

The Kawabata Quest for Purity: A Study on Sexuality in Modern Japanese Literature

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Abstract

The openness in the depiction of sexuality in modern Japanese literature represents a subversion of the conventions. This paper makes use of the portrayal of sexuality in Yasunari Kawabata's (1899-1972) works to show how the depiction of sexuality in modern Japanese literature implies both the influence of western modernism and the revival of Japanese conventional essence. Special attention will be paid to how the quest for purity is the ultimate realm in modern Japan during the Showa period.

The two Kawabata's works chosen for analysis come from different periods during the Showa era (1926-1989): *The Izu Dancer* (1926) and *House of the Sleeping Beauties* (1961). During these writing years, not only had Kawabata himself turned from a promising young writer to a well-known, lonely old man, his protagonists also evolve with him. Still, the conventional essence in their quests of sexuality has not been altered. They share the common goal in the pursuit of purity.

Keywords: Yasunari Kawabata, modern Japan, sexuality, purity

Introduction

Modern Japan is always regarded as the most appropriate and successful example in illustrating how an imperial country became a modernized world power with international recognition. History textbooks depict the modernization of Japan since the Meiji period as a process that strengthened the country through adopting western elements. On the other hand, many Japanese traditions were considered as obstacles and should therefore be abandoned. This makes Talcott Parsons' controversial idea of conflating modernization with westernization seemingly applicable to the case of modern Japan (Parsons, 1951). The modernization of Japan gives rise to a set of unique Japanese culture which is not shared by the west. The openness of modern Japanese literature in the portrayal of sexuality is often considered as a subversion of the conventions. It should be noted that convention does not refer to Japanese traditions before its modernization, nor does subversion mean the western tradition being brought to Japan. This paper makes use of Yasunari Kawabata's (1899-1972) works to demonstrate the revival of Japanese conventional essence as seen in modern Japanese literature. Special attention will be paid to how the pursuit of purity is the ultimate realm in modern Japan.

The uniqueness of modernized Japan can easily be seen from the works of Modern Japanese literature. The Meiji period (1868-1912) symbolized Japan's emergence as a modernized nation. Renowned Japanologist Donald Keene commented that the Meiji Restoration in 1868 "had fundamentally changed both the culture of Japan and its position in the world" (Keene 2003: 24). To strengthen the country against European imperialism, Japanese writer and journalist Yukichi Fukuzawa initiated the idea of Datsu-A Ron or Leaving Asia in 1885. The idea marks the first Japanese attempt in making the country a civilized world power by adopting the western model. Though Modern Japanese literature can be defined as literary works written from 1868 onwards till the very present day, the problem of this rough definition is, needless to say, the embodiment of different dynastic periods with significant societal changes which resulted in a diversity of literary works. Still, the

uniqueness of modern Japanese literature can be seen from the works written during the aforesaid period of time.

Modernist Writings in Japan: An Overview

This paper pays special attention to modern Japanese literature during the Showa period (1926-1989). There are several reasons for such a choice. First, from the aspect of literature, the idea of modernism which originated from the western world arrived in Japan during early Showa period. It is also the period that many icons of modernist writings such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Ezra Pound were active in the western world and exerted influence upon Japanese writers. Second, the Showa period symbolizes the era of changes and alterations worldwide. Not only did the west experience destruction and reconstruction, Japan had also encountered political conflicts with other countries, defeat in war and economic recession. It is through the study of various literary works written during this period that we can understand the complexity of modern Japan.

Japan had already undergone the process of modernization during the Showa period. Through analyzing literary works written in this period of time which are actually products of modernized Japan, we can conclude whether modernization should be aligned with westernization in modern Japan. The works selected in illustrating the observations come from the first Nobel Prize winner in Japan, Yasunari Kawabata. Though his works cannot represent the whole pool of modern Japanese literature, they have actually included some major themes in modern Japanese literature. Some of the major themes include the shock of sexuality, as we can find in Yukio Mishima's *Thirst for Love* (1950); the isolation of mankind, as we can find in Kōbō Abe's *Woman in the Dunes* (1960) and the crisis of modern psyches, as we can find in various works by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki. The theme being explored in this paper is the quest for purity. In western literature, the quest for purity is a seemingly insignificant theme. The only exception could be Christian literature which stresses on the virtue of spiritual purity. However, the quest for purity appears frequently in Kawabata's

works and is one of the major themes found in both literary works and the popular culture of modern Japan. For instance, they can still be found in popular literary works in the 20th and 21st centuries. Some of the examples include *A Lost Paradise* (1997) by Jun'ichi Watanabe and *Socrates in Love* by Kyoichi Katayama (2001). The works of Watanabe and Katayama show that the essence of Japanese quest for purity lies on purity in love relations. This further links us to the idea of Platonic love in the western sense¹. Based on such linkage, I explore in this paper on the relationship between purity and sexuality in love relations by means of a modern western philosophical approach. Through which I investigate whether the Japanese derived their quest for purity from western philosophy.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical approach is used to analyze the theme of purity in the selected stories written by Kawabata due to two main reasons. First, works written by Kawabata are sometimes referred as "Freudian stories" (Starrs 1998: 145). Inspired by this remark and the aforesaid linkage between purity and sexuality, this paper attempts to explore the possible connection between the Kawabatan quest for purity and the Freudian definition on sexuality morality. Freud gave a definition to sexual morality:

Characteristic of present-day sexual morality is the extension of the demands made upon women on to the sexual life of the male, and the taboo on all sexual intercourse except in monogamous marriage (qtd. from Rieff 1997: 11).

Under western patriarchy, women are passive objects in sexual activities. For both males and females, it is considered immoral to have sexual relation outside marriage. This implies that sexuality, being an instinct of mankind, is suppressed. Such observation echoes with Freud's idea that "[o]ur civilization is, generally speaking, founded on the suppression

¹ *Kyoichi Katayama's Socrates in Love seems to be a deliberate correlation.*

of instincts (qtd. from Rieff 1997: 15). Unlike the concept of sexuality morality suggested by Freud, extra-marital relations may not be considered as immoral in traditional Japanese context. As the indigenous religion of Japan, Shinto views sexuality as a "natural, normal, and appropriate human behavior", as long as they don't exert adverse influence over one's social roles (Perez 2002: 260). Thus, it seems that Freud's idea on the immoral nature of sexuality outside monogamous marriage is not entirely applicable to the Japanese context. However, my second reason for adopting the Freudian mode is related to the heterogenetic changes brought to Japan as a result of the Meiji Restoration. Psychoanalysis was introduced to Japan mainly after Japanese defeat in the Second World War. Western elements that were imported to Japanese society brought heterogenetic changes to the society. Heterogenetic changes refer to alterations that happen to a society due to influences from the outside, rather than alterations that generate within that society². Many notions raised in Kawabata's stories have exactly revealed the shocks that occur to the Japanese as a result of Western influence upon their country since the Meiji Restoration.

Two pieces of Kawabata's works are used for analysis. They come from different periods during the Showa era. *The Izu Dancer* was published in 1926 while *House of the Sleeping Beauties* was published in 1961. There are a lot of surprisingly discoveries in analyzing these two works coming from different periods. Although Kawabata's mentality turned from a young writer to a well-known but lonely old man, the conventional essence in his quest for purity remains despite various changes and alterations in modern Japanese society.

In both stories, the quest of the protagonist plays an important role in the development of the plot. In *The Izu Dancer*, the protagonist is a high school graduate who goes for a trip to the Izu Peninsula. During the quest, the protagonist has encountered a

² See Roland, Alan. (1998). *In Search of Self in India and Japan*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 72.

group of travelling dancers. Attracted by the beauty of a young dancer, the protagonist decides to turn the physical quest into a spiritual journey to manhood. As the plot complicates, his evil intention of luring the young dancer to sexual act is ironically purified by the innocent quality of the young dancer. In entering the complexity of the adult world, he eventually understands the value of being pure and innocent. *House of the Sleeping Beauties* depicts an old man's visit to the secret house of "sleeping beauties". It is where young girls are willingly made unconscious by dosing sleeping pills. Similar to the young protagonist's evil intention in *The Izu Dancer*, old Eguchi's quest to the secret lodging illustrates the hideous aspect of sexual desire. However, just like the previous protagonist, it is not the pleasure of sexuality that fulfills Eguchi's desire, but the process of spiritual purification. The young bodies of the girls remind Eguchi of past relationships back to his young days. Old Eguchi has been rejuvenated by such *déjà vu*. These two works have both demonstrated the Shinto convention on the inexorable nature of sexuality. The evil intention of the young protagonist in *The Izu Dancer* and Eguchi's visit to the secret lodging indicate sexuality as natural desire not subjected to age or social class. That both of them have finally achieved fulfillment in the pursuit of purity, rather than pre-marital or extra-marital sexuality, seemingly echoes with the Freudian notion of sexuality morality. However, as both characters have achieved spiritual purification, I suggest that the fulfillment gained by the two characters reflect the non-repressive aspect of sexuality in the Kawabata pursuit of purity. Kawabata's works thus demonstrate the Shinto convention on the natural and inexorable nature of sexuality.

Kawabata Purity

Purity in Kawabata's works is often inseparable from clean virgins. Donald Keene initiated that "Kawabata was attracted throughout his life to virginal, inviolable women" (Keene 2003: 32). The clean virgins are not protagonists in the stories but they represent the ideal goddesses that the protagonists would like to pursue. In the two stories chosen for analysis, the protagonist is either a horny guy or a womanizer. A contrasting effect has thus

been achieved through juxtapositioning such protagonists with clean virgins of innocent and pure quality.

In *The Izu Dancer*, the protagonist's coincident encounter in the beautiful region of the Izu Peninsula has soon been turned into an intentional rendezvous. He has paid both physical and spiritual efforts in order to achieve his goal. Not only does he want to catch up with the dancer on his journey in the physical sense, evil plan has also developed in his mind:

"Where will they [the dancers] stay tonight?" I asked the woman when she came back.

"People like that, how can you tell where they'll stay? If they find someone who will pay them, that's where it will be. Do you think they know ahead of time?"

"Her open contempt excited me. If she is right, I said to myself, then the dancing girl will stay in my room tonight (Kawabata 1974: 11).

Driven by evil intention, the protagonist has taken the advantage of the woman's words in justifying his plan. That he has twisted the meaning of the woman's words resembles with the misconception regarding the nature of Japanese tradition under Western eyes. For instance, westerners often misunderstand the nature of Japanese entertainers or performers. In *A Souvenir of Japan*, Angela Carter interprets geishas as prostitutes rather than performers of traditional Japanese dance or music (Carter 2005: 271). Though some unpopular or unskillful geishas were driven to become prostitutes due to poverty, geishas as professional artisans must not be denied. Being Japanese, the protagonist of Kawabata's story has also misunderstood performers such as the dancing girl and her teammates as prostitutes that offer sex to customers who are willing to pay. With no doubt, this misconception is stimulated by his evil intention.

While the Freudian notion on civilized sexual morality represents the suppression of sexuality outside monogamous marriage, Kawabata suggests the transcendence of sexuality. In *The Izu Dancer*, the protagonist's quest on the fulfillment of sexuality is transcended by the purity of the young dancer. There is a twist in the protagonists' attitude upon realizing that the dancer is not yet a grown-up:

It was the little dancer. I looked at her, at the young legs, at the sculptured white body, and suddenly a draught of fresh water seemed to wash over my heart. I laughed happily. She was a child, a mere child, a child who could run out naked into the sun and stand there on her tiptoes in her delight at seeing a friend. I laughed on, a soft, happy laugh. It was as though a layer of dust had been cleared from my head (Kawabata 1974: 16).

To the surprise of the readers, the protagonist is not disappointed by the immature female body in front of him. On the other hand, he is delighted to see the sense of childish innocence. This utterance of laughter represents the realization of his mistake. As suggested by Roy Starrs, the protagonist's evil intention of luring the young dancer to sexual act has metaphorically been cleared and washed away (Starrs 1998: 54). His evil mind has been purified as the acquaintance has been transformed into true friendship. This critical moment of revelation has also changed the protagonist's perception towards the travelling performers. A comfortable and true friendship has developed in between them. This comfortability allows the protagonist to understand the loneliness of the performers and the simplicity of their lifestyle. This revelation also reflects his ability to appreciate national art.

The happiness of the protagonist can also be explained by the realization of the goal of his quest. This graduate trip marks the end of his boyhood and the beginning of his manhood. This further signifies loneliness as the familiar environment and acquaintances have become by-gones. Driven by evil curiosity during the stage of puberty, he believes that

the breaking of virginity symbolizes the entering of manhood. It is the purity of the little dancer that awakens him. He comes to the Izu peninsula in search for the pureness in human that cannot be found in the prosperous and populated Tokyo.

What exactly is the pureness in humans? Kawabata's works show a tendency in glorifying virgins. In *The Izu Dancer*, the notion of purity does not merely refer to the virginity of the little dancer. She is actually praised by her genuine innocence and not being ashamed of her nakedness. This reminds readers on Adam and Eve living in the Garden of Eden before their fall. In terms of the pureness in human, the people that the protagonist has encountered during his travel to the Izu Peninsula have demonstrated love and mutual trust, which is sadly disappearing in the modern world.

Written thirty-six years after *The Izu Dancer*, *House of the Sleeping Beauties* represents Kawabata's continuous effort in the pursuit of purity. Roy Starrs shares the point of view that the sleeping beauties are agents that "purify and rejuvenate" the dying old men (Ibid 185). To relate ugly and impotent old men who pay for their visits to unconscious young maidens with the notion of purity seem incomprehensible at the first glance. However, through sleeping next to the naked young bodies, old Eguchi, who is the protagonist of the story, recalls memories in his past:

He would travel back over memories of women with whom he had had affairs. An old love had come back tonight because the sleeping beauty had given him the illusion ... Perhaps it was a melancholy comfort for an old man to be sunk in memories of women who would not come back from the far past, even while he fondled a beauty who would not awaken (Kawabata 1969: 26-7).

The memories aroused by sleeping next to the sleeping beauties are all linked to women who have been exploited by him or victimized by other men. His addiction to the house of the sleeping beauties where unconscious young maidens are "free" for his

exploitation can be explained by their mysterious function in stirring up memories that he has long been forgotten.

In this story, the purity of females is what old Eguchi pursues throughout his life. Though the sleeping beauties are associated with the materialistic aspect of the young generation, as they have betrayed their youth and beauty, they are the sole persons being praised. They are even compared to Buddha³. It is not surprising that readers may have a question in their mind: aren't the sleeping beauties prostitutes who are willing to give their bodies to those who can pay? It seems that they are far from the sacred Buddha in many ways. Just like the misconception that the protagonist in *The Izu Dancer* has, the sleeping beauties should not be viewed as sex workers. Other than being performers of youth and beauty, they are also therapists that comfort lonely old men. This is hinted in two ways. First, the old men who visit the house are generally impotent. Second, the beauties serve to accompany lonely old men in sleepless nights. Kawabata had also made a distinction by giving us the hint that the sleeping beauties are possibly virgin whores.

Talking about modern Japan in the present day, the popularity of Japanese pornographic or adult video industry violates the Freudian or Christian perspective regarding sexual morality. There is nothing surprising that the 70s generation Japanese males view the adult video actresses Ai Lijima as goddess. Such appreciation towards females from the sex industry is unique in Japanese culture. When we take this phenomenon into serious consideration, it is found that this uniqueness represents the legacy of the Kawabata tradition in the Showa period.

There is at least one historical fact in traditional Japanese society that would help us to understand the Japanese perspective on sexuality and particularly the pursuit of pureness in sexuality. Before the Second World War, there was an old tradition in Japan known as *Yobai* or nightcrawling. It refers to the practice of a male stranger visiting the house of a

³ *Old Eguchi describes the experience of visiting the house of the sleeping beauties as "sleeping with a secret Buddha" (Kawabata 1969: 22)*

female at night for lovemaking. The belief behind is that nighttime is said to be the time for deities to visit human. Through receiving the male strangers at night, the females bear the symbolic meaning of serving deities and would be blessed (Ryang 2006: 21-30). House of the Sleeping Beauties revives this Japanese tradition in the modern context. Just like the deity in the past, the guests of the inn are trusted guests:

The woman had spoken of guests she could trust. It seemed that everyone who came here could be trusted. The man who had told Eguchi of the house was so old that he was no longer a man. He seemed to think that Eguchi had reached the same stage of senility (Kawabata 1969: 17).

The enjoyment that the guests have in the inn makes them feel like deities. The girls are like sacrifices to the old men. Their willingness makes them pure like deities. This has also explained the linkage between the sleeping beauties and Buddha. They do not only share the same quality of being motionless. They have similarly given mercy to the ugly and impotent old men. Sadly, they can only do so when they're asleep. They lack the true courage in sacrificing themselves like women in the ancient time.

Instead of the pursuit of purity, the pursuit of virgins sounds like a more common theme in Kawabata's works. The pursuit of virgins is part of the institutional policy in occupied Japan during the Showa period. In the sex education guidelines, junketsukyoiku or purity education is the prominent goal in making school girls candidates of good wives (Ryang 2006: 67). The values transmitted through purity education aimed to safeguard the virginity and sexual purity of young girls (Ibid 74). This institutional policy allows us to understand how the mentality on the pursuit of virgins is developed during the occupied era. It is an imported element that acted as a controller on citizen's moral standard. The pursuit of virgins appears in Kawabata's *The Izu Dancer* even before the implementation of the purity education policy. If such a pursuit is not a personal preference of Kawabata, this could be an indication

that proves the influence of Confucius beliefs in Japan. The Confucius beliefs stress on *li* or the etiquette of daily behavior. Having premarital or extramarital relationship would be regarded as a violation of such etiquette. The nightcrawling tradition in ancient Japan reflects that sexual purity in the Japanese sense is not defined by the restriction of sexual intercourse outside marriage. This makes them different from the perspectives of the occupied force or the Confucians.

Purity in the two selected works being discussed is related to the pure relationship between mankind. In *The Izu Dancer*, the travelling dancers are not only willing to accept the protagonist as their companion but they have also expressed their views frankly in front of the stranger. This makes them different from the city dwellers who care only about money. The love between the young dancer and the protagonist is referred by Donald Keene as "pure love of adolescents" (Keene 2003: 32). This type of love can be regarded as the pioneer of pure love promoted recently in Japanese literary sphere. Their relationship has been transformed through the building of mutual trust and respect rather than sexual connection. In *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, the relationship between the sleeping beauties and the old men is similar to that of the women and the deities in the ancient time. Why can't the sleeping beauties be the same as the women in the past? By the time Kawabata had written the story, Japan had not only experienced modernization but also defeat in war. That the sleeping beauties can only serve the ugly old men when they are unconscious can be explained as mistrust between mankind after war. Makoto Ueda suggests the notion of impossible love in Kawabata's works as the crucial factor in achieving pure relationship:

Many other novels and stories by Kawabata center on this type of love, an impossible love that is pure and without stain because of its impossibility (Ueda 1976: 179).

The development of romantic relationships among many Kawabata's characters is impossible because they are too good to be true. It is exactly the realization of self ugliness and horniness and the discovery of the pure quality of the target of pursuit that make further development of the relationship impossible. The protagonists dare not to offend the pureness of the pursuit target, but to treat the valuable relationship with care and respect.

House of the Sleeping Beauties reflects the fatal aspect of modernized Japan. At the time when Kawabata wrote the story, he was no longer a young man like the protagonist in *The Izu Dancer*. The writer has actually resembled with the image of the old protagonist in *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, who faces the problem of aging and witnessing the deaths of many others. When we look at Kawabata's works chronologically, it is easy to find that the Japanese society being depicted is making progress in a linear manner. The progress is a result of modernization but it brings forth the degradation of the society in Kawabata's works. When the society is built upon westernized elements and technologies, old traditions have been discarded. *Thousand Cranes* is a perfect example that demonstrates this circumstance. The landscape of the city is formed by western buildings and people with western clothing. The Showa generation is being portrayed as ignorant of their national treasure. Few of them can appreciate the essence and beauty of the tea ceremony. It is a piece of work that shows how the Japanese have polluted their heritage under westernization, not just in the physical, but also in the moral sense.

Kawabata Modernity

In Kawabata's works, the juxtaposition of traditional Japanese and modern western elements is commonly found. Kawabata's love towards Japanese traditions resulted in his determination to continue the heritage under the waves of modernization. It is important to note that tradition is not the same as uncivilized in Kawabata's mind. He had rather pointed out the adverse significance of heavy reliance upon modern civilization among the Japanese in the Showa period. Besides the loss of Japanese heritage, the death of a sleeping beauty in

House of the Sleeping Beauties is another example that demonstrates such a notion. The accidental death of the sleeping beauty is caused by old Eguchi's carelessness as he has turned off the electric blanket. However, that a young female reaches death, instead of the dying old man, represents the fragility of the young and modernized generation.

Kawabata's works should not be read as anti-modernist. The protagonists in his works share the common traits of loneliness and alienation just like many other characters under the pens of modernist writers in the western world. The young protagonist in *The Izu Dancer* is going through both a physical and spiritual journey. There is an autobiographical reference of Kawabata's walking tour of the Izu Peninsula in the autumn of 1918. It is said that he was touched by the readiness with which the group of traveling entertainers accepted him (Keene 2003: 31-2). By the end of his journey, the protagonist has to face once again the loneliness in the city. Old Eguchi in *House of the Sleeping Beauties* is a light sleeper. This has coincidentally reminded readers of sleepless nights faced by the speaker of T.S. Eliot's *Rhapsody on a Windy Night* (1917):

The lamp said,
"Four o'clock,
Here is the number on the door.
Memory!
You have the key,
The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair.
Mount (Eliot 2002: 18).

Similar to the problem faced by Eguchi, the speaker in Eliot's poem is under the threat of ageing as well. The speaker mentions that past memory comes up to his mind at midnight. As indicated by "Midnight shakes the memory", midnight serves as an agent that arouses past memory in the mind of the speaker (Eliot 2002: 16). The speaker has reached

the final stage in his life and come to a realization that his youth will never come back. He can only recollect his young days through memories. Different from Eguchi, the speaker has some hope towards his life despite the crisis that he faces. Although the lamp upon the stair is a little one with limited illumination, the light that it spreads out forms a ring. This ring is associated with divinity or heavenly nature that brings hope to people. As the speaker is climbing up a stair with a ring on it, it seems that he is reaching a heavenly place. It may seem ironic as the heavenly peace may represent the eternal paradise that he will reach soon. Eliot's depiction proves that loneliness in sleeping nights is the common symptom of numerous restless modern minds. Meanwhile, that Kawabata had also suffered from insomnia reflects the autobiographical quality of his work. In *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, the polarized worlds of the mysterious and unconscious sleeping beauties and that of the lonely and awoken old men demonstrates the sadness of alienations in the modern world. People from these two worlds are unable to communicate with each other. This is possibly a representation of generation gap in Showa Japan. The generations from traditional and modern Japan fail to understand each other. They are both alienated by each other as a result of the absence of communication.

From the literary point of view, the pursuit of purity as a common phenomenon in Kawabata's works represents his desire in the pursuit of pure literature. This category of literary works is a typical product of modernized Japan. It reflects both the spirit inherited from the European "art for art's sake" and the uniqueness in the beauty of the Japanese language and the spirit of the country. Purity in literature refers to both its originality and aesthetic perspectives. It is not subjected to the constraints of social norms. The works of Kawabata shows a deliberate effort in breaking the conventional standards on morality. When Japan would like to build up her image as a modern and civilized nation by gaining western recognition in the fifties, traditional rituals such as nightcrawling became unlawful. This has also explained for the scarce acknowledgement of this custom to the west (Ryang 2006: 31). A true precursor of pure literature does not put emphasis on this kind of political or social pressure. While "every European nationality marveled at Japan's apparent lack of

sexual shame", the notion of sexuality in Kawabata's works goes beyond moral limits in many different ways (Perez 2002: 259). Instead of exaggeration on sexuality and deliberate challenge on moral standard, his works should be read as a reflection on the moral values and sexual lives in Showa Japan. This is possibly what Kawabata meant about rebellion against conventionally morality⁴.

Conclusion

Samuel Huntington referred Japan as the most important lone country that lacks "cultural commonality with other societies". Kawabata was seemingly monocultural; however, his writing style suggests the influence of Western modernism upon him. The mixture of haiku-like lines with interior monologues in his works is highly associated with the cross influence of Japanese poetic style and the modernist technique of stream of consciousness. Kawabata's works are rather Japanese in terms of content as there are often exclusive Japanese ingredients in his writings. Geishas, kimonos, the Go chess and other Japanese localities can be found in his writings. Despite of the continuous importation of western products during over a century's time of modernization, Japanese literature remains unique with a combination of both western modernists and Japanese values.

In the portrayal of sexuality, Kawabata's works reveal how Japanese literature shows a different attitude regarding morality. In Japanese literary works, it is common for man to have extra-marital affairs. Unlike the Western setting in which the extra-marital affair often disrupts couple relations, extra marital relations in Japanese society seem to be acceptable as long as it does not affect the relationship between husband and wife. Kawabata's works show how lustrous sexual desire is not repressed. However, the pursuit of purity in sexuality and love relations is often regarded the ultimate realm. Instead of gaining excitement from his evil plan, the protagonist in *The Izu Dancer* understands the joy of purity and

⁴ Kawabata wrote, "*Without a rebellion against conventional morality there can be no 'pure literature.'*" (Keene 2003: 35)

innocence from the child figure of the young dancer. In *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, old Eguchi realizes his own hideous and lustrous aspects from the purity of the virgin whores. The pursuit of purity as the common theme in recent Japanese culture has its early precedent during the Showa period (Huntington 1996: 136-7). This kind of purity does not superficially refer to sexual purity or the virginal ideal. It refers to both the relationship between mankind and the essence of pure literature.

Being a lone country, loneliness and alienation are all around among the Japanese population. The popularity of the adult video industry and the phenomenon of aid-dating in Japan are often seen as signs of moral degradation. However, Japan is one of the few modernized countries with low rape rate. The prosperity of the legalized sex industry can partly explain for the availability of channel for repressed sexual traits.

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