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Moral Values Reflected in the Protagonist's Struggle in Koyoharu Gotouge's *Demon Slayer*: *Kimetsu no Yaiba*

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ABSTRACT
This study deals with an analysis of moral values reflected in Koyoharu Gotouge's *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba*. The primary objective of this research is to explore the types of moral values demonstrated by the protagonist, Tanjiro Kamado, during his journey. This study uses the theory of moral value proposed by Sjarkawi and the theory of Thomas Lickona to classify the types of moral value. By applying a descriptive qualitative method proposed by Sukmadinata, the study focuses on determining the values of the independent variable. The method applied is to describe the types of moral value through the story of the manga, utilizing dialogue and narrative excerpts as the primary data. The results of this study show that the protagonist's struggle in this manga chooses to maintain several points of moral values in his life, such as moral feeling, moral knowing, and moral action. Specifically, the findings reveal that Tanjiro exhibits moral knowing through his deep sense of responsibility and justice toward his sister, Nezuko. Furthermore, his moral feeling is strongly reflected in his altruism, love, and loyalty, while his moral actions are evident in his courage, cooperation with allies, and an unwavering never-give-up attitude against demons. Ultimately, these findings highlight that the protagonist's moral struggles not only drive the narrative forward but also serve as a reflection of profound ethical values that can be learned and applied in real life.

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1. Introduction

Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba (鬼滅の刃) is a Japanese manga series written and illustrated by Koyoharu Gotouge. It was serialized in Shueisha's *shonen manga* magazine *Weekly Shonen Jump* from February 2016 to May 2020, with its chapters collected in 23 *tankōbon* volumes. It has been published in English by Viz Media and simultaneously on the Manga Plus platform by Shueisha. It follows teenager Tanjiro Kamado, who strives to become a Demon Slayer after his family **is** slaughtered and his younger sister, Nezuko, is turned into a demon.

Demon Slayer is also adapted into a Japanese fantasy drama television series that tells the story of Kamado Tanjiro, a young man who joins the Demon Slayer Corps after his family is slaughtered by demons, except for his sister Nezuko who turns into a demon. Tanjiro seeks to find a way to heal Nezuko and avenge his family's death by being part of the Demon Exterminator Corps. Meanwhile, in this manga, Tanjiro Kamado is the main character and was introduced in Gotouge's *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba* series. He is a charcoal seller who must learn to use the sword of Nichirin to fight demons. Tanjiro Kamado is a kind-hearted and intelligent boy who lives with his family in the mountains. After his father's death, he became his family's breadwinner and travels to the nearby village to sell charcoal. In

this series, Tanjiro and Nezuko meet fellow Demon Slayers Zenitsu Agatsuma and Inosuke Hashibira; they team up after Tanjiro's mission to kill Kyogai, the former Lower Six. They later join other Demon Slayers in facing the family of Lower Five Rui. In the midst of battle, Tanjiro unlocks a mysterious Breathing Style known as "Hinokami Kagura", but Rui ultimately outmatches him, while Inosuke and Zenitsu are injured and the expedition is slaughtered. Giyu and Insect Hashira Shinobu Kocho rescue the survivors, who are brought back to the Corps' headquarters. It is in the story of Tanjiro being put on trial by the Hashira – Giyu, Shinobu, Flame Hashira Kyojuro Rengoku, Sound Hashira Tengen Uzui, Love Hashira Mitsuri Kanroji, Stone Hashira Gyomei Himejima, Mist Hashira Muichiro Tokito, Serpent Hashira Obanai Iguro, and Wind Hashira Sanemi Shinazugawa – who, with the exception of Giyu and Mitsuri, do not believe he and Nezuko should be allowed to live. Nonetheless, the Corps' leader Kagaya Ubuyashiki is able to convince them to accept Nezuko and see Tanjiro's importance, believing it is with their help that Muzan can be defeated.

This topic is chosen because it is an important topic to study as it helps us gain the benefit of the moral value of the protagonist's struggle. The benefits of moral values are profound and far-reaching, influencing individuals, communities, and societies. Besides, this manga is also so popular that Japan adapted it into an anime series entitled *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba* from 2016 to 2020. Next, the background of Koyoharu Gotouge as the author of this manga has an awesome career in writing. In 2020, he was awarded the Kodansha's Noma Publishing Culture Award which honors those who have contributed to "reinventing publishing". Gotouge debuted in the 70th Jump Treasure Newcomer Manga Awards with the one-shot work *Kagarigari* (過狩り狩り). Three more one-shots followed: *Monju Shiro Kyōdai* (文殊史郎兄弟), published in *Jump Next!* in 2014; *Rokkotsu-san* (肋骨さん), published in *Weekly Shōnen Jump* in 2014; and *Haeniwa no Zigzag* (蠅庭のジグザグ), published in *Weekly Shōnen Jump* in 2015. Gotouge was born in Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan, on May 5, 1989. The author uses a pen name to maintain anonymity.

The research problem in this research is formulated in questions, namely: What types of moral values of the protagonist's struggle are found in the manga? How are the types of moral values of the protagonist's struggle reflected in the manga? Then, the scope and the purpose of this research are bordered on those subject matters.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Moral Value

Moral values are defined as the content of the entire order that regulates human actions, behaviors, attitudes, and habits in society based on the teachings of values, principles, and norms (Sjarkawi, 2005, p. 29). Mulyana (as cited in Sauri & Hufad, 2007, p. 65) adds that value education is a process of cultivating and developing values within a person, allowing them to be aware of and experience these values integrally in their lives. Furthermore, Hakam (as cited in Sauri & Hufad, 2007, p. 65) reveals that value education considers objects from both moral and non-moral perspectives, including aesthetics and ethics. This means that moral value serves as a principle or standard that guides a person's behavior and choices based on what is considered right or wrong. In the context of literary and media analysis, moral values are crucial because they reflect the cultural and social norms embedded within a narrative, shaping how characters interact and make decisions. Moral values can be shaped by culture, religion, education, and personal experience.

2.2 Types of Moral Value

According to Thomas Lickona (as cited in Windriani, 2020), there are three types of moral value in human life: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. These three

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domains are interconnected; a person must know what is right (knowing), care about it (feeling), and ultimately act upon it (action) to possess a complete moral character.

2.2.1 Moral Knowing

Moral knowing is a moral value that encompasses six important aspects: moral awareness, knowing moral values, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, decision-making, and self-knowledge (Lickona, 2013). Examples of values within moral knowing that are essential for social life include responsibility, respect, justice, tolerance, wisdom, and democracy. Responsibility is the ability to make appropriate and effective decisions within the boundaries of social norms and common expectations (Wiyoto, 2001). Respect is a key component of healthy relationships and effective communication, and its perception is heavily influenced by culture, family, peers, and social relationships (Lickona, 2013). Justice, according to Plato, represents balance and harmony, where individuals contribute to society according to their unique abilities and receive what is proportionate to their contribution. Tolerance, as stated by UNESCO (1996), is an act of humanity that must be nurtured to rejoice in diversity. Additionally, wisdom is an individual's cleverness in using their intellect based on experience and knowledge (Sahrani et al., 2014). Finally, democracy is a system of government where the government is accountable to its citizens (Schmitter & Karl, 1991).

2.2.2 Moral Feeling

Moral feeling is the emotional source of energy that drives humans to act on moral principles. Lickona (2013) identifies six emotional aspects that must be felt by a person to become a moral human being: conscience, self-respect, empathy, love, self-control, and humility. In literary narratives, these feelings often manifest as altruism, love, loyalty, and self-discipline. Altruism is a voluntary act to help others without expecting anything in return (Sears, as cited in Nashori, 2008; Widyarini, 2009). Love, according to Harlow, is an emotional attachment essential for healthy psychological development, while loyalty is a firm stance to obey agreements and not be easily persuaded by others (Budiyono, 2007, p. 30). Furthermore, self-discipline is the ability to control one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to achieve long-term goals. According to Siswanto (2001), discipline is an attitude of submission to applicable regulations, which is crucial for personal success.

2.2.3 Moral Action

Moral action refers to morals that are applied into real behavior. To understand what drives someone to behave well, three things must be considered: competence, willingness, and habits. Examples of values within moral action that are important for social life include courage, cooperation, and never giving up. Courage is the ability to rise above fear and do what is right, even when facing risks (Irons, 2003, p. 5). Cooperation is a group process where members support and rely on each other to achieve a consensus result (Landsberger, 2011). Finally, the attitude of never giving up is a defensive attitude to still achieve one's goals despite experiencing failures or obstacles (Sholihatin, 2019). These three domains of moral value will serve as the analytical framework for examining the protagonist's journey in *Demon Slayer*.

2.3 Protagonist

A protagonist is the main character in a story and is usually the opponent of the antagonist. The protagonist typically receives a lot of support and sympathy from the audience or readers. As stated by Beckson and Ganz (1990, p. 217), the protagonist is the first actor who plays the main role. Nurgiyantoro (2002, pp. 178-181) states that the protagonist is

the main character who supports the main idea in the story and usually has a specific plan and goal. The protagonist represents kindness and is commendable for being able to attract the sympathy of the reader. Abrams (1999, p. 224) also says that the protagonist is the head of the character in a plot, which is the center of our attention. Based on these opinions, the protagonist can be concluded to be the main character in a story where they greatly influence the plot, commonly found in literary works such as novels, dramas, films, or manga. In the context of this study, Tanjiro Kamado serves as the protagonist whose actions and moral decisions drive the narrative of *Demon Slayer*.

2.4 Struggle

Struggle is a part of the conflict in our lives. It is a form of maturity that involves imagination, energy, and courage in making decisions. Berelson (1964, p. 30) says that struggle is one way to achieve a better life in the future and to increase prestige. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2000, p. 1343), the term "struggle" is defined as "trying very hard to do something when it is difficult or when there are many problems." Based on these definitions, it can be concluded that struggle is a way for someone to fulfill their desire to achieve a better life.

2.5 Kinds of Struggle

Maizler (2012) divides struggle into four types. First, a negative struggle is the achievement of eliminating a deficit state, such as overcoming a life-limiting phobia. Second, a positive struggle involves the transformation from a stable state into a more evolved state, such as going to graduate school. Third, the inevitable struggle relates to the necessary losses and inconveniences that condition life, such as dealing with grief. Finally, the chosen struggle is the result of personal choice, not an automatic condition in life, such as climbing a mountain. In *Demon Slayer*, Tanjiro's journey reflects a combination of inevitable and chosen struggles as he copes with the tragic loss of his family and actively chooses to become a Demon Slayer to save his sister.

3. Research Method

3.1 Study Design

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative method. According to Sukmadinata (2006), descriptive research is a form of research aimed at describing existing phenomena, both natural phenomena and man-made phenomena. This definition is supported by Sugiyono (2012), who defines descriptive research as research conducted to determine the values of an independent variable, either one or more, without making comparisons or connecting it with other variables. In the context of this study, the phenomenon being described is the manifestation of moral values within the protagonist's struggle in the manga. Furthermore, Creswell (2010) describes qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions that explore a social or human problem. Moleong (2007) states that qualitative research intends to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subject, such as behavior, perception, motivation, and action, in a holistic manner. This is done through descriptions in the form of words and language in a specific, natural context by utilizing various natural methods.

To ensure the research is conducted smoothly and systematically, a research design is necessary. According to Sekaran (2017, p. 109), research design is a plan for data collection, measurement, and analysis based on the research questions. Nazir (2010, p. 30) further states that research design encompasses all the necessary processes in planning and conducting research. Therefore, this study employs a descriptive qualitative design to explore the moral values reflected in the narrative and dialogue of the manga.

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3.2 Data Collection

The data collection in this study was conducted through library research by following several systematic steps. The primary data source for this research was the manga *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* by Koyoharu Gotouge. First, the researcher identified any accounts or textual data from the manga that are categorized within the subject matter of the study. Second, the researcher found and reviewed theories related to the subject matter, specifically focusing on Thomas Lickona's (2013) framework of moral values. Third, the researcher read the manga carefully and thoroughly to find the intended data, paying close attention to the protagonist's dialogues, actions, and internal monologues. Finally, the researcher classified the collected data into specific points based on the study's problem formulation, categorizing them into moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study began by collecting and recording the observation data. Data analysis is a very important part because it provides meaningful interpretation for the research problem. The data analysis aims to answer the research problems formulated in this study. The researchers followed three classifications in the data analysis process. First, the data were classified into several point categories related to the research problem. Second, the researcher identified each statement contained in the data collection based on the data being studied, ensuring that the textual evidence directly supported the theoretical framework. Third, the researcher verified the data and made a conclusion based on the analyzed data to ensure the validity and consistency of the findings.

4. Discussion

4.1 Moral Action

Moral action means the behavior and actions of an individual towards actions and decisions shown with a sense of responsibility based on his moral reasoning and emotions. This behavior is closely related to self-consistency, strength identity, and competence in making decisions by practicing fairness and rationality. In Tanjiro's as the protagonist, his actions were portrayed as the demon killer.

"H… How can I finish them off?"
(A Tengu Mask!)
"Do not trust what other say. Can you solve this riddle by yourself?"
(He Moved in Complete silence)
(Gotouge, 2016: 90[Vol. 1]).

From the quote above, it can be explained that Tanjiro can finish the demon by himself, but on the one hand Tanjiro has a strong physique, that ability makes him believe that he can be relied on in a fight. It makes Tanjiro begin to get the courage from his master.

In next quotation, Tanjiro finds the hidden fifth evil body. But, Tanjiro fights the demon. Tanjiro asking to cooperate with Nezuko and Genya to face the demon, It is seen inthe following quotation:

"Genya! Straight to the Northeast! The fifth one is hunkered down there!"
"North-east"!
"Go! I'll back you up!"
"Nezuko! Go help Genya! Don't let the demons interfere with him!"
(Gotouge, 2016 : 151[vol. 13]).

The quotation above shows that Tanjiro asks to cooperate his friends. It makes Tanjiro acts to kill the demon by commanding his friends. And infact he can survive and fight like a warrior who can defeat demons.

In the next quotation, Tanjiro tries to kill the demon and he realizes that if he becomes a demon he will dying. But, Nezuko tries to get the courage to Tanjiro to not giving up to kill the Demon. It will be shown in the quotations below:

"(Argh! I can't cut through!)
(He should be weak from the prison… Am I still not strong enough?)
He's recovered from the prison! If I get caught in that, I'll be mangled!
It repelled my sword!
(Aaagh!)
(I was almost there! Just a little farther and…)
(Hang on to the end!)
(Don't give up Tanjiro! Never give up!)"
(Gotouge, 2016: 97-99[Vol. 11]).

The quotation above shows that Tanjiro cuts the demon's neck. But, his sword was mangled by the demon itself. He is like Nezuko's personal protector. Tanjiro has a spirit to protect Nezuko from the demon itself. This kind of action is usually done because it has become very close. Tanjiro was so strong to withstand the demons, his ability makes his friends amazed and trust to him. It is showed in the following quotation:

"Arm strength alone isn't enough. I have to use my whole body. Use everything from head to toe!"
"Gonna ignore the pain. Stay focused!"
"A single blow won't be enough. Summon a hundred times that strength!"
(Gotouge, 2016 : 111[Vol. 11]).

The above quotation shows that Tanjiro shows his ability in fighting and defending. It makes Tanjiro can kill the demon and save his sister Nezuko. With his face gets close to Gyutaro's, Tanjiro brings his head down and headbutts him with a great force momentarily stunning him. Daki screams at him to get up but as his legs falter, and looks down to discover that a kunai dart has been lodged into his leg. He realizes that when Tanjiro had looked down, he opened a bag given to him by Hinatsuru which contained wisteria poison.

4.2 Moral Knowing

The moral knowing of the protagonist's struggle is always shown in every chapter in the novel. Tanjiro is always kind to everyone, especially his family. It is seen in the following quotation:

"Tanjiro!"
"Your face is pitch-black. Come here"
"It's snowing and it's dangerous. You don't have to go"
"I want us to have a great new year's feast, so i'll go sell as much charcoal as i can...
even if just a little"
"Thank you"
(Gotouge, 2016: 9[Vol. 1]).

The above quotation shows that Tanjiro has a responsibility to his family, especially his mother and his sister. His responsibility is like a servant who is ready to do anything to fight the demons before his family was being killed.

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In the next quotation, Tanjiro asks the villagers to carry the huge load by himself. Even Tanjiro's respect to kill the demons to protect his sister from the demons. It is seen in the following quotation:

> "To get to Mount Sagiri, you first have to cross that mountain."
> "The sun will set soon. And you're going to carry that huge load? It's dangerous."
> "I'll be plenty careful. Thank you very much."
> "People really do dissapear up there... so don't get lost!" (Gotouge, 2016: 67[Vol. 1]).

The above quotation shows that Tanjiro truly has respect for himself. He is not afraid of death and does not think of himself. He has enough respect to fight all the demons that threaten him.

Then, Tanjiro loses his family to become demons. Tanjiro gets the justice from that accident when he gets the justice from Akimesatsu. It was shown in the quotation below:

> "Wait! Nezuko hasn't killed anyone! There was a scent at my house... from someone i've never smelled before! That must be who killed everyone!"
> "Not Nezuko! I don't know what's making her act like this... But..." (Gotouge, 2016: 35-36 [Vol. 1]).

The above quotations show that Tanjiro has the justice to protect his sister Nezuko. He does not think of his own safety for the sake of others' lives. Tanjiro's desire to avenge his family's death. But as the series progresses, the idea of revenge starts to shift toward a more complex sense of justice that includes mercy and understanding.

In the next quotation, Tanjiro's Tolerance is to save his sister from being a demon. And also, the wisdom of Tanjiro is to protect and not kill Nezuko. It will be shown in the quotation below:

> "But this Nezuko… Smells of blood and death. But Nezuko couldn't have done all that. I found her… fallen over Rokuta, Like she was protecting him. She didn't have any blood on her mouth or hands. And there's yet… Another smell…"
> "Whatever the reason… she's growing bigger… and she's getting stronger!
> "While I was safely asleep in town, something horrible happened to my whole family."
> "How they must have suffered and I wasn't there to help there."
> "I have to save Nezuko if I can! But she's so strong! I can't push her away!" (Gotouge, 2016: 26-27 [Vol. 1]).

The above quotation shows that Tanjiro has the tolerance to protect his sister especially Nezuko. His tolerance toward Nezuko, despite her demonic transformation, demonstrates his understanding that people (or demons, in this case) are not simply "good" or "evil" based on their external nature. Also, Tanjiro's early wisdom is evident: it is not just about reacting with anger and vengeance, but about understanding the deeper tragedy behind the demons, especially his sister's condition. Tanjiro demonstrates wisdom in his compassionate approach to Nezuko and his immediate decision not to kill her but to try and protect her, despite her transformation into a demon.

4.3 Moral Feeling

In moral value, moral feelings are central to the development of the main characters, especially Tanjiro Kamado, the protagonist. His journey is not only a physical battle against demons but also an emotional and moral one, in which his feelings guide his decisions and relationships. He is known to be a man of of the altruism. These actions was shown by him when he promised to protect and graduated together with his sister. It is shown in the following quotations:

> "Only Nezuko's body was still warm. Maybe a doctor can save her.
> How did this happen? A bear? Maybe a bear too hungry to hibernate?
> So hard to breathe! The air's so cold its freezing my lungs.
> Keep going! Move your feet faster.
> It's still a long way to town. I wont let you die. I have to save you."
> (Gotouge, 2016: 20-21[Vol. 1]).

Through the quotation above, we know that Tanjiro has the altruism before his sister begone a demon, He risks his life to protect her, refusing to give up on her humanity. His determination to find a way to cure her stems from his deep love and selflessness.

In the next quotation, Tanjiro's love and loyalty being seen when Tanjiro is in a way training to be a demon killer. He was dealing with monsters, when Tanjiro was following the teacher and guards his sister Nezuko to save him and become human again. This he did as the loyalty that he had promised to protect Nezuko and did so. It is seen in the following quotation:

> "Nezuko… this'll be rough, but hang in there!"
> "But then… suffering is all you ever known… little sister"
> "(Are you mending your kimono again? You should buy a new one)"
> "(No, no… I'm fine. I like this kimono. Instead, I use that money to give
> younger kids plenty to eat").
> "I will make you human again! And then I'll buy you a beautiful kimono!"
> "Everything I couldn't give to them, I'll give to you!"
> (Gotouge, 2016: 100 [Vol. 1]).

The above quotation shows that Tanjiro has truly taken action of love and loyalty. He has promised to Nezuko to protect her and make her a human again. Tanjiro's determination to protect Nezuko and his refusal to see her as an enemy showcases his loyalty. He convinces Urokodaki to help him, asserting his faith in Nezuko's humanity despite the danger she poses. Next, in another situation, Tanjiro has self-discipline and a hideous physical appearance. He has the sword. Sometimes, he was trained and learned. Tanjiro stood his ground to practice and he glad he wrote everything down in his journal. It is seen in the following quotation:

> "Since that day... Urokodaki hasn't taught me anything.
> Still.. everyday i practice what i learned from urokodaki. Holding my breath
> flexibility, and the most basic things too. I'm glad I wrote everything down
> in my journal.
> But even after half a year I still can't split the boulder. I'm beginning to
> worry.
> It isn't enough. I haven't had enough training. I have to do more. More!"
> (Gotouge, 2016: 123-124 [Vol. 1]).

The quotation above shows that Tanjiro really does practice to fight them the demons. During his training with Sakonji Urokodaki, Tanjiro's self-discipline shines as he endures

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rigorous physical and mental challenges. His ability to maintain focus and work tirelessly to cut the boulder demonstrates his extraordinary commitment.

5. Conclusion

After analyzing the moral values reflected in the protagonist's struggle in Koyoharu Gotouge's *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba*, several findings can be concluded. First, the study confirms that moral values serve as the guiding principles for ethical conduct and decision-making within the narrative. These values are categorized into three interconnected types proposed by Lickona (2013): moral feeling, moral knowing, and moral action. Through the characterization of the protagonist, the research demonstrates that these three dimensions are not separate entities but are deeply integrated into his daily struggles.

Specifically, Tanjiro Kamado, the main protagonist, is depicted as a kind-hearted and determined boy whose life takes a tragic turn when his family is slaughtered by demons, leaving his younger sister, Nezuko, transformed into a demon. Despite this tragic background, Tanjiro's struggle to protect his sister and avenge his family is driven by his strong moral compass. His moral action is continuously demonstrated through his physical and ethical decisions, reflecting what is considered right, fair, and good based on moral values. He does not merely fight demons physically; he also upholds his ethical principles by showing empathy toward them, thus proving that his actions are guided by a profound sense of responsibility.

Overall, the protagonist's journey in *Demon Slayer* illustrates that a true struggle is not only about achieving physical goals but also about maintaining moral integrity under extreme pressure. This research highlights that the manga successfully portrays moral values as a core foundation for the protagonist's resilience. For future research, it is recommended to explore the antagonist's perspective or to conduct comparative studies with other shonen manga to enrich the discussion on moral values in popular literature.

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