



# Death in Japanese and Indonesian Literature: A Comparative Study of Literary Psychology

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**Abstract.** The study of death is an interesting matter and is currently a trend. One of them is the study of death in literature. In this regard, the research aims to describe death in Japanese and Indonesian literature in the context of a comparative study. This research method uses qualitative to emphasize data narration. The approach refers to the psychology of death, focusing on the psychology of literary works. The data were collected from the Indonesian literature series called *Nagabumi*, and the Japanese Literature series titled *Musashi*. Data collection techniques were assembled in the form of a documentary. The results of the research show that both *Nagabumi* and *Musashi* novels bring up death associated with fighting/battles on the battlefield; death is a noble thing when it is associated with a fight/battle; and from a different aspect, death in *Musashi* is associated with Japanese zen philosophy, while death in *Nagabumi* is not associated with a particular philosophy, but rather leads to a spiritual aspect.

**Keywords:** Death, Comparative Literature, Psychology.

## 1 Introduction

Death is a topic of interest in various scientific disciplines. In the context of philosophy, [1] declaring death is an ancient topic; it emerged from the Greek era. It is still interesting to study and discuss today. In the context of psychology, [2], [4] it reveals that modern humans experience alienation, resulting in death. In the context of sociology, [5] it discusses the sociology of death about the type and social context. In contemporary developments, death is not only a study in basic science that is more directed to a monodisciplinary context, but it is more directed to various interdisciplinary studies nowadays. This can be seen in writing, for example, [6] a study of suicide conducted in the context of adolescents, [7] which discusses the link between music and suicide.

Mortality in modern humans is increasing along with the alienation of modern humans who experience emptiness in life [2]. Modern humans have more demands and pressures

in life, making the complexity of life increase. This makes them choose the path of suicide. In this context, suicide is an escape from modern humans who are no longer strong enough to face alienation and the emptiness of life. However, there is also suicide considered to be a genuine path in seeking the truth of life and one's spiritual path. Thus, everyone has different desires to commit suicide because their motives for committing suicide are based on their personal experience.

Death in the context of modern humans cannot be separated from the context of spirituality in certain societies. In Japan, they have Kamikaze groups willing to commit suicide because of their spirituality. They carried out suicide attacks on allied aircraft during the Asia-Pacific war [8]. In addition, death is claimed as a theory that damages/destroys public facilities and kills people [9]. Suicide in terrorism is sometimes associated with a religious context and disappointed people with a government in a particular country.

The study of art as a creative area of study cannot be separated from the Death theme [10]. One of these areas of art is literature. As a creative work, literature cannot be separated from suicide. Whether the theme of suicide is committed by the author or the appearance of death in literary works will show off symbolically or explicitly. One of the writers who committed suicide, for example, Ernest Hemingway, an author from Oak Park, Illinois, America [11], committed suicide by shooting himself. The phenomenon of a writer committing suicide in a literary context cannot be separated from the author's psychological problems. Apart from that, Yasunari Kawabata, a writer from Japan, also committed suicide to end his life. This shows that writers as creative figures cannot be separated from the psychological problems that bind them. Therefore, literary works cannot be separated from the psychological context of the author.

Similar to universal literature, Indonesian literature is also inseparable from the theme of suicide. Several writers, for example, Darma, wrote about the theme of suicide in their literary works [12]. The themes of suicide and death in literature are mostly carried out by writers with an existentialist view; for example, [13] and [14] narrate death in modern humans. Likewise, [15] writes the theme of suicide in his fiction. The theme of suicide in literature is not only dominated by male authors, but also female authors try to raise suicide and death in their literature. This was raised to strengthen feminist literature that seeks to promote the existence of women.

In Indonesia, the concept of self-labor, individually and collectively, is not strong enough. Indonesia is a country that follows a religious philosophy. Most Indonesian writers or literary works rarely raise the concept of suicide. Because of that phenomenon, this study raises suicidal desires and behavior themes in Indonesian literature and Japanese literature from the perspective of the psychology of death.

Specifically, these suicidal desires and behaviors are examined through Indonesian and Japanese literary works. The Indonesian literary works chosen as the research data source are the series novel called *Nagabumi* and the Japanese literary work entitled *Musashi*. *Nagabumi* is the work of author Seno Gumira Ajidarma, while *Musashi* is a novel by Eiji Yoshikawa.

*Musashi* tells the story of Takezo (later to become Musashi) and his best friend Matahachi, who are lucky to survive the Sekigahara war, which determines Tokugawa's victory. The villagers, instigated by Matahachi's mother, stipulate Takezo as a fugitive to be tried and sentenced to death because they are thought to have dragged Matahachi to the battlefield and think that Matahachi did not return because of Takezo's actions. However, none of them were able to catch Takezo.

In this section, Eiji Yoshikawa presents the character of Takuan, a Zen priest who managed to save Takezo from death row, and replaced it by isolating Takezo in a room for three years to meditate and study. Then, Takezo studied Sun Tzu's martial arts, eventually finding enlightenment. Once free, Takezo decided to become Shugyosha, the Wandering Samurai. He changed his name to Miyamoto Musashi to indicate that Musashi is a newborn, and Takezo has disappeared from him. Kyoto was the first city Musashi visited. In this city, Musashi fought against people from the Hozoin temple and Yoshioka school, who left the Yoshioka people with grudges and hatred against Musashi, causing long conflicts. After that, he went from one place to another to deepen his sword-playing technique.

*Nagabumi* is the first book by Seno Gumira Ajidarma with the theme of martial arts. This series is a trilogy; with the first book titled *Jurus Tanpa Bentuk* (Formless Move), published in 2009; then the second book called *Buddha, Pedang, dan Penyamun Terbang* (Buddha, Sword, and Flying Rogues), published in 2011; and the third book titled *Hidup dan Mati di Chang'an* (Life and Death in Chang'an), published in 2019. This novel tells the journey of a Nameless Warrior (*Pendekar Tanpa Nama*) between the world of martial arts and his personal life. In *Nagabumi*, Seno Gumira Ajidarma includes historical facts in the form of quotations from ancient texts for readers. These quotations were generally created by philologists in the form of archaeological and historical data about steles, temples, the construction of temples, and powers such as in Javadvipa (Java Island) and Suvarnadvipa (Sumatra Island) at that time. This series also describes anthropology and ethnography in the VIII-IX centuries, adapted from books to scientific works in journal articles, theses, dissertations, and others that discussed history from the 8th century to the 19th century. Seeing these facts, *Nagabumi* is determined to be a historical fiction series.

History written in fiction requires the author (novelist) to process historical data and facts carefully. A well-known example of historical fiction is Diana Gabaldon's novel called *Outlander*. In addition to the historical value contained in *Nagabumi*, there is also several knowledge about law, urban planning, and economics from the book of *Arthashastra* written by Kautilya, a teacher, philosopher, economist, jurist, and royal adviser from Jambhudvipa (India). The knowledge about the procedures for intercourse is from the book of *Kama Sutra* Jambhudvipa (India), written by Vasuyana, a Hindu philosopher. There are also philosophical values, ranging from the philosophy of martial arts techniques to the philosophies from Nagasena's conversations with Buddha.

Through several things previously mentioned, *Nagabumi* is different from other silat-themed novels that have been published and circulated in Indonesia. For example, S. H. Mintardja's Silat stories emphasize more on fiction for entertainment. Kho Ping Hoo's Silat story is slightly different because He added philosophical values to each of his

moves and has a background in places, characters, and Chinese culture. The novel of *Gajahmada* by Langit Kersa Hariadi and the novel of *Senopati Pamungkas* by Arswendo Atmihwiloto have similarities to *Nagabumi*, especially in creating events and places based on historical facts. However, these two novels are not as detailed as *Nagabumi* in explaining some places and the ethnography of society quoted directly from history books and scientific works to describe the archaeology of the temples at that time. According to the background, this research mainly focused on comparing death in Indonesian and Japanese literature.

## 2. Method

The research method used in this study is qualitative, which uses more verbal and narrative data [16], [17], [18]. The data sources are Indonesian literary works called *Nagabumi* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma and Japanese literature titled *Musashi* by Eiji Yoshikawa. The data used in the research are selected data contained in the texts of the two novels (as the sources of research data), such as phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, dialogues, monologues, and fragments of novel texts relevant to the formulation of the problem.

Data collection techniques were carried out in a documentary manner through literature studies using three stages; first, the identification of literary texts (the novels of *Nagabumi* and *Musashi* as research data sources) which are related to suicide; second, the classification of research data related to suicide; and third, the presentation of research data related to the results of the analysis.

## 3. Results And Discussion

In *Musashi* [19], death is more likely to appear in ronin. As a ronin, they will think about two things: victory and defeat. If they win, they will live. If they lost, they would die. Death in the mind of a ronin is common, and they must be prepared for death. This statement is shown in the following quotation:

To the universe, the death of one man could hardly have any more significance than that of a butterfly. But in the realm of mankind, a single death could affect everything, for better or worse. *Musashi's* only concern now was how to die a noble death (Yoshikawa, 2000: 343).

The description shows that a ronin named *Musashi* is an enlightened human being in terms of the philosophy of death. In his early life as a ronin, he saw death as a failure because he lost a fight with the enemy. In this context, the character loosed the fight because he is killed or commits suicide. However, when he is enlightened by studying Zen, *Musashi's* figure of longing for death begins.

Musashi wanted a good death that had meaning for himself and others. This is what is called the beginning of death. A death that is good for others, not even a painful death that is bad for others.

In another context, monk Takuan, a Zen monk figure, taught that death is not scary. Every human being will be facing death. That way, humans cannot fight and avoid death. Humans will die. It could be an ordinary death or a philosophical death. This statement is shown in the following quotation.

“There is nothing frightening about death, nothing to cry over. Don't weep, child, don't weep. Takuan will prepare you for the end” (Yoshikawa, 2000: 635).

Based on this quote, the figure of the monk Takuan taught that death is not scary. Humans should not be afraid of death because death is something beautiful. Humans will be facing that death. You don't have to regret people who have died, leaving other humans or being anxious in the face of death.

In *Nagabumi* [20], death also tends to appear in fighters. In the novel, it is described that death is not a scary thing. This statement is shown in the following quotation.

As a warrior, I will give them an honorable death, that is, a death in battle. (Ajidarma, 2013: 3).

The quote shows that having a death in a battle is honorable and has a high philosophical value. This is the meaning of true death. By demonstrating proficiency in the art of fighting, Death is shown as noble.

In another context, death is the noblest thing to do when it came to lose. Losing a fight is usually something that is considered shameful and despicable. Sometimes fighters asked to be killed by their opponents because they have lost. That shows how the fighter chose to commit suicide as a form of defeat. He chose the path of death. This statement is shown in the following quotation.

Is it true that the human soul is nothing compared to death? Warriors in the world of martial arts always feel the dignity to die in a battle rather than to live in the shame of losing a battle. Defeated always means death, which is full of honor (Gumira, 2013: 262).

This quotation shows that a human who loses a fight is a human who will choose the path of death. This path is considered the same path to live in shame because of losing the battle.

According to the two novels, death appears to be a very strong ideology in the life of the warriors. In Japan, death is associated with ronin, while in Indonesia death is associated with fighters. Both *Musashi* and *Nagabumi* are talking about death. Death is noble as it is related to fighting bravely and having a good death for others. It also has a

different philosophical aspect. In *Musashi*, death is associated with zen philosophy, while in *Nagabumi*, it is not associated with a particular philosophy but more with spiritual aspects.

#### 4. Conclusion

Indonesian literature and Japanese literature are both related in terms of death. Based on the explanation discussed, it is found that *Nagabumi* and *Musashi* both have the idea of death associated with fighting/battles on the battlefield; death is a noble thing when it is associated with a fight/battle; and from a different aspect, death in *Musashi* is associated with Japanese zen philosophy, while death in *Nagabumi* is not associated with a particular philosophy, but rather leads to a spiritual aspect.

#### Authors' Contributions

Parmin had duties for collecting and processing research data. Anas Ahmadi was the one who analyzed the data and interpreted the research data. Ahmad Burhanuddin' duties were drafting articles and editing research data. Nuria Reny Hariyati was collecting the data.

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