Tsubota Jouji Bungakushou*), and his work 『エイジ』 /*Eiji* also won the 12th Yamamoto Shuugoroshou Literature Prize (山本周五郎賞/*Yamamoto Shuugoroshou*). In 2000, his work entitled 『ビタミンF』 /*Bitamin F* won the 124th Naokishou Literature Prize (直木賞/*Naokishou*) (Shigematsu, 2008).

The novel *Tsubame Kinenbi* was published on March 15, 2008. The story revolves around a letter written by a father (referred to as Papa) to his daughter named Yuki, who is soon to be married, on her birthday. The letter describes their family life when she was born and the struggles faced by her parents as they raised her. It recounts the challenges her mother experienced when she returned to work after maternity leave and childcare leave. The father asks Yuki to keep the letter he wrote for her mother. He describes how her mother encountered difficulties after returning to work following more than a year of maternity and childcare leave. Her mother was the first female worker to hold a position with prospects of promotion in her office, the first female employee who did not resign after becoming pregnant, and the first to take maternity leave. As a result, she did not have a senior role model to guide her.

On the other hand, she had to be a role model for her junior colleagues and face particular scrutiny from her coworkers. The outcome of her success or failure would impact decisions regarding permanent employment for female workers in her office. The father also recounts their life before Yuki was born when they were DINKs (Double Income No Kids), meaning a couple who worked independently without children, allowing them to have dual incomes and spend it on themselves (Saito, 1995). Initially, Yuki's mother did not want to have a child, but her perspective changed, and she decided to have a child. The main story of the novel explores their life after Yuki's birth.

The novel was published in 2008. The DINKs (Double Income No Kids) trend was popular around 1980, so it can be inferred that the story is set around that time, and Yuki is approximately 28 years old. This calculation is based on subtracting 1980 (the year when the DINKs trend was popular) from 2008 (the publication year), resulting in 28 years. To summarize the story's content mentioned above, it focuses on the challenges faced by the female character, Yuki's mother, upon her return to work after maternity leave. The story's themes are closely related to gender equality, making it an interesting subject for investigation. This is the primary reason why I have chosen this novel for analysis in relation to gender equality.

According to Buchbinder (1991), discourse refers to the act of discussing ideas, and feminist literary theory posits that gender has an influence on poetry and literature. The creation and interpretation of texts are influenced by the societal assignment of feminine or masculine identities and the unequal social power associated with them. In traditional and contemporary poetics, gender is often disregarded, with masculinity prevailing despite the focus on universal human nature. While certain theories, like New Criticism, acknowledge the embodiment of gender in texts, others such as Russian Formalists, Marxists, and post-structuralists do not consider gender to be influential. Psychoanalytic theories tend to overlook potential gender differences. The feminine is frequently metaphorically portrayed in literature, conveying notions of moral virtue, spiritual perception, and natural emotion. However, this representation fails to account for the distinct social and literary experiences that differentiate women and men (Buchbinder, 1991).

Flotow (1997) explains that the concept of gender expanded beyond biology with post-war feminism. Society shapes individuals assigned female at birth into women through education and conditioning influenced by cultural, subcultural, ethnic, and religious contexts. Gender encompasses the sociocultural construction of both males and females and emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a way to understand the social discrepancies and disadvantages experienced by women in various aspects of life (Flotow, 1997).

Boserup (1970) discusses the preference for male workers over female workers in the economic sphere. In many developing countries, equal wages are mandated regardless of gender. However, women's benefits such as maternity leave and exemption from night duty make it more cost-effective for employers to hire male workers, particularly hindering women's employment in major industries.

In Japan itself, gender equality is still difficult to realize even though Japan is one of the countries that agreed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Among the international human rights treaties, the Convention takes an important place in bringing the female half of humanity into the focus of human rights concerns. The spirit of the Convention is rooted in the goals of the United Nations: to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity, and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women.

The following research shows that gender inequality still exists in various fields up to the last two decades. Chiavacci's (2005) study reveals a two-sided scenario of social equality in Japan. While fair income distribution receives strong support, gender equality in the family and the job market remains weak. However, there is a growing awareness of income inequality and changes in traditional gender roles within families. The study aims to deepen the understanding of equality in Japan by interviewing elite university graduates employed in foreign affiliate companies. These companies are noteworthy due to their reputation for offering better career opportunities for women compared to Japanese companies. Notably, the success of FACs draws special attention, as they exhibit higher performance-related pay, distinct promotion systems, and improved career prospects for women in comparison to their Japanese counterparts.

This is still corroborated by research conducted by Abe (2013) stating that Japan still lags behind other developed countries in terms of gender equality, despite having the Equal Employment Opportunity Law since 1985. This article discusses the institutional conditions that influence gender equality in the workplace and highlights the ongoing challenges in Japan. The article explores several factors that can promote gender equality, including strong anti-discrimination laws, an education system that accommodates women's academic abilities, supportive market conditions for women's work-life balance, and access to contraception methods that empower women to make reproductive decisions.

Tomizawa's research (2012) highlights Japan's ongoing lag in achieving gender equality compared to other developed countries. To enhance the work environment for female surgeons, it is crucial to respect the opinions of female surgeons. The Women Surgeons Committee of the Japan Surgical Society (JSS) conducted two surveys, spaced three years apart, to assess the representation of female board members and directors within the Japanese Association of Medical Sciences. The findings indicate limited progress, with only one female director appointed in non-surgical medical societies over the past three years. In 2011, none of the 12 surgical societies had female directors. Despite the JSS's establishment in 1899, there has never been a female surgeon elected as a director, and presently, there are no female board members due to the new election system.

Saito's study (2017) explores the inseparable gender relationship between men as breadwinners and women as caregivers in family care. The aim of the study is to understand the significance of male caregivers in achieving gender equality in family care. The research emphasizes that when men engage in caregiving, they are confronted with their own masculinity, challenging the perception that care and masculinity are contradictory. It highlights the importance of recognizing that caregiving is not solely a women's responsibility and involves men without compromising their masculine

identity. To promote gender equality in family care, the study suggests implementing diverse support programs for caregivers and enacting sustainable legislation.

Research conducted by Kobayashi & Eweje in 2021 examines the barriers to gender equality in Japan. Despite aspirations to achieve gender equality in government and corporations, there remains a gap between expectations and actual outcomes. The analysis suggests that companies and key stakeholders such as shareholders, customers, employees, policymakers, spouses, parents, children, and school teachers are responsible for perpetuating these barriers by clinging to rational myths. To overcome these barriers, the government, corporations, and key stakeholders need to collaborate in eliminating them and creating a new reality.

Iwao (1996) says in his article that Japanese companies distinguish the type of jobs by their sex. According to Iwao, it had been the tradition in Japanese companies to assign women to a special secretarial career track and to deny them access to managerial positions. But recently, women have been given access to both the secretarial career track and the management track, and as a result, the number of women pursuing managerial jobs has grown substantially. However, a significant number of women have been given management training by their company only to resign to attend to family concerns. This has caused some large companies to rethink their dual career track policy for women.

Based on the explanation above, it is clear, firstly, that sex is determined biologically since birth, while gender refers to the social roles associated with each gender. Second, gender inequality still occurs in several fields. All of this is because different societies have their own expectations about gender, which are influenced by values, social norms, religion, and other factors. Furthermore, how is the world of literature in Japan? The world of literature in Japan is also suspected of still carrying narratives with unequal gender positions. According to feminist literary theory, all literature is influenced by gender, indicating that literary works can reflect social phenomena, including gender equality.

This paper aims to analyze how gender equality is constructed in the novel *Tsubame no Kinenbi* by Shigematsu Kiyoshi and attempts to explore the views of the novelist, Shigematsu Kiyoshi, on gender equality based on what is described in his novel.

METHOD

The flow of the analysis will be conducted in three steps. Firstly, I read all the content of the novel and take notes in every part which has a relationship with gender equality. Secondly, I will present the data related to gender equality that are quoted from the novel and then compare it with the reality in Japanese society. Thirdly, I also will analyze Shigematsu Kiyoshi's point of view related to gender equality written in his novel.

Based on the three steps that were conducted in the analysis flow as explained above, there are some variables that affect gender equality in Shigematsu Kiyoshi's point of view in his novel. The variables will be presented and analyzed one by one as below.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Government Policy

Government policy related to female rights affect gender equality, one of them is maternity leave rules as portrayed below.

ママは、その日、朝イチで大事な会議があった。出産休暇を含めると一年以上のブランクがあるママにとっては、復帰後のスタートダッシュの成功がかかった会議だった。

Mama wa, sono hi, asa ichi de daiji na kaigi ga atta. Shussan kyuuka wo fukumeru to ichinen ijou no buranku ga aru mama ni totte wa, fukki-go no sutaatodashi no seikou ga kakatta kaigi datta.

Mom had an important meeting in the early morning that day. For Mom, who had a gap of over a year including maternity leave, the success of the fresh start after returning was riding on this meeting.

(Shigematsu, 2008).

It is mentioned clearly that according to his father, Yuki's mother went back to her work after more than one year of maternity leave. It means women in Japan have the right to take maternity leave as a government's policy to support women to have equal rights in working opportunity.

According to Hoshi (2020), the childcare leave system started with the obligation to make efforts under the Working Women's Welfare Law, and then the Childcare Leave Law and it enacted in 1975 for some female civil servants (teachers, nurses, day care workers, etc.). In 1991, the "Law Concerning Childcare Leave, etc." (Childcare Leave Law) was enacted for private-sector workers, and came into force the following year. In the background, there were women's social advancement, the progress of nuclear families, and labor shortages due to the declining birthrate.

歴史的には、育児休業制度は勤労婦人福祉法の努力義務から始まり、その後、女性公務員の一部（教員、看護婦、保母等）を対象とした育児休業法（1975年制定）が成立、民間の労働者を対象として 1991 年に「育児休業等に関する法律」（育児休業法）が成立、翌年施行となった。背景としては、女性の社会進出、核家族化の進行、少子化に伴う労働力不足などがあった。

Rekishi-teki ni wa, ikuji kyūgyō seido wa kinrō fujinfukushi-hō no doryoku gimu kara hajimari, sonogo, josei kōmuin no ichibu (kyōin, kangofu, hobonado) o taishō to shita ikuji kyūgyō-hō (1975-nen seitei) ga seiritsu, minkan no rōdō-sha o taishō to shite 1991-nen ni 'ikuji kyūgyō-nado ni kansuru hōritsu' (ikuji kyūgyō-hō) ga seiritsu, yokunen shikō to natta. Haikai to shite wa, josei no shakai shinshutsu, kakukazoku-ka no shinkō, shōshika ni tomonau rōdō chikarabusoku nado ga atta.

Historically, the childcare leave system started with the obligation to make efforts under the Working Women's Welfare Law, and later, the Childcare Leave Law (established in 1975) was enacted for some female civil servants (teachers, nurses, day care workers, etc.). In 1991, the “Law Concerning Childcare Leave, etc.” (Childcare Leave Law) was enacted for private-sector workers, and enforced the following year. In the background, there were women's social advancement, the progress of nuclear families, and labor shortages due to the declining birthrate.

According to Mori (2019), the maternity leaves and childcare leave law was revised in 1992, 1995, 2005, 2010, and 2017. In Heisei 4 (平成 4 年) or 1992, childcare leave can be taken until the baby is one-year-old but applied only at the company which has more the 30 employees. In Heisei 7 (1995), it is applied for all the categories of company. In Heisei 17 (2005), it is possible to extend the childcare leave until 6 months. In Heisei 22 (2010) fathers and mothers can take childcare leave until the baby is one year and 2 months old. And in Heisei 29 (2017), childcare leave can be extended until the baby is 2 years old, in special cases such as they cannot get daycare for their children.

And based on Global People Strategist (2022), the current eligibility requirements for parental leave in Japan state that both parents must have worked for the same company for at least one year. These qualifications will soon expand to include parents employed at their current company for six months or more and those who are self-employed or work part-time jobs. In addition, the regulations will no longer exclude parents who already have a child under a year old. With declining birth rates, an aging population, and a shortage of childcare options, the Japanese government has proposed extending parental leave from 14 weeks to 26 weeks for mothers and from eight weeks to 12 weeks for fathers. It means both father and mother in Japan can take the childcare leave.

The childcare leave that can be taken by both, woman and man, as explained above is also explicitly written in the novel.

「だいじょうぶ、育児休暇もあるんだし、何とかなるわよ」ママは自信たっぷり言った。「そうだな、おれだって有給休暇がたっぷりたまってるし。なんだったら俺が育児休暇をとったていいんだから。」パパもうなずいてーわれながら調子のいい男だ。

「じゃ、育児休暇はあなたにとってもらおうかなあ。」さっそく、ママにいたずらっぽく言われた。「あ、いや..... やっぱり、現実問題として、それはちよっとなあ.....」自分のよけいな一言で困ってしまったパパを、ママは「わかってるって」と笑って許してくれた。「でも、ほんとうにピンチになったら助けてよ。赤ちゃんはわたしだけの子どもじゃないんだからね」「わかってる。だいじょうぶ。」パパも笑って「まかせとけ」と胸を張った。

“*Daijōbu, ikuji kyūka mo arun dashi, nantokanaru wa yo*” *mama wa jishin tappuri itta.*
 “*Sōda na, ore datte yūkyū kyūka ga tappuri tamatterushi. Nandattara ore ga ikuji kyūka o tottate iin dakara.*” *Papa mo unazuite-- warenagara chōshino ii otoko da.*

“Ja, ikuji kyūka wa anata ni totte moraou ka nā.” Sassoku, mama ni itazurappoku iwareta.

“A, iya... .. Yappari, genjitsumondai toshite, sore wa chotto nā.....” Jibun no yokeina hitokoto de komatte shimatta Papa o, Mama wa “Wakatteru tte” to waratte yurushite kureta. “Demo, hontō ni pinchi ni nattara tasukete yo. Akachan wa watashi dake no kodomo janaindakara ne”

“Wakatteru. Daijōbu.” Papa mo waratte “Makase toke” to mune o hatta.

"Everything's gonna be alright, I have maternity leave right and it will be fine," Mom said confidently.

"Yeah, I also have plenty of paid vacation, too. Why don't I take childcare leave?" Papa nodded as well--he's in good shape, even though he's selfish. "Then I'll ask you as the one who takes the childcare leave." Immediately, I was mischievously told by Mama.

"Ah, no... In fact, it's a bit of a problem." Then she said, "I understand" and then laughed and forgave Papa who was troubled with my own words. "But if I am really in trouble, help me. The baby is not just my child."

"I understand. It is okay" Papa also laughed and said, "Believe me!" confidently.

(Shigemastu 2008, 294-295)

Although Yuki's parents finally decided that the one who will take the childcare leave is Yuki's mother, at the same time it is portrayed that Yuki's father also has the commitment to take care of Yuki. The mother dialog 赤ちゃんはわたしだけの子どもじゃないんだからね which means the baby will not be only her child, is the way of Shigemastu Kiyoshi to convey his opinion about responsible both of the parents related to childcare.

According to the proven data above, in the novel and also in the social reality, government policy about maternity leave and childcare leave can be recognized as one of the variables which support gender equality in Japan and it allows women and men to have a child while still keeping their work life and career.

And based on the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, to respond to the declining birth rates and aging society problems in Japan, in 2021 the government of Japan introduced childcare and nursing care support plans for smallmedium businesses. The aims of the support plans are to prevent employees from leaving their jobs due to childbirth, childcare, and respond to their wishes. It is clearly mentioned that it is to realize a society where both men and women can balance work and childcare. The plan was decided to be implemented sequentially from April 1, 2022. Paternity leave was one of the mandatory support plans. It means the government of Japan continuously pays attention in improving the childcare policy until now.

Neighborhood Environment

Yuki's parents also have to face the neighborhood problem. The neighbor who lives under their room sometimes complains to the apartment agency about the voice when Yuki's crying and also the sound of their footsteps when they take care of Yuki.

由紀は覚えていないと思うが、マンションの下の部屋に住んでいたマツダさんは、とても神経質で、かつ陰険なひとだった。赤ん坊のなき声がうるさい、親がばたばたと子走りに動き回るのがうるさい、という苦情の電話をしょっちゅう——しかも不動産にかけていたのだ。

Yuki wa oboeteinai to omou ga, manshon no shita no heya ni sunde ita Matsuda-san wa, totemo shinkeishitsude, katsu inken na hito datta. Akanbō no nakigoe ga urusai, oya ga batabata to kohashiri ni ugokimawaru no ga urusai, to iu kujō no denwa o shocchū — shikamo fudōsan ni kakete ita no da.

I don't think Yuki remembers about it, but Mr. Matsuda, who lived in the lower apartment, was a very nervous and sly person. He was constantly calling to complain about the loud squealing of babies and the loud scurrying of parents – and the worst thing is, he called the real estate agent.

(Shigemastu 2008, 291)

Yuki's parents know that Yuki will be more anxious when they are getting more stressed. When they face stress from their work, automatically they cannot be calm and it makes Yuki also get stressed. And the neighbor's complaints make them get more stressed and affect them mentally. Complaining about the noise of children in Japan still happens even now sometimes and it makes parents stressed.

According to Santelices (2021), there is a controversial Japanese site, called the *Dorozoku Map* (道路族), an online term that refers to people who are being noisy on the streets, and each dot on the map represent a user-submitted complaint about people – in many cases, children—who are believed to be causing 'disturbances' in the neighborhood. Not only on the internet, in 2012 a suit was filed against a daycare center by some resident in Tokyo's Nerima Ward who claimed that the noise from the kids at the daycare "must be stopped". And the most extreme case in 2014, a father who was picking up his child from daycare was threatened with a hatchet by a 43years-old man, who made phone calls to the municipal office the day before, complaining about daycare children being 'too noisy'.

From the data above, it can be understood that parents in Japan need support and understanding from the neighborhood but unfortunately sometimes they do not get the support. Shigemastu portrayed the reality in Japan that is often faced by parents of children in their daily life even until now through the character named Matsuda who complained about Yuki's parents when they Yuki was crying or also the sound of footsteps.

Support from Spouse

In the quoted data in the analysis below, it is clearly written that both the father and mother have to take equal responsibility in raising children. The Yuki's father dialog:

「そうだよな、おれだって有給休暇がたっぷりたまっているし、なんだったら俺が育児休暇をとっていいんだから」

“Sōda yo na, ore datte yūkyū kyūka ga tappuri tamatte irushi, nandattara ore ga ikuji kyūka o totte iin dakara”

"Yeah, I also have plenty of paid vacation, too. Why don't I take childcare leave?"

(Shigematsu 2008, 294)

It proves that he has a commitment to raising Yuki together with his wife and it means he supports her wife. In this text, as a father (おれ), also have accumulated plenty of paid vacation and even suggest that he can take childcare leave (育児休暇). This statement challenges the traditional assumption that childcare is solely the responsibility of mothers. By expressing a willingness to take childcare leave, the speaker recognizes that fathers can and should actively participate in raising their children. This challenges traditional gender roles that have often positioned fathers as secondary caregivers.

By acknowledging the availability of paid vacation and considering taking childcare leave, this text challenges the notion that parenting duties should be predominantly shouldered by mothers. It encourages a more equitable distribution of caregiving responsibilities and fosters a supportive environment for fathers to be actively involved in their children's lives. In a gender-equal society, it is crucial to break away from traditional gender roles and stereotypes, providing fathers with the flexibility and support to take on caregiving responsibilities. This not only benefits fathers in building stronger bonds with their children but also promotes gender equality by challenging the notion that childcare is exclusively a mother's responsibility. It is also supported by the government of Japan and according to “Japan Enacts Law Making Paternity Leave More Flexible for Men” (2021), the Japanese lawmakers also enacted a law giving fathers more flexibility when taking paternity leave soon after childbirth. The law will be revised and allows fathers to take a total of four weeks off, allows fathers to give shorter prior notice to their employers of their intention to take leave, and up to 80% of their salary will be guaranteed through the child care leave plan. The revised law was expected to be launched in October 2022. In fiscal 2019, only 7,48% of men working in the private sector took child care leave, while 83% of women did so and the government aims to lift the ratio for men to 30% in 2025.

But in the story it is described that although before Yuki was born, her father ever said if it is okay if he takes maternity leave, but his mind changed after Yuki was born. After Yuki was born, he feels that his life is complete, and the fullness of his life has a different feeling from their life in the DINKS period as described below.

ママは出産休暇をとるのと同時に、独学で中国語の勉強を始めた。復帰後までの一年ちょっとのうちに日常会話ぐらいはできるようになりたい、と張り切っていた。
パパも DINKS 時代とはひと味もふた味も違う充実感とともに毎日を過ごした。

Mama wa shussan kyūka wo toru no to dōji ni, dokugaku de chūgokugo no benkyō o hajimeta. Fukki-go made no ichinen chotto no uchi ni nichijō kaiwa gurai wa dekiru yō ni naritai, to harikitte ita. Papa mo DINKS jidai to wa hitoaji mo futa aji mo chigau jūjitsu-kan to tomo ni mainichi o sugoshita.

Mama began studying Chinese on her own while taking maternity leave. She was enthusiastic that she wanted to be able to have daily conversation proficiency within a year and a little over when returning to work.

Papa also spent every day with a sense of fulfillment that was different from the DINKS days.

(Shigematsu 2008, 295)

It means both of them enjoy their life after the childbirth and during the childcare leave period. But, in the next part, Shigematsu Kiyoshi at the same time also tries to describe the patriarchal way of thinking to explain the common way of thinking about female roles in Japanese society.

このままでいいじゃないかな、と思うようになった。ママが由紀の子育てに専念してくれれば、パパは家のこと心配せずに、思い切って仕事ができる。

Kono mamade ii janai ka na, to omou yō ni natta. Mama ga Yuki no kosodate ni sennen shite kurereba, Papa wa ie no koto shinpai sezu ni, omoikitte shigoto ga dekiru.

I think that it would be fine to keep it as it is. If mama devotes herself to raising Yuki, Papa can take the plunge and work without worrying about home.

(Shigematsu 2008, 296)

ためらいながらも、仕事をやめてはどうかと、本音を伝えた。すると、ママは急に怒りだした。「ちょっと待ってよ、なに言ってんの、冗談じゃないわよそんなの」———血相を変えた。

Tamerainagara mo, shigoto o yamete wa dō ka to, honne o tsutaeta. Suruto, Mama wa kyū ni okori dashita. 'Chottomatteyo-nani itten no, jōdanjanai wa yo sonna no'— kessō o kaeta. (Shigematsu 2008, 297, 298).

Although hesitant, Papa told her what I really wanted to do and asked her to quit her job. Then mama suddenly got angry. She said, "Wait a minute, what've you said, you're not kidding me?"— her expression changed.

(Shigematsu 2008, 297-298)

The text presents a dialogue where the character Papa expresses a thought that things would be fine if the mother (ママ/*mama*) focuses on raising their child (由紀/*yūki*), allowing the father (パパ/*papa*) to work without worrying about household tasks. This statement reflects a traditional gender role expectation that places the primary responsibility of childcare on the mother, while the father's role is primarily focused on work. However, when the father hesitantly suggests the possibility of quitting her job, the mother reacts angrily, stating that it is not a joke and expressing her strong disapproval.

From a gender equality standpoint, this text reveals a couple's discussion about the division of responsibilities between parenting and work. It reflects a common societal expectation that assumes mothers should prioritize childcare, often at the expense of their careers or personal aspirations, while fathers are expected to focus primarily on work. Analyzing this text through the lens of gender equality, we can question and challenge these traditional gender roles and expectations. It prompts us to consider the importance of shared responsibilities and the equal participation of both parents in childcare and household duties.

In a gender-equal society, it is essential to foster an environment where both parents have the freedom to make choices that align with their individual aspirations, career goals, and personal interests. This involves recognizing and supporting the equal capacity and shared responsibilities of both mothers and fathers in raising children and managing household tasks. This analysis encourages us to challenge gender stereotypes and promote discussions about equitable distribution of responsibilities within families, based on the abilities, choices, and preferences of each parent, rather than predetermined gender roles. The mother complains to Yuki's father that at the end he is just the same as the others who think raising a child is mothers' role.

「結局あなたも、子供はお母さんが育てるものだって決めつけてるわけでしょ」

“Kekkyoku anata mo, kodomo wa okāsan ga sodateru mono datte kimetsuke teru wakedesho”

After all, you also think that raising children is the responsibility of a mother by herself, don't you?”

(Shigematsu 2008, 298)

It described that Yuki's father asked her wife to resign from her work and be a full housewife to raise Yuki and he will take the responsibility to earn money for their life. Of course, her mother was very angry when she heard it and refused it. Shigematsu

Kiyoshi tries to portray the patriarchal way of thinking that widely happens in daily life in Japan through this dialog and the portrayal is completed with the dialog of Yuki's mother. That means *after all, you also think that raising children is a responsibility of a mother by herself*. The particle も/*mo* in the あなたも/*anata mo* means another people also have the same way of thinking include Yuki' father.

The text highlights an assumption or belief that the person being addressed (referred to as "you") holds regarding the upbringing of children. The speaker states that ultimately, the assumption is that children are to be raised by their mothers (お母さん/*okāsan*). This statement implies a traditional gender role expectation that places the primary responsibility of child-rearing on mothers. From a gender equality standpoint, this statement raises questions about the division of caregiving responsibilities between parents and reinforces the idea that childcare is solely the mother's duty. It suggests a societal belief or stereotype that assigns women the role of primary caregivers and assumes that they are solely responsible for raising children.

In a gender-equal society, it is essential to challenge and dismantle these gendered assumptions and stereotypes, fostering an environment where both mothers and fathers are recognized and supported in their parenting roles. This analysis prompts us to reevaluate traditional gender norms and advocate for equal opportunities and responsibilities in parenting, regardless of gender.

After, finally Yuki's mother decides to back to work, her father support Yuki's mother even of course there are bunch of up and down through all along the way. One of the supports is Yuki's father always asks Yuki's mother to not be anxious because it will take all of her stamina and honestly he also wants to say not only her stamina but also mentally but he keeps it in his own mind as below.

「あせるなよ」

何度もママに言った。「先は長いんだから、いまから全力疾走すると体力もないぞ」----ほんとうは、そこに「心も」とつけ加えたかった。

“Aseru na yo”

Nando mo mama ni itta. “Saki wa nagain dakara, ima kara zenryoku shissō suruto tairyoku motanai zo”---- hontō wa, soko ni “Kokoro mo” to tsukekuwaetakatta. “Don't rush!”

Papa told Mama many times. “You have a long way to go, so if you start sprinting now, you will lose your stamina” ----actually, I wanted to add “Your mental too.”

(Shigematsu 2008, 300)

The support from her husband helps her to remember that life is still too long and she has to compromise her ambition and the situation they faced. The text emphasizes the importance of avoiding undue stress or rushing in one's life. The husband pressures wife by repeatedly saying, "Don't rush," and advises her not to exhaust her energy by sprinting at full speed from the start because the future is long.

The significant aspect of this analysis is the indication that the speaker wanted to add 心も (heart/mind/mental) to the advice. By expressing the desire to include “heart/mind/mental” in the statement, it suggests that the speaker recognizes the importance of not only physical stamina but also mental well-being.

This dialog aligns with the concept of gender equality by acknowledging the holistic nature of individuals, regardless of gender. It implies that maintaining a balanced approach to life, which considers both physical and emotional aspects, is essential for overall well-being and success.

By recognizing the significance of emotional well-being, the text promotes gender equality by challenging traditional gender stereotypes that often prioritize physical strength and resilience while neglecting the importance of mental and emotional health. It implies that individuals, regardless of gender, should be mindful of their overall well-being and avoid placing excessive pressure on themselves.

Support from The Big Family

Beside the support from a spouse, Shigematsu Kiyoshi also thinks that support from a big family, such as father, grandfather, grandmother, mother, etc is important. Support from the big family will make a couple who are raising children and at the same time also do public roles, could ask help when they are in a very pinch situation and it makes them psychologically feel not alone.

The father tells Yuki that even though her grandmother ‘s house is relatively close to Tokyo, her mother decided to not ask any help from her. It is because her grandmother thinks that Yuki’s mother will automatically resign from her work after Yuki was born.

前橋から東京は、確かに決して遠い距離ではない。それでも、ママは前橋のおばあちゃんにはなにがあっても SOS は出さなかった。前橋のおばあちゃんは、由紀が生まれたらてっきり仕事をやめるものだと思い込んでいた。

Maebashi kara Tōkyō wa, tashikani kesshite tōi kyori dewanai. Soredemo, mama wa Maebashi no obāchan ni wa nani ga atte mo SOS wa dasanatta. Maebashi no obāchan wa, Yuki ga umaretara tekkiri shigoto o yameru mono da to omoikonde ita.

Maebashi is certainly not far from Tokyo. Even so, Mama never sent an SOS to Maebashi's grandma no matter what happened. Maebashi's grandmother assumed that Mama would quit her job when Yuki was born.

(Shigematsu 2008, 307)

It means Yuki’s mother does not get support from the big family and she has to solve every single problem only with her husband. According to Arnold-Parra (2021), one obstacle to women’s participation in both the political and corporate spheres is the persistence of gendered social expectations – specifically the expectation that women

perform the majority of childcare and housework. And Arnold-Parra also says, a 2018 study concluded that the dearth of female Japanese politicians was attributable to the difficulty of balancing professional and domestic duties. In a December poll that asked why women were not advancing in politics, the main reason cited was the obligation of housework, closely followed by the perception of politics as a male pursuit. Japan's work culture is notoriously particularly demanding, thus making the challenge of balancing housework and a career even more difficult than in other developed countries. Yuki's mama who does not get support from Yuki's grandmother reflects the image in the society that women in Japan are expected to perform the majority of childcare and housework.

The climax of the story is, one day, Yuki's mother feels very stressed because she has a very important meeting at the office when Yuki is sick. They take care of Yuki alternately all the night but unfortunately both of them oversleep and Yuki's mother cannot wake up the next morning. But she still decided to leave the home and go to the office. When she sits down on the bench in platform of the station and starts to crying, a couple of elderly asks if they could sit near her to see the swallows (ツバメ) that stay at the ceiling of the station platform. The elderly couple tell her that every year they always come to the same place to watch the swallow since a very long time ago. They tell her that the swallows always feed their chick and take the food alternately, both the female and male swallow take the same role. They also tell Yuki's mother that they also worked together while raising their children. It gives her energy.

持ち帰ったエサが終わりかけた頃、もう一羽の親のツバメも戻ってきて、最初の親ツバメは入れ替わるようにまた空に飛び立っていく。ツバメは雄と雌の区別などつかなくても、つがいんだろうな。とわかる。「働き者でしょ？」おばあさんが言った。

Mochikaetta esa ga owarikaketa koro, mō ichi-wa no oya no tsubame mo modotte kite, saisho no oya tsubame wa irekawaru yō ni mata sora ni tobitatte iku. Tsubame wa osu to mesu no kubetsu nado tsukanakute mo, tsukaingarou na. To wakarū. "Hatarakimonodesho?" Obāsan ga itta.

When the food they brought home was almost finished, the other parent of the swallow returned, and the first parent of the swallow took off again in the sky. Even if swallows do not distinguish the difference between a male and a female, they still mate. I understand. "They are hard workers, aren't they?" said the old woman.

(Shigematsu 2008, 318)

Through the description of how the swallows feed their chick, Shigematsu tries to convey his point of view about gender equality. Shigematsu thinks that women and men have to take the same responsibility to raise their children and it has no relationship with their sexes. Both of the parents can take the domestic and public role at the same time, no matter with the sexes.

After she talked with two of the elderly couple, Yuki's mother gets calm and calls Yuki's father to ask him to come with Yuki to the platform where she sits and tells him that there are swallows. And they call the day as (The Swallows Memory Day/ツバメ記念日). At the end of the story, the father tells Yuki that her mother looks so happy when hears Yuki will still be working even after Yuki has a kid. And her mother thinks it is very reasonable to take care and raise the kid together because a kid is not only mom's kid but both the parents' kid.

由紀、お誕生日おめでとう。そして、結婚おめでとう。結婚しても、子どもを産んでも、いまの仕事をつづけていくつもりなんだと、ママから聞いた。「仕事をつづけるだけが人生じゃないとは思うけどね」とママは言いながら、嬉しそうな顔をしていた。

「ママの会社では育児休暇をとるパパ社員も増えてきたらしい。ま、それは当然よね。二人の子どもなんだから」とママはいままでもチクチクとパパにトゲを刺して笑う。

Yuki, otanjōbi omedetō. Soshite, kekkon omedetō. Kekkō shite mo, kodomo o undemo, ima no shigoto o tsuzukete iku tsumori nanda to, Mama kara kiita. "Shigoto o tsuzukeru dake ga jinsei janai to wa omoukedo ne" to Mama wa iinagara, ureshi-sōna kao o shite ita.

"Mama no kaisha de wa ikuji kyūka wo toru papa shain mo fuete kitarashī. Ma, sore wa tōzen yo ne. Futari no kodomo nandakara" to Mama wa ima made mo chikuchiku to Papa ni toge o sashite warau.

Happy birthday, Yuki. And congratulations on your marriage. I heard from Mama that you intend to continue your current job even after you get married and have children. "I don't think life is all about working," said Mom, with a happy face on her face. Mama said, "It seems that more and more fathers are taking childcare leave at Mama's company. Well, that's what should happen because children are both of the parent's child" Even now, Mama still laughs and as if she stabs a thorn to Papa.

(Shigematsu 2008, 328)

In the last part of the story, Shigematsu Kiyoshi once again highlights his opinion that raising children is the responsibility of both parents. Based on the concept of gender equality, the text portrays a positive representation of a woman's perspective regarding marriage, childbirth, and continuing her career. The mother (ママ/mama) expresses her support for her daughter Yuki (由紀/yūki), congratulating her on her birthday and marriage. She shares with Yuki that she intends to continue her current job even after getting married and having children.

The mother's statement highlights her belief that "continuing work is not the only purpose in life," indicating a broader understanding of personal fulfillment beyond career achievements. This suggests a balanced perspective on the roles and aspirations

of women. Furthermore, the mention of increasing male employees taking childcare leave in the mother's company reflects a shift towards gender equality in parenting responsibilities. The mother acknowledges this as a natural development and playfully teases the father (♡^♡^♡) about the shared responsibility of raising their two children. Overall, the text presents a positive outlook on gender equality, emphasizing the importance of supporting women's choices in balancing career and family life, and recognizing the shared responsibilities of both parents in childcare.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the novel shows that the Japanese government has implemented policies such as maternity and paternity leave to support work-life balance and gender equality in parenting. However, challenges related to traditional gender roles and societal expectations still exist.

In the neighborhood, Yuki's neighbor's complaints about the noise from the baby and the parents' activities may indicate gender inequality targeting activities associated with childcare, which are often associated with women. It emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive neighborhood environment that promotes gender equality and understands the needs of families with young children.

The text highlights spousal support in a relationship where the mother wants to continue her personal development during maternity leave. The father is understanding and suggests taking childcare leave himself. They support each other's goals, with the mother showing enthusiasm for learning Chinese and the father being satisfied with their current lifestyle. When the father considers quitting her job, the mother becomes angry and challenges the idea of sole responsibility for childcare, emphasizing the importance of shared parenting and rejecting traditional gender roles. The father reassures her and emphasizes the need for balance and shared effort in raising their child. This portrayal demonstrates a positive example of gender equality, where both partners support each other and share childcare responsibilities, challenging traditional gender norms and promoting a balanced and fulfilling family life.

In terms of support from the big family, the text reveals that the mother resists seeking help from her grandmother in Maebashi, suggesting a reluctance to conform to traditional gender roles that expect women to prioritize childcare over their careers. However, the mention of swallows and the grandmother's comment about their hard work imply a different perspective. This indicates a potential shift in mindset within the extended family, recognizing women's ability to balance work and childcare responsibilities. The passage suggests a nuanced view of gender equality within the family, challenging stereotypes and emphasizing the importance of support for women pursuing both their professional and personal aspirations.

Additionally, the text discusses the importance of the mother's successful return to work after maternity leave and the challenges faced by mothers in this regard. It highlights the historical development of parental leave policies in Japan and the government's efforts to support working parents. The dialogue between the parents also touches on the possibility of the father taking childcare leave, highlighting the

persistence of traditional gender roles. Despite progress, barriers to achieving gender equality in parenting still exist.

Shigematsu Kiyoshi tries to convey his idea in the novel that raising children is not only the female's (mother's) role as common Japanese think, but it is both of the parents' role. He conveys this point of view to gender equality through the characters of the elderly couple, swallow's parables (allusion), and Yuki's mother.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

This study was approved by the institution.

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