

## CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

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### **WHAT MESSAGE ATTRACTS YOUNG PEOPLE IN JAPAN: FROM THE NOVEL BY MIZUKA TSUJIMURA, “THE LONELY CASTLE IN THE MIRROR”**

Have you heard about “The Lonely Castle In The mirror”? This book was written in 2017 by Mizuki Tsujimura, a female writer in Japan. The book won several awards including “Japan Booksellers’ Awards” which is based on votes by bookstore clerks from all around Japan. The book has been read by many young people in Japan.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss why this book has gained such popularity among the young and to also examine the message from this book which is “There is the place where you are / There are people around you”.

#### **The Reasons Why This Book Became So Popular**

Before discussing the book, we would like to introduce a brief outline to make it easier to understand.

The story begins with seven children gathered at the castle in the mirror. One day, each of them found a mirror shining in their room and entered the magical castle through it. After that, a group of schoolers were given the task to find a key hidden in the castle. The story follows one of the children, Kokoro, who is in her first year of middle school.

There are some factors which make this storyline quite complicated.

First, seven children are all middle school students, but they refuse to go to school because they have many problems in their lives such as being bullied.

Second, the castle would be closed in one year depending on whether or not they could find the key. Thus, they could not stay forever in the castle to avoid their problems.

Third, the key is important. This key has a magical power to make their wishes come true. However, only one child who finds the key could use the power. Therefore, even though they have chances to become friends, they are rivals at the same time. In addition, if a child got the power of the key, the castle would disappear, and they all would forget everything they experienced in the castle. These factors make the story more complicated but also attractive.

We would like to discuss in greater detail why this book attracts young people.

First, as we mentioned, the characters’ situations and their aims seem fancy and unrealistic. The castle in this story is a kind of shelter for the students. They can avoid going to school or staying at home by being at the castle. However, the time limit is only a year, and they could not gather forever at the castle even if they have a good relationship with each other.

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Hence, the time-limit and the rules make them struggle. They must face their school or family problems in their lives after the castle closes. If somebody finds the key, students must forget everything about the castle and their relationships will also disappear.

Second, through communication in the castle, students come to understand each other. Gradually they find people support them too. For instance, Kokoro realizes her mother worries about her all the time and a friend who lives next door shares the same feeling about going to school. Sooner or later, they must face their problems because the magic of the key does not solve everyone's problems in the story. The one thing that supports the characters after they leave the castle is the hope they got from their communication in the castle. The struggles of the students in the story depict the movement of emotions. As a result, we can conclude that the emotional depiction of the problems are realistic, even though the story unfolds in a magic realm.

These are the reasons the book's story creates sympathy among young people who may have school or home problems in Japan.

### The Message from the Novel

We discussed some reasons why this novel attracts young people in Japan. In conclusion, the story of this book is complex, and it focuses on issues from a psychological perspective. The struggles of the characters make a sort of suspension of each scene in the mirror castle/real world in the story.

Here, we would like to present one of the most impressive passages from the book.

When Kokoro was going to school on time, mom asked her, "Are you fine?", "Do you need me to go to school with you?"

Kokoro replied, "I'm alright."

Although they talked several times about this topic (whether to go to school or not) last night, her Mother still worries about her.

Kokoro also thinks it is natural (for her mother to say that).

She decided to go because now Kokoro understands that school is not the only place for her to be. She accepts that there are other places where she can receive support. If she found or faced any problems there, she could change the place. Wherever she goes, there will be someone who cannot get along with her. But now she does not need to fight for it because also there is someone who will support her.

Therefore, she decided to go back to school.

(M. Tsujimura, *The Lonely Castle In The mirror*", pp. 350—351, the explanations in parenthesis were added by the authors)

Reading this scene, one can notice the change in Kokoro's mind. In the beginning of the story, she refused to go to school. But through the interactions and communications with friends in the castle and her mother, she eventually changes her thoughts about school and her problems. The same can be said about the other characters. They also find ways to cope with their problems. Though not all problems are solved in the story, their decisions to reframe bad situations and face their problems encourages the reader.

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When bad things happen, we are often just fixed on them. In such situations we cannot think about other things around us. This novel tells us that we have our own places where we can be and there are certainly people who will support us.

### References:

Tsujimura, M. (2017). *The Lonely Castle In The Mirror*. Poplar Publishing.