

FACT AND FICTION – JAPANESE SOCIAL NORMS IN MISHIMA YUKIO’S “PATRIOTISM”¹

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Abstract

As a member of a society, a writer’s works contain social norms. In that sense, it is possible to find out Mishima Yukio’s ideas on Japan and its people in the short story “Yūkoku”, which has been translated into English as “Patriotism”. The characters of the story are presumed to represent Mishima’s thoughts on the Emperor, the Japanese nation and Japanese women as well. Therefore, the analysis of this story enables the reader to understand the coherence between fact and fiction.

Keywords: *Mishima Yukio, “Patriotism”, the 26 February Incident, Seppuku (ritual suicide), Loyalty, Japanese Women, Samurai, Japanese Society*

Öz

Gerçeklik ve Kurmaca -Mishima Yukio’nun “Vatanseverlik” Adlı Öyküsünde Japon Toplum Ögeleri

Toplumun bir parçası olan yazarın eserlerinde sosyal normlardan esinlendiği görülür. Bu durum, Mishima Yukio’nun “Vatansever” adlı öyküsü için de geçerlidir. Söz konusu öyküdeki karakterler incelendiğinde, Mishima’nın Japon imparatoru, ulusu ve kadını hakkında bilgi sahibi olunacaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Mishima Yukio, Patriotism, 26 Şubat Ayaklanması, Seppuku, Sadakat, Japon Kadını, Samuray, Japon Toplumunu*

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Introduction

This paper aims to make clear how fact and fiction cohere in a short story by taking “Patriotism” as an example, the short story written by Mishima Yukio. It was published in *Shōsetsu Chūō Kōron* –a monthly literary magazine in Japan- in January, 1961 (Matsumoto, Satō, Inoue, 2000:384). Mishima directed the film based on the story, in which he himself played the main actor on April 12, 1966 (Matsumoto, Satō, Inoue, 2000:654).

Aspects of Japanese social life such as the loyalty to the Emperor and the social status of women during the 1930s take place in “Patriotism.” As they are considered to be parts of Mishima’s ideology, the discussion is limited to these norms.

Mishima Yukio (1925-1970)

Mishima Yukio is the pen name of Kimitake Hiraoka. Mishima did not only write novels, but poems and plays as well. He was also an actor and film director. Having nominated three times for the Nobel Prize in Literature, he is undoubtedly one of the most famous Japanese authors. However he is not only remembered for the books he wrote but also with the way he died. On November 25, 1970, he committed seppuku, Japanese ritual suicide, in order to inspire the Self Defense Forces to give the Japanese Emperor his authority back to rule Japan, which did not succeed.

Historical Fact

In order to understand how fact is correlated with fiction, it is important to draw outlines of historical and social facts related with the story. In “Patriotism”, the Japanese Emperor, the 26 February Incident and the status of Japanese women are of great importance.

Emperor of Japan

According to the Constitution of Japan (1947), the Emperor shall be the symbol of the state and of the unity of the people, deriving his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power (Chapter I, Article 1). Even though the imperial system dates back to BC 660, it was from the beginning of Meiji Period until the late Showa Period, more precisely, from 1868 until 1947 that the Emperor of Japan held all the sovereign power. On the other hand, Emperor Jimmu (BC 660) was believed to be the descendant of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess which made the belief of sacredness for Japanese Imperial Family until the end of the World War II (Henshall, 2012:6).

The 26 February Incident

"Patriotism" depends on a historical fact; the military revolt took place between February 26 to 29, 1936. A group of soldiers aimed to dismiss some politicians, beginning with the Prime Minister Okada Keisuke, who were believed to be poisoning the Japanese soul. However, these soldiers did not get support from the Emperor and the Commander in Chief. After the unsuccessful revolt, some of them committed suicide and the rest were prosecuted (Gomi, Takano, Toriumu, (et.al.), 1998:436,437).

Social Status of Japanese Women

The first important source about the social status of Japanese women is Japanese mythology which gives Japanese women a high place (Zollinger and Smock, 1997:124). Amaterasu is believed to be the Sun Goddess who created Japan and its protector (Beasley, 1999: 3-5).

China had a great influence on Japan. During the flourishing Chinese civilization of T'ang Dynasty (7th-10th century), Japan adopted systems of thought, law, government and others from China. As the family system based on Confucianism was patriarchal, women were accepted as second class members of society (Zollinger and Smock, 1997:130). Furthermore, Confucianism gained more importance during the Tokugawa Era (1603-1868). During the Meiji Era (1868-1912), Japan's aim was to become a strong, modern country. At that time, a woman's duty was stressed by ryōsai kenbo/good wife, clever mother. To fulfill this motto, Japanese women had to perform her duties at home, and raise their children following the new methods in order to serve the nation (Fukaya, 1998: 11-18).

However, in 1920s, the social fashions and living modes became to change. Women attained a new independence as secretaries and office workers (Morton and Olenik, 2005:174).

Literary Analysis

The correlation of the social and historical facts with the story can be clarified by means of literary analysis. Below is the archetypic analysis of "Patriotism".

Characters

Lieutenant Takeyama Shinji is a handsome, honorable, 31 year old soldier. In the story he has to choose to be either a patriot or a loyal friend during the 26 February Incident.

Takeyama Reiko is a beautiful 23 year old housewife. She has no choice but to be loyal to her husband and a good citizen according to the moral training she has undergone since her childhood.

General Ozaki is the commander of Shinji, and the go-between in the Takeyamas' marriage. He even helps them to find a home.

The young officers Honma, Kanō and Noguchi are the Takeyamas' friends who visited them at their house several times. They believe that the Japanese soul must be purified as in the old days of Japan.

Plot

The event occurs at the house of the young, newly married Takeyama couple, on February 28, 1936. After only a short time Shinji is informed that his close friends have joined the group rebelling against the government and he is ordered to join the Imperial Forces to suppress the rebellion. He can betray neither his friends nor the Emperor, therefore he commits the ritual Japanese military suicide, seppuku.² He leaves behind the message "Long live the Imperial Forces", while his wife Reiko leaves a message to her parents apologizing for dying before them which is considered as a shameful thing for a child. She finishes it with the following sentence: "The day which, for a soldier's wife, had to come, has come." (Mishima, 1971:102) Then she kills herself after her husband, with the dagger her mother gave to her on her wedding day.

Message

The story of "Patriotism" may be considered as a realistic story for the reason that it is related with historical fact. On the other hand, Takeyama Shinji and his wife Reiko's leaving their own personal identities, in other words Shinji's sacrificing his life for his country's order, and Reiko's being loyal to her husband, gives the story an idealist realistic feature. Personal love turns to love of nation.

²Suicide by self-disembowelment. Often known as harakiri in the Western World, seppuku was a death penalty to which a higher ranking samurai warrior was condemned for a crime of great gravity. It was a solemn, almost ceremonial suicide achieved by a man thrusting a short sword into his belly and then moving it across, and by a woman stabbing a dagger into her throat. (Nobuyuki and Bates, 1986; 245-246)

Fact Becomes Fiction

The coherence between fact and fiction can be vivid through the basic explanation of the historical and social facts, and the literary analysis.

The Incident is described by Takeyama Shinji as follows: "I knew nothing. They hadn't asked me to join. Perhaps out of consideration, because I was newly married. Kanō, and Homma too, and Yamaguchi. (...) There may be an Imperial ordinance sent down tomorrow. They'll be posted as rebels, I imagine. I shall be in command of a unit with orders to attack them. I can't do it. It is impossible to do a thing like that." (Mishima, 1971:107,108)

Shinji informs Reiko that he is going to commit suicide because he cannot betray his friends, but cannot act against the Emperor's order either. He is sure Reiko will follow him: "'Well then...?' The lieutenant's eyes opened wide. Despite his exhaustion they were strong and clear, and now for the first time they looked straight into the eyes of his wife. 'Tonight I shall cut my stomach'" (Mishima, 1971: 108) And his wife did not hesitate so say: "'I am ready' she said. 'I ask permission to accompany you.'" (Mishima, 1971:108)

Reiko's education played a big role in her accepting the fact unhesitatingly and killing herself: "When Reiko said, 'I ask the permission to accompany you,' the lieutenant felt these words to be the final fruit of the education which he had himself given his wife, starting on the first night of their marriage, and which had schooled her, when the moment came, to say what had to be said without a shadow of hesitation." (Mishima, 1971:109)

Their suicide will be very bloody but they think this will not cause any bad feelings because they are sincere in their act: "They wondered whether they ought not to remove the hanging scroll, but since it had been written by their go-between, Lieutenant General Ozaki, and consisted, moreover, of two Chinese characters signifying 'Sincerity', they left it where it was. Even if it were to become stained with splashes of blood, they felt that the lieutenant general would understand." (Mishima, 1971:119)

While committing seppuku shows the lieutenant's loyalty to the Emperor and proves his patriotism, his wife's following him³ shows that she

³(...) *shinjū*, a double suicide, a famous theme in Kabuki theater. The lieutenant dies out of loyalty to his comrades, whom he believes he will meet again in death, his wife dies out of loyalty to her husband, and both out of loyalty to the Emperor for whom they pray before death at the house altar. Death and love are one, twin faces of immortality. Romantic heroes,

is not only loyal to him but also to the nation. Shinji considers their situation as a privilege: “This must be the very pinnacle of good fortune, he thought. To have every moment of his death observed by those beautiful eyes it was like being borne to death on a gentle, fragrant breeze. There was some special favor here (...) the Imperial Household, the Nation, the Army Flag. All these, no less than the wife who sat before him, were presences observing him closely with clear and never faltering eyes.” (Mishima, 1971:120)

In the end, Takeyama, his wife and friends all die for their causes.

Conclusion

A writer is a member of the society in which he lives. As Mishima Yukio is a member of Japanese society, it is obvious that his ideas will be found in his writings. In fact, “Patriotism” is a good example. In the story, the loyalty to the Emperor is emphasized. Similarly, Mishima’s opinion about Japan’s political situation during the 1960s can be seen in the 26 February Incident. In the same fashion, the lieutenant’s death by committing seppuku and his wife’s following him without hesitation can be considered as Mishima’s idealization of the social norms in Japan. These can also be considered as a part of Japanese thought. In short, “Patriotism” provides the reader with clues to Mishima Yukio’s ideology. As he is a member of Japanese society, a Japanese person’s opinions can be read through the characters. That is to say, first fact becomes fiction and then fiction gives the reader facts, this time by means of art of literature.

the two eventually die in the name of the same idea, although their motivations seem somehow different. (Frentiu, 2010:71)

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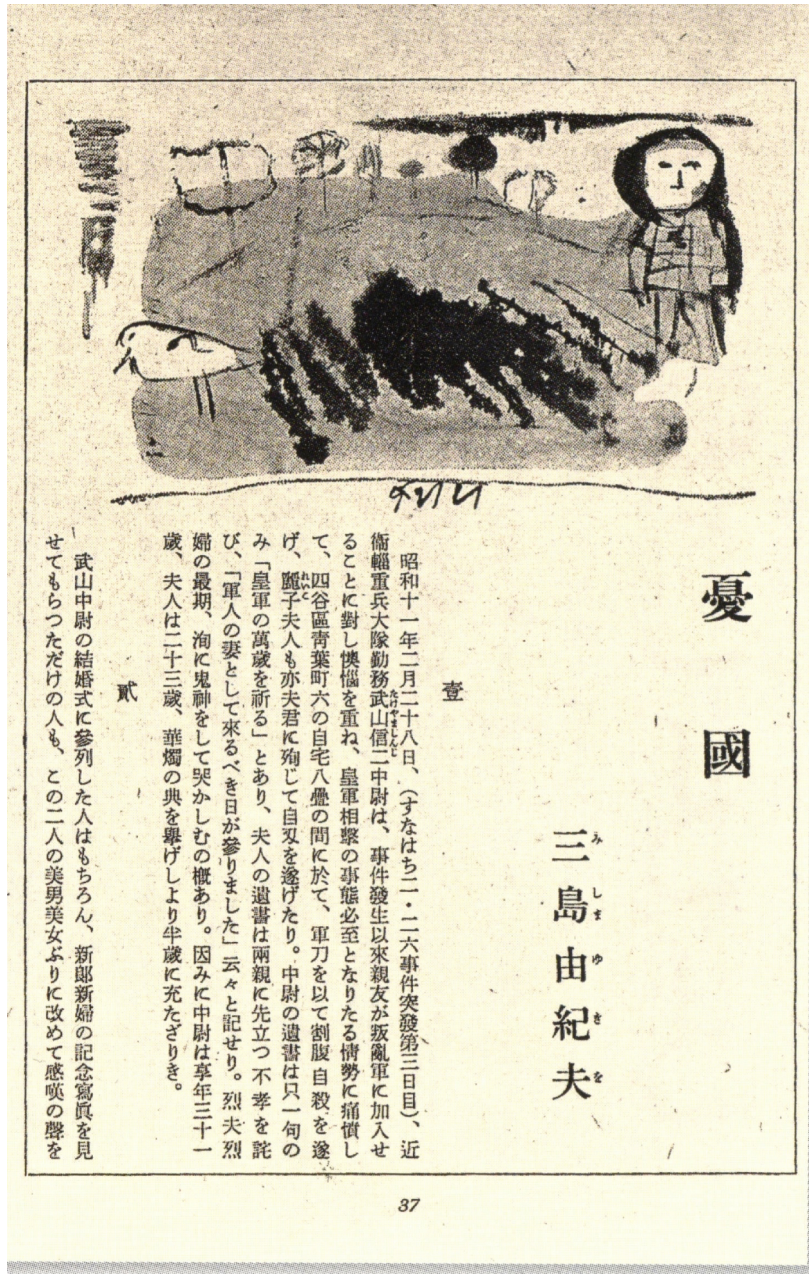


Shukan Shincho, October 9, 1965

News about the Nobel Prize for Literature candidacy (Bessatsu Taiyō, p. 97)



Mishima Yukio, the movie Yūkoku ("Patriotism"), Shinjuku Theater, April, 1966. (Mishima Yukio. Shinchosha Arubamu 20, p. 65)



Yūkoku ("Patriotism") in Shōsetsu Chūō Kōron, 1961.
(Bessatsu Taiyō, p. 138)

