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JAPAN AS SEEN THROUGH NOVELS AND MESSAGES FROM BOOKS

Based on the novel “Colorful,” I would like to introduce the Japanese character, Japanese sociality, and youth fiction where people are not able to express their innermost thoughts and feelings. Rather, they are concerned about their human relations, the attention of the public, and what others think of them. I believe that Japanese people have such tendencies. I think about this by using this story. I will also focus on the message I can get from the main character’s growth. Through this story, we can see the important things in our lives. I also think about examinations and transmigration in Japanese society through the expression of the story.

Summary of “Colorful”

“Colorful” was chosen as the No.1 book collection that high school students wanted to read, and it is also a youth novel that can be read by adults. It has also been made into an anime and a drama. This is the story of a soul who should have died after making a big mistake in a previous life, never to be reborn again, but who tries again in the lower bound where he failed once because he won the lottery. There are several main points to the story, and since he has no memory of his previous life, he doesn’t know what sins he had committed before he died. He lives in the body of someone else in the lower bound, and the quality of the environment depends on the size of his mistakes in his previous life. He has to remind himself of his sins. Therefore, the main character’s soul entered the body of a boy named Makoto, a third-year junior high school student who had attempted to commit suicide by taking drugs three days earlier. In the process, he is challenged, he grows, and his world becomes more colorful. At the end of the story, he realizes that he was also Makoto in his previous life.

The Japanese Character and Messages from Makoto’s Changes

This book focuses on the not-so-good aspects of the Japanese personality and describes the changes. People are not able to express their true feelings. They worry about their surroundings and how they are viewed by other people. They live in a mold created by others of what is socially appropriate. I believe this is one aspect of Japanese people. In this book, the main character is a young man with a personality that is a collection of the worst aspects of the Japanese. Through two major changes, this book has messages for us, the readers, that since even he could change, anyone can change. These two major changes are the key points of this book. As the main character is a young man with the typical Japanese bad side, we can understand his character, which is our problem, and through the change of the main character, it leads us to the solution.

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Makoto has a complex about his appearance. He thinks of himself as introverted and judgmental about his own humanity, that he is out of line, that he doesn't get along with anyone, and he puts up a barrier to keep everyone away (Mori, p. 35). In this book, he also says, "Makoto's face never seemed to be bright. A smile did not suit him. His eyes lacked power." Makoto's character was described as above (Mori, p. 27). I believe that Makoto's character was born out of the unique Japanese way of thinking, which places importance on syncretism, on the idea that opinions and things that differ from the people around him are wrong. He is also concerned about what others think of him. And I believe that he has lost his confidence because he feels that he cannot blend in with his surroundings. Because of this, Makoto had a dark personality and thought that it was impossible for him to take on challenges. He doesn't want to get involved with the people around him, he is lonely at school and has his own world. This is why he lives a solitary life, worrying about his surroundings.

On the other hand, the soul that actually entered Makoto's body also originally lived as Makoto, but he does not realize it in his life because he realizes at the end of the story that he is also Makoto in his previous life. Therefore, the soul that entered Makoto felt that this was not his body or life, but a temporary lodging. Since he was taking things easy and thinking that he was only borrowing Makoto's body for a certain period of time, he acted as he pleased without paying attention to his surroundings. For this reason, he was portrayed as a cheerful character, the complete opposite of the previous Makoto. This change in Makoto's personality is depicted a lot in the story. The part that clearly showed that Makoto's personality had changed was when he answered in a normal voice when the teacher called his name at school, but was surprised by both the teacher and his classmates that his voice was brighter (Mori, pp. 38–39). This response also made "his classmates creepy and suspiciously observe him" (Mori, p. 39). From this, we can see how Makoto has changed and it shows us that we can live more like ourselves if we don't worry too much about our surroundings and don't get too self-conscious. In this way, Makoto has changed to being himself from the problematic Japanese personality of being shy and concerned about what others think of him and that he must be the same as those around him. This is considered to be one of the major changes. Makoto's change in personality is a message to others to take things easy and live life in their own way without worrying about others.

Makoto was also an avid art club member and loved to draw and was very good at it. Even the formerly dark Makoto looked forward to coming to school for art time and club activities. In the art room, everyone was concentrating on their canvases, and there were no people staring at Makoto, so he could concentrate without worrying about his surroundings. It was a place where Makoto could relax and feel at home. This also shows the importance of a space where you don't have to worry about your surroundings.

In addition to the message from Makoto's change to live life on his own terms without worrying about others, I believe there is also a message from the other major change: don't fit people into a mold. The brighter change in Makoto made him realize how Makoto used to be. He had been bound by the impressions of those around him. "The image that represents me is not necessarily the real me. I am bound by the image that the people around me have created for themselves" (Mori, p. 120). This is also expressed in Makoto's line. In this way, he lives in the image of what people think they should be, which is suitable for their society. He is trapped in a predetermined mold. This is one of the problematic characteristics of the

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Japanese people, as expressed by Makoto before the change. In the story, the expectations of others and the image of Makoto created by others had become a burden for Makoto. Makoto used to be bound by the image of those around him, but as Makoto changed his cheerfulness and showed his true self without worrying about those around him, he realized the discrepancy between the image that had been set by those around him and his true self. At the end of the story, Makoto expressed that “I was just an ordinary boy” (Mori, p. 120). He told his friends and his mother, “I have normal problems, and I want to live a normal life, just like everyone else around me” (Mori, p. 120). This assertion of Makoto’s true self was a change in him from being consumed by the image of those around him, being shy and not believing in his own potential. This is another major change in Makoto. Therefore, this change conveys the importance of expressing one’s true self in an unconventional way, because fitting oneself into a mold would be a burden to oneself. When Makoto told his mother, she said, “I may have tried to push you into a mold that I created on my own. I may have unconsciously tied Makoto’s hands and feet” (Mori, p. 127). He also said to the previous Makoto, “I was living in the same world as everyone else. The old Makoto was stuck in a world where people glorified him and thought he was strange. He was really just a normal boy who was a little shy” (Mori, p. 120). From the two conversations in this story, we can conclude that Makoto’s insistence that he is a normal boy means that he should not fit into a mold.

Memory return and character change

What Makoto’s classmates said to him brought back his memory. Through the scene where his memory returns, the author is encouraging that anyone can change and break out of the mold. I think it also shows the importance of one’s own world. A girl in his class said, “Makoto didn’t change, he just returned to his original form. He’s just a normal kid like everyone else, and everyone has locked him up in a different world on their own. He’s changed a lot, but his roots haven’t changed. He’s completely different, but the same. The unique colors of his paintings, the touch of his brush, and the way he looks at the canvas have never changed” (Mori, pp. 228–230). These words indicate that the former Makoto and the new Makoto are the same, that is, the soul that enter the Makoto’s body is real Makoto. Makoto was trapped in another world by external factors. However, Makoto changed when he broke it, but Makoto himself did not change. One of the main reasons for this is that his own world, what he likes to do, which is drawing pictures, have not changed. Therefore, one can say that one’s own world is the root of one’s identity, which cannot be changed.

She had been bullied before, and at the same time Makoto had been bullied too. However, Makoto seemed unconcerned and kept his face expressionless and his eyes quiet. He kept it up by drawing pictures that he liked. Therefore, having a world of his own as an escape from external factors. In addition, the friends who influenced Makoto and helped him to regain his memory felt that he was different from her because he had his own world, even though she were in the same situation as Makoto. Therefore, she was interested in him (Mori, pp. 224–226). In this way, having one’s own world is an element that attracts people to anyone.

Therefore, from the scene here, the author is encouraging that anyone can change and break out of the mold. Having one’s own world is the fundamental and unchangeable identity of a person. It can be an escape from external factors, but it can also be an attraction that

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attracts people. From this message, I felt that I should use my own world as my power and center to help me change.

Social Problems in Japan

Suicide has become a social problem in Japan, and the percentage of suicides in Japan is one of the highest in the world. The main character in this book has also committed suicide. Many of the problems that Makoto experienced are problems that anyone can have if they live in a society. By portraying the main character who committed suicide, this book makes us aware of and warns us about the problems and situations we face, the difficulty and importance of overcoming these problems, and the new world that exists after overcoming them. Makoto was not always a gloomy person, but as he grew up, he began to feel inferior to those around him. He began to be treated as an outcast by those around him and was bullied. He felt safe in his own world because he would not be attacked by those around him, so he began to confine himself to the world of art (Mori, pp. 235–237). The tendency to ignore people who are different is a bad trend in Japanese society. However, at this time, he thought it was not good to remain confined to his own world and tried to do something about it. Therefore, he began to draw bright pictures to get out of the dark world, and he was determined to change himself. One day, however, something happened that made Makoto's friends and family lose all trust in him, which had helped him so much (What was the event? What happened?). Makoto hit rock bottom and began to feel more attracted to death than life, and committed suicide. When he committed suicide, Makoto lost his own world and people who had been his emotional support (Mori, pp. 237–239). On the other hand, the symmetrical reborn Makoto realized that there were people who needed him through his challenges. The environment and people around us have a great impact on us. Therefore, I felt that having people who support you and who need you is important, and being able to feel that you are not alone is a good way to take care of your heart.

In the scene after Makoto's rebirth, there is a great message for those who feel suffocated and tired of living in society. I have never forgotten the word since I read this book, and reading the story and learning about Makoto's change has made them stay with me even more. It's "Think of your life as a slightly longer homestay." (Mori, p. 244). Before Makoto realized that he was really Makoto, he thought he was only borrowing his body temporarily and was able to live a carefree life. However, after he realized it, he no longer felt like a stranger and was not sure if he could do as well as he had been doing. The words that were given to him at that time were, "It's only a few decades of your life at most. Just think of it as the start of a slightly longer homestay" (Mori, p. 244). There is a message for people who are stuck in their own shells, that it will be easier if they think of life as a homestay, just like Makoto, who was free to move about without restraint.

The book uses the unique Japanese concept of the circle of transmigration. It is when a person repeatedly lives and dies, and is reborn into a new life. In this book, the reason why Makoto got the chance to start over in the lower world, without knowing his true identity, was to test whether a soul that once abandoned itself can return to itself again. It was a period of time for him to reevaluate his own problems. The fact that Makoto committed suicide once and got a chance to start over again as Makoto in the lower realms is considered to be

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a direct application of the circle of transmigration. The fact that Makoto was able to change and become a new person through his challenge indirectly represents the form of the circle of transmigration. Also, examinations have become a major issue in Japan, and I believe that this novel plays an important role at the crossroads of resolving family issues through examinations.

Conclusion

Makoto has changed by trying many things even though he failed. By making Makoto the main character, the author makes us realize the negative aspects that we need to change, because Makoto before was a negative Japanese character, and through his change, we can also see the solutions. As we can see from his personality, worrying about the people around them and being trapped in a mold created by others are negative aspects. The fact that Makoto has changed to be himself conveys the message that he does not have to worry about others and that he should not be too set in his own mold. It also encourages that anyone can change with the power of their own unique world, because Makoto himself did not change, but was reborn as a new Makoto. The story also depicts the dark side of Makoto's life, such as suicide and bullying, but Makoto's struggles show that this is a positive story and that the support of those around him is important. Through the story, it tells us that life can be redone many times, just like the circle of transmigration.

It is a story about a person who is always lonely, who is not sure what he wants to do. Through one challenge, he makes friends for the first time and decides what he wants to do. It is also about family issues, and how family members become closer to each other, changing their initial impression of each other. The story is about how everyone wants to change their past, and how they repeatedly challenge and change themselves by being reborn and starting their life over. I think this is a story that would touch the hearts of anyone who has ever wanted to start their life over and feel the love of their family and friends.

It is possible for anyone to be reborn if they keep challenging themselves, and if they can do so, they can change the world into a more livable and colorful place. It teaches us the importance of facing our own mental weaknesses and thinking for ourselves. If you think of yourself as a homestay family in this world, you will be able to live comfortably.

References:

Mori E. (2007). *Colorful*. Tokyo: Bungeishunju publ.