



Delving Into The Dynamic Cultural Transitions Within Kazuo Ishiguro's Masterpiece: An Artist Of The Floating World

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Citation: Dr Jyoti Syal, Kiran Kumar, (2024), Delving Into The Dynamic Cultural Transitions Within Kazuo Ishiguro's Masterpiece: An Artist Of The Floating World, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 3624 - 3630
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i5.3500

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 12-04-2024

Accepted: 09-05-2024

ABSTRACT

In a dynamic world characterized by perpetual change, culture emerges as the conductor of humanity's narrative, weaving a symphony of traditions and beliefs handed down through generations. When different cultures converge, it can create a complex blend that shapes our perspectives and influences who we are. This clash of cultural identities is a recurring theme in cultural studies, which critically analyzes the impact of societal power structures and ideologies, political interventions etc. on societies, economies, and identities. Japan, deeply affected by World War II, provides a poignant backdrop for exploring these themes. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, vividly portrays post-World War II Japan through the experiences of its central character, Masuji Ono. His personal struggles reflect the broader challenges faced globally in the aftermath of the war. As the only nation to endure the devastation of two atomic bombs, Japan still bears the scars of that tumultuous era. The story delves into themes of social, political, and cultural transformation. Masuji Ono's journey mirrors the broader national experience shaped by the upheavals of global conflict. *An Artist of the Floating World* illustrates the intricate interplay between culture and crisis, revealing the enduring resilience of the human spirit to adapt, grow, and find equilibrium amidst life's trials. The narrative underscores the universal human capacity to navigate challenges, portraying a poignant reflection on the lasting impact of war and cultural shifts.

Key words: Modernity, political, culture, social, America, Japan, World War II

Introduction:

Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* stands as a captivating exploration of Japan's cultural and political landscape in the aftermath of World War II. Set against the backdrop of post-World War II Japan, the narrative unfolds in a society grappling with the aftermath of colonial pursuits and the transformative impact of global conflict. Through the lens of New Historicism, this paper seeks to illuminate the novel's engagement with history and its implications for understanding the complexities of cultural shifts in post-war Japan. New Historicism invites us to deeply explore the impact of power legacies, cultural shifts, spanning historical periods and our modern world. This concept, widely discussed in academic circles, delves into former colonial territories locally and globally, where echoes of imperial domination persist. By considering the ways in which *An Artist of the Floating World* intersects with broader socio-political and cultural dynamics, this paper seeks to uncover the complexities of historical representation and memory in Ishiguro's work. Within the dynamic and diverse discourse of new historicism, the novel unfolds many narratives encompassed a broad spectrum of themes, ranging from the haunting specter of slavery to the intricate tales of migration, the ominous shadow of oppression, the unwavering spirit of resistance, the celebration of diversity, the nuances of racial dynamics, the subtle exploration of gender complexities, and the influence of geography on societal narratives.

Methodology:

As we discussed earlier that this paper seeks to uncover the complexities of historical representation and memory in Ishiguro's novel *An Artist of the Floating World* with the help of New Historicism. New Historicism, as a literary theory, has profoundly influenced the study of literature by emphasizing the inseparable relationship between texts and their historical contexts. As discussed by Xiaotang Lyu as, "Not dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists pay more attention to the historical and cultural context of the literary text". (Xiaotang, 2021) Emerging in the late 20th century as a response to the limitations of formalism and structuralism, New Historicism seeks to unravel the complex interplay between literature and history, viewing texts as products of specific socio-political conditions and cultural discourses. By examining how power, ideology, and historical contingency shape literary production and reception, New Historicism offers a dynamic framework for understanding the ways in which literature reflects and refracts the complexities of the past. Central to New Historicism is the practice of contextual reading, which involves situating texts within their historical, cultural, and political contexts. Rather than seeking to uncover the author's intentions or the text's inherent meaning, New Historicist critics examine how literature reflects and refracts the discourses of its time. This approach often involves drawing connections between literary texts and contemporary historical events, cultural practices, and ideological formations. Moreover, New Historicism emphasizes the importance of intertextuality, viewing texts as dialogues with other texts and discourses that shape and inform their meaning.

Background Study of the Novel

"Mentioned or not, cultural and historical factors guide the human activities and so does the literature, and at the same time literature inherently becomes the part of the historical and cultural heritage. The history provides the foundation of writing literature and literature gives the way out to the history to be exposed" as quoted by Keshav Raj Chalise in his research article *Ranahar: Textuality of History, Culture and Politics*. Dealing with the historical incident & war theme numerous authors have delved with, but Kazuo Ishiguro, an Anglo-Japanese writer, holds a significant place. Originally hailing from Nagasaki, Japan, Ishiguro embarked on a personal journey, migrating to England at the tender age of six. In this way, he became a living embodiment of the themes he would later explore in his literary works, adding his unique voice to the chorus of postcolonial narratives. The world shaped in *An Artist of the Floating World* is Japan. For Ishiguro, its shape is

A narrative, most literary critics agree, is a meaning-making activity, a highly deliberate rhetorical construct. It is a way we give shape to the world around us and the world of our experience. By creating a narrative out of these experiences, we impose an order and a structure on thoughts and ideas that otherwise would be uncontrollable. (Burton, 2007)

As the narrative unfolds, Ishiguro's aim is to cast a revealing light upon the pivotal years between 1948 and 1950, a time when Japan stood on the precipice of recovery, its collective psyche still haunted by the haunting specter of the war's indelible scars. During this tumultuous era, Japan found itself at the crossroads of history, where the echoes of its past met the dawn of a new global influence—the irresistible spread of American culture. To fully appreciate this juncture, we must journey back to a time when Japan, with astonishing swiftness, had metamorphosed into Asia's first industrialized and independent nation, asserting its identity from 1853 to 1895. In its relentless pursuit of regional dominance, Japan seized Taiwan following the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 and, following in the footsteps of its European imperial counterparts, sought to expand its dominion within China.

Ishiguro's focus spans Japan's pivotal years from 1948 to 1950, post-war recovery intertwined with the influence of American culture. To understand this era, it's essential to revisit Japan's rapid industrialization and expansion from 1853 to 1895, culminating in its emergence as a major Asian power. Japan's ambitions led to conflicts like the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, establishing its influence in the region. However, Japan's expansionist dreams were thwarted by the defeat in World War II, leading to occupation by the United States until 1952. This period saw profound transformations in Japanese society politically, socially, and economically. On intervene of this imperial power in Japanese democracy, Ishiguro mentions in the novel as:

Democracy is a fine thing. But that doesn't mean citizens have a right to run riot whenever they disagree with something. In this respect we Japanese have been shown to be like children. We've yet to learn how to handle the responsibility of democracy. (Ishiguro, 1986, p.120)

The identical formation of the Japan shattered in every field whether it was culture, power, economy etc. Shunya asserts, "...the ideal of postwar Japanese home life flowed explicitly from the model of the "American way of life" of the 1950s. People wanted to buy all kinds of home electric appliances and live in American type suburban houses. In the field of design and advertising, "American" influences were more evident. American films and TV dramas were quite popular especially during the 1950s..." (Shunya, 2008, p.83). He describes American occupation by dividing it into two categories: "effects consciously pursued as a part of occupation policy and effects that arose unconsciously through the interaction of occupier and occupied" (Shunya, 2008, p.84).

Discussion

Ishiguro explores the complex cultural identity of post-war Japan, where traditional Japanese values collide with Western influences during the process of reconstruction. Masuji Ono grapples with the tension between preserving traditional art forms and embracing modern Western values. The novel reflects power dynamics within Japanese society as it transitions from a militaristic regime to a democratic nation under Allied occupation. Masuji Ono's struggle to reconcile his past actions, aligned with imperialist ideologies, with the changing political landscape illustrates the power shifts within the nation. The profound influence of American culture casts a long shadow over the lives of the Japanese populace. This cultural collision lays at the heart of the protagonist, Ono's, inner turmoil, his sense of displacement, and the estrangement that plagues him. Ono, a retired artist who has tragically lost his son in the ravages of war, now resides with his two daughters. Setsuko, one of his daughters, is married, while Noriko remains single. In the later stages of his life, Ono gazes into the rearview mirror, conjuring the specters of his history and attempting to unravel the transformations in Japanese society before and after the devastating war, juxtaposing these different eras through a collage of memories. Ishiguro by portraying the character of Ono says that Rebecca Walkowitz, in her illuminating article titled "Ishiguro's Floating Worlds," astutely observes that An Artist of the Floating World intricately complicates the structure of displaced narratives by weaving together a palimpsest of memories, recounting and juxtaposing multiple stories simultaneously. Ishiguro mentions in an interview:

I'm interested in people who, in all sincerity, work very hard and perhaps courageously in their lifetimes towards something, fully believing that they're contributing to something good, only to find that the social climate has done a topsy-turvy on them by the time they reach the ends of their lives. (Mason, 1989.)

This literary technique adds layers of depth to the narrative, allowing readers to delve into the multifaceted psyche of the characters and the evolving societal backdrop. This sentiment encapsulates the essence of Ono's journey, as he grapples with the disorienting shifts in the cultural and social landscape of Japan. Through Ono's introspective lens, Ishiguro masterfully paints a canvas that bridges the past and present of Japan. According to Burton, the name of the novel relates both to traditional Japanese art but

The floating world also refers more broadly to an elaborate web of memories and epiphanies spun by narrators who are caught between two worlds (whether moral, ideological, or geographical). As the narrators look back on the roads taken in their lives, they question whether or not their lives have been a waste and this questioning invariably brings them to a crisis-point. (Burton, 2007. p 42)

The erosion of traditional Japanese values is intricately linked with the pervasive Americanization process, a cultural metamorphosis that permeates every aspect of society. Economic, topographical, and physical structures shift as monetary pursuits gradually replace the once-revered ideals of honor and respect. Simultaneously, the institution of the family undergoes a profound transformation. In the midst of these seismic societal changes, a conflicted artist emerges, seeking to strike a delicate balance between his familial obligations and the evolving demands of society. The American influence, pervasive and transformative, induces feelings of estrangement and displacement, not only within Ono's psyche but in the collective consciousness of the Japanese people. Ono himself reflects on this profound societal transformation, remarking that "...something has changed in the character of the younger generation in a way I do not fully understand, and certain aspects of this change are undeniably disturbing." (Ishiguro, 1986, p.59) The radical shift, most pronounced in the younger generation, rattles Ono's sense of belonging and understanding of his own culture. As Zuzana Fonioková astutely observes, Ono's character is marked by his evolving perception of past events, a transformation that reverberates not only in his memories but also in his present behavior. He grapples with the changing values of the younger generation, who have forsaken traditional Japanese culture in favor of American ideals. This stark generational contrast prompts a thought-provoking comparison between pre-war and post-war Japan.

The novel commences with a poignant portrayal of the importance of respect and honor, exemplified through Ono's quest to purchase a house. This house, once owned by Akira Sugimura, is the object of Ono's desire. Sugimura's daughters, responsible for its sale in their father's absence, meticulously assess potential buyers and ultimately choose Ono, despite his modest wealth. Their decision hinges on the emotional connection to the house, constructed by their father's hands. However, even in this poignant moment, the daughters' preference veers toward financial gain as they candidly admit that the house, while important, is now "strictly secondary." In this intricately woven narrative, Kazuo Ishiguro invites readers to traverse the multifaceted landscapes of memory, culture clash, and personal evolution, creating a symphony of emotions and societal transformations that resonate long after the final page is turned.

Ono's ability to secure the house rested upon his revered status as an artist, a mantle of honor that granted him this privilege. However, as the winds of change reshaped the economic landscape, a materialistic ethos began to ascend, redefining society's perspective on wealth, endowing it with newfound value and prestige. This transformation becomes strikingly evident towards the novel's conclusion during a poignant exchange between Ono and his son-in-law, Taro. Their conversation revolves around the whirlwind changes that have swept through Japan's business realm in an astonishingly brief span. The emerging Japanese corporations have ushered in a new era, bringing in fresh recruits while ushering out the old guard. In this dialogue, Ono raises a profound question to Taro, one that probes the compatibility of the altered legal approaches and

practices instituted by the new management with the ethos of his own firm. The discussion encapsulates the seismic shifts unfurling in post-war Japan's economic fabric, where tradition and modernity clash, and where the concept of honor and value undergoes a profound metamorphosis. Taro has prepared his response: "We needed new leaders with a new approach appropriate to the world of today" (Ishiguro, 1986, p.185). In the quest for economic supremacy, the call arises for visionary leaders, adorned in the garments of fresh ideologies and inventive approaches. Within this panorama, Ono's grandson emerges as an emblematic figure, epitomizing the ethos of the burgeoning generation, one singularly driven by the siren call of wealth. Despite his relatively tender years and limited experience, when probed about his aspirations, he boldly proclaims, "President of Nippon Electric!" (Ishiguro, 1986, p.186). This declaration reverberates as a harbinger of the shifting tides and evolving ambitions within the up-and-coming cohort. Ono, as an individual, cherishes traditional societal values, yet he grapples with the perplexing ideologies held by both his son-in-law and grandson. The aftermath of World War II ushered in a novel world order, one that openly championed and propelled the tenets of capitalism, ushering in the era of globalization. Japan, too, found itself swept up in this transformative wave, catalyzing a sea change in the younger generation's perception of wealth. Kathryn Woodward astutely notes that the process of globalization bears a profound impact on the crisis of identity. She articulates, "Globalization constitutes an intricate interplay between economic and cultural factors, where shifts in production and consumption patterns give rise to novel collective identities" (Woodward, 1997, p.16). However, these transformations yield multifaceted outcomes for individual identity, a phenomenon exemplified in Ono's personal journey. Furthermore, Woodward elucidates that "the cultural uniformity propagated by global marketing has the potential to sever identity from its traditional moorings of community and locale" (Woodward, 1997, p.16). In this intricate dance of shifting identities and global influences, the essence of one's self can become detached from the familiar anchors of community and place. In the looming shadow of materialism, the cherished traditional values that once anchored Japanese society found themselves adrift, their significance slowly eroding. Notions of patriotism and heroism, once the bedrock of national unity, have gradually faded into obscurity. These conceptual elements, integral to the fabric of nationalism, have undergone a substantial diminution in significance. Within the pages of Antony Smith's illuminating work, "Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History," nationalism is defined as a visionary pursuit. It is a quest to establish and safeguard self-governance, social cohesion, and a distinct cultural identity for a group of individuals, a collective deemed by some among them to constitute a present or potential nation.

Yet, the novel at hand paints a vivid tableau of intergenerational conflict, where the wisdom of age clashes with the ideals of youth. The chasm widens as Ono and the younger generation grapple with differing perspectives on pivotal issues like patriotism, heroism, and nationalism.

The younger voices within the narrative cast a critical eye back on their forebears, unflinchingly questioning the decisions of the previous generation, particularly their involvement in the cataclysmic Second World War. To them, the Japanese politicians' choice to attack Pearl Harbor appears reckless and devoid of value. A stark example of this ideological divide emerges in the conversations between Ono and Miyake, the latter being Ono's "prospective son-in-law."

For Miyake, those who participated in the war are not heroes but rather akin to criminals. In contrast, Ono, who lost his beloved son Kenji during the conflict, harbors no bitterness towards the war effort. To him, those who fought with unwavering loyalty and dedication for their country during those trying times deserve honor and respect. On this subject, their perspectives diverge sharply. For Ono, wartime service is a testament to immense dedication and an honorable endeavor; however, for Miyake, it is utterly futile.

The widening gulf in their viewpoints becomes evident when Miyake shares the news of the President's suicide, a man who took his own life as an act of apology for the company's wartime activities. To Ono's astonishment, Miyake applauds the President's decision, viewing it as a just course of action. In Miyake's eyes, the President bore the greatest responsibility for instigating the war and was, in essence, one of its chief architects. Another illustration of this generational divide unfolds through the character of Hirayama's son, a young man considered foolish. During the war's peak, he had been hailed and rewarded for serenading patriotic songs to the crowds on Kayabashi Bridge. However, the post-war landscape, less favorable to Japan, witnessed a stark turn of events. He was met with violence when he attempted to sing those same songs, his once-celebrated patriotism now met with hostility. In these intricate clashes of ideology and generational perspectives, the novel navigates the turbulent waters of a society grappling with the profound changes brought on by the passage of time and the shifting tides of history. An Artist of the Floating World has been described in a review in the following way:

"An Artist of the Floating World" is a sensitive examination of the turmoil in postwar Japan, a time when certainties were overturned, gender politics shifted, the hierarchy of the generations seemed to topple and even the geography of cities changed. All this is made more poignant when seen through the eyes of a man who is rejected by the future and who chooses to reject his own past. (Maloney, 2015)

The seismic transformation within society has cast its profound shadow upon the hallowed realm of traditional Japanese art, and within this evolution, Ono's creative odyssey bore witness to remarkable shifts. In the nascent stages of his artistic journey, Ono wielded his brushes in the time-honored Japanese fashion, conjuring compositions that often depicted the breathtaking vistas of nature, resplendent women, or temples

nestled serenely amid the wilderness (Ishiguro, 1986, p.69). Yet, the crucible of war altered the very essence of Ono's artistic expression, propelling it into the realm of patriotism and heroism. His canvases became potent tools of propaganda, igniting fervor and nationalism in the hearts of his compatriots. In a twist of fate, Ono's once-venerated painting technique came under scrutiny, as his Marxist comrade, Matsudo, questioned the very essence of his artistry. Matsudo, a harbinger of change, led Ono to a locale now relegated to the status of a "shanty area," a stark consequence of the relentless march of industrialization (Ishiguro, 1986, p.166). With a heavy heart, Matsudo pronounced, "...Only two or three years ago, this was not such a dire place. But now, it is burgeoning into a shanty district, with an ever-growing population ensnared in poverty" (Ishiguro, 1986, p.166).

Kazuo Ishiguro skillfully reveals a crucial moment in Ono's transformation in "An Artist of the Floating World." This change occurs when Matsudo, aiming to show Ono the harsh realities of poverty resulting from industrialization, leads him through the slums. Matsudo criticizes politicians and businesses for neglecting these conditions and emphasizes artists' unique responsibility to engage with society. Matsudo's passionate plea urges Ono to act, asserting that passivity contributes to the persistence of poverty. This Marxist ideal calls on artists to use their craft for the greater good. This encounter profoundly changes Ono, instilling in him a sense of empathy for the slum dwellers. Inspired, Ono shifts from pursuing aesthetic ideals to creating political art. His artwork transforms destitute slum children into nationalist warriors against post-colonial influences. While Ono's mentor had emphasized aesthetic pursuits, the post-colonial context reshapes Ono into a compassionate advocate. His contemporary works focus on the post-colonial world, moving away from traditional art references. This transformation reflects Ishiguro's exploration of how societal changes impact individuals, particularly artists, and how their perspectives evolve in response to new realities. Ishiguro masterfully captures the evolution of Ono's self-concept, a transformation that resonates with the shifting sands of the post-war era. In his book, *Imagining Japan: The Japanese Tradition and its Modern Interpretation*, Robert Bellah delves into the influence of Marxism in Japan during the tumultuous decades of the 1920s, 1930s, and the early years of World War II. Bellah astutely observes, "Amid the tensions and anxieties of Japan's uneven development, Marxism emerged as a comprehensive, theoretically sophisticated explanation, offering a clear alternative to the prevailing emperor-system nationalism" (Bellah, 2003, p.47).

Historically, when Japan surrendered in WWII, allied troopers controlled the country, bringing about big change. It took years for the Japanese to recover from air strikes and bombings. After 1945, Japanese history is rewritten. Ishiguro mentions it as:

Actually, until I was about twenty, I did a lot of reading about Japan and whenever there was a Japanese movie, I would go see it. Looking back now, it had a lot to do with my wanting to write at all. Japan was a very strong place for me because I always believed I would eventually return there, but as it turned out, I never went back. This very important place called Japan which was a mixture of memory, speculation, and imagination was fading with every year that went by. I think there was a very urgent need for me to get it down on paper before it disappeared altogether. (LI, 2021, p 9)

The Meiji administration prompted westernization in that time that clearly indicates it was happened to take advantage of. Hundreds of personnel from Western countries have been appointed by using the Meiji administration in sectors like as education, banking, law, army affairs, and transportation. They have been westernized in their culture and art. Music and videos are also made with blended Western and Japanese elements. Under the supervision of the US Army and the American Constitution, they lost political and economic power. The persistent presence of the American occupation exerted a continual influence, gradually eroding the foundations of Japan's national identity, affecting both its physical and spiritual aspects. Within the context of this story, Ono's grandson, the lively Ichiro, stands out as a tangible representation of the profound cultural changes. A youthful spirit, he is enamored by the charm of cinema and fascinated by the mystique surrounding the American cowboy. In one poignant moment, Ono observes Ichiro immersing himself in a game, adopting the role of a hero, a stark departure from his Japanese cultural roots. Ono, inquisitive and somewhat bemused, ventures to ask his grandson a profound question: "Who do you wish to become, my young warrior? Lord Yoshitsune, the storied samurai, or perhaps a stealthy ninja?" To this query, Ichiro offers a response that embodies the pervasive influence of American culture - "The Lone Ranger," the iconic American cowboy. Of particular significance is Ichiro's linguistic foray, a symbolic gesture that underscores the omnipresence of American culture. Ono notes with a mixture of admiration and concern, "He attempts to communicate in English" (Ishiguro, 1986, p.35). Through language, heroes, and the very fabric of entertainment, American culture casts its formidable shadow upon Japanese society, rendering visible the gaping chasm of generational divide wrought by its profound impact.

Within this narrative, we find Ono, a man haunted by the ghosts of his past, his son's sacrifice in the war echoing through the corridors of his memories. In the embrace of his modest abode, he shares his days with his daughter, granddaughter, and the lingering specters of yesteryears. In the grand theater of this post-war landscape, our main characters take center stage—Ono, Kuroda, Noriko, Matsuda—and a host of supporting players who contribute their nuances to this unfolding drama. The heart of the narrative beats in sync with Ono's quest, a relentless exploration of his family's place in this brave new world. This is the epitome of post-war cultural metamorphosis, where the entire societal canvas undergoes a breathtaking transformation. Ono grapples not only with the shifting sands of post-war society and culture but also with the intricate dance of his relationships, particularly those with his daughters, Setsuko and Noriko. Through Ono's eyes, we witness

the intricate web of the past weaving itself into the present, a delicate thread that will ultimately shape the contours of their shared future. One stark reality confronts him—a past affiliation with the government that now casts a long shadow over his daughter Noriko's life. The fissures in Ono's marriage, a fracture that emerged when the plaintiff's family relocated, are laid bare. Once an ardent supporter of the war, Ono now stands branded as a traitor by former colleagues, his allegiance now a mark of shame. Setsuko, Noriko's sister, and her husband are convinced that this tarnished reputation played a pivotal role in Noriko's failed marriage, a marriage now lost to the annals of history. In this intricate dance of past and present, loyalty and betrayal, the narrative unfolds, revealing the profound impact of individual choices against the backdrop of a society in metamorphosis. It is a poignant exploration of the shifting sands of identity and allegiance in the wake of a world forever altered by the tempestuous tides of war and peace.

Within the intimate confines of their home, a tempest brews, as Setsuko points an accusatory finger squarely at Ono, laying the blame for the shattered negotiations at his feet. In this charged moment, Noriko steps into the role of a guardian, perched before the ancestral altar, offering her father sagely advice. It's a scene painted with intricate strokes, a snapshot of a familial dynamic in flux, captured within the pages of Ishiguro's 1986 opus (*Ishiguro, 1986, p.50*). In the vast portrayal of Japanese culture, where reverence for family ties, filial piety, and the sanctity of marriage are revered as sacred ideals, Ono's daughters navigate these hallowed traditions with a dash of irreverence, a touch of humor, and a hint of playful jest. Their banter, at times gentle ribbing and at others a gleeful teasing, is a testament to the evolving landscape of Japanese society. Gone are the days of stifled voices; the winds of change have ushered in a new era where women, once bound by tradition, now revel in the freedom to express themselves. In this familial theater, where age-old norms and contemporary mores dance in a delicate waltz, the daughters gently prod their father's sensibilities, an endearing reminder that even amidst the shifting sands of cultural revolution, the bonds of love and family remain resilient and enduring. As Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf point out, "Violence against women during conflict has reached epidemic proportions. Civilians have become the primary targets of groups who use terror as a tactic of war. Men and boys as well as women and girls are the victims of this targeting, but women, much more than men, suffer gender-based violence." (Rehn and Sirleaf. p. 10)

Conclusion:

An Artist of the Floating World offers a compelling meditation on the intricacies of memory and power, inviting readers to interrogate their own relationship to history and truth. Through the lens of New Historicism, this paper has examined how Ishiguro navigates the complexities of post-war Japan, weaving together personal narrative and historical context to construct a multi-layered portrait of a society in transition. By analyzing the interplay between individual subjectivity and collective memory, this study has shed light on the ways in which literature serves as a site of contestation and negotiation, where alternative narratives can challenge dominant discourses and offer new perspectives on the past. Ultimately, *An Artist of the Floating World* reminds us of the importance of confronting uncomfortable truths and interrogating the stories we tell ourselves about who we are and where we come from.

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