

Moral Development of the Main Character in *The Husky and White Cat Shizun*

Cinta Violeta^{1*}, I Made Rajeg², Ni Made Ayu Widiastuti³

¹⁻³ Universitas Udayana, Indonesia

Email : cintavioleta72@gmail.com^{1*}, made_rajeg@unud.ac.id², ayu_widiastuti@unud.ac.id³

Abstract, This article investigated the moral development of the main character in the novel *The Husky and His White Cat Shizun*. The research aimed to identify the main character's moral development stages and examine how the main character's personality relates to these stages throughout the story. This study focused on understanding the stages of the main character's moral reasoning development within the context of the novel. To achieve the research's aims, the study utilized data from the novel, employing documentation and observation methods along with a note-taking technique for data collection. Through this approach, the study explored the moral development of the main character, Mo Ran. The key findings of this research reveal that Mo Ran undergoes six stages of moral development. The analysis demonstrates that Mo Ran's moral reasoning develops into a more complex and principled understanding of morality. The findings indicate Mo Ran's character develops his moral understanding, moving from self-centeredness to a more complex principled sense of morality.

Keywords: main character, moral, moral development, stages of moral

1. INTRODUCTION

Literary works, including poetry, novels, short stories, and plays, serve as significant reflections of numerous elements of human life. According to Wellek and Warren (1995:82), the leading cause of the existence of a literary work is the writer. A literary work represents its intended purpose at conception and stresses the subjective character of literary interpretation. A literary work might be presumed to convey the writer's ideas, whether they originate from emotion or societal realities. The idea that understanding a piece of writing is subjective and influenced by the reader's individual experiences is a cornerstone of literary theory. This principle applies particularly strongly to fictional works, where the lack of a fixed, objective reality allows for a wider range of interpretations.

Psychology and literature are deeply interconnected, as both explore the complexities of human behavior, expression, thought, and motivation. Through the application of psychological principles, literature can offer profound insights into the human experience, shedding light on the underlying motivations and emotions that drive individuals. Wellek and Warren (1977) also argue that psychology, while valuable, serves primarily as a preparatory tool for the act of creation. Psychological insight becomes an artistic value only when it contributes to the overall coherence and complexity of the work, ultimately enriching the artistic expression.

Kohlberg (1958) dedicated his life to unraveling the factors that drive the development of moral reasoning abilities. Moral development refers to the process by which individuals learn to differentiate between right and wrong and establish a moral framework. This lifelong development process is intricate and influenced by various factors, including culture, background, individual experiences, and cognitive development. Nevertheless, it is crucial to remember that morality encompasses more than mere adherence to a predetermined set of norms.

The Husky and His White Cat Shizun by Meatbun Doesn't Eat Meat is a Chinese fantasy novel about love, guilt, and second chances. The story follows Mo Ran, a young cultivator who gets transmigrated after a life full of mistakes. Reborn into his past, he tries to become a better person and fix his broken relationship with his strict but caring teacher, Chu Wanning. This analysis focuses on Mo Ran's moral development, examining how the character changes from a troubled, sometimes cruel person into someone who wants to do good. The primary focus of this research revolves around moral themes. The moral development of the main character, Mo Ran, is a subject of particular significance. A combination of internal and external factors shapes his intricate and diverse process of moral development.

The relevant research was an undergraduate study by Shofi (2011), titled "An Analysis of Josephine's Characterization and Moral Development in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*." This study aimed to analyze Josephine's characterization and moral development. The researcher utilized a descriptive qualitative method to examine how Josephine's moral compass evolved through challenging situations and ethical choices. The study focused on identifying the progression of Josephine's moral development, suggesting that personal growth is achieved through navigating complex ethical dilemmas. The analysis employed the theory of conflicts as a primary literary tool. The study drew upon Piaget's (1932) theory to provide a theoretical framework for understanding moral development, specifically focusing on the stages of heteronomous and autonomous morality. The research demonstrated that Josephine's experiences led to a shift from heteronomous to autonomous morality.

Compared to the current research, Shofi's study was relevant due to the shared focus on moral development. The current research uses Kohlberg's theory, which expands on Piaget's work and provides a more detailed exploration of moral reasoning. However, Shofi's study focused on the transition between two specific stages of moral development, whereas this study aims to explore the broader spectrum of Kohlberg's six stages. While Shofi's research applied Piaget's theory in a literary context, this study will apply Kohlberg's theory.

2. THEORETICAL BASES

Literature and Psychology

According to Klarer (2004), literature is referred to as the entirety of written expression, with the restriction that not every written document can be categorized as literature in the more exact sense of the word. Literature, as an interdisciplinary field, intersects with disciplines such as history, philosophy, sociology, and psychology, utilizing language as a medium through which human nature, existence, culture, personality, and individual differences are explored and expressed. The intricate dance between literature and psychology reveals a profound and multifaceted relationship, where the study of the human mind illuminates the depths of fictional narratives, and conversely, literature provides a rich tapestry for exploring the complexities of human experience. While distinct disciplines, literature, and psychology share a fundamental interest in understanding the human condition, albeit through different lenses.

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

Piaget's (1932) theory of cognitive development is a significant framework within child pedagogy, highlighting how children's understanding of morality that children undergo two primary phases, Heteronomous and the Autonomous phases. These phases represent a progression in how individuals understand and apply moral principles. In the heteronomous phase, typical of younger children, moral understanding is externally dictated, with rules perceived as originating from authority figures like parents, teachers, or religious figures. Children in this phase view rules as immutable and universal, believing that moral transgressions must always be met with punishment that is proportional. This phase reflects an absolutist view of morality, where children blindly accept rules without considering the context or underlying intentions. As children mature, they transition to the autonomous phase, which is more common in adulthood. In this phase, people are more likely to forgive actions motivated by good intentions, even if the outcomes are negative. A key shift in this phase is the abandonment of the belief in immanent justice, the notion that every wrong action inevitably leads to punishment.

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Expanding on Piaget's (1932) research, Kohlberg also proposed a theory of sequential moral formation based on the idea that we acquire our moral principles via deliberate, purposeful thought and deliberation. In general, there are three levels of moral development: Preconventional, Conventional, and post-conventional. Each level consists of two substages, the Preconvention level consists of Obedience and Punishment Orientation and Individualism and Exchange. The Conventional level consists of Good Interpersonal Relationships and Law

and Order Morality. The last sub-stages in Postconventional are Social Contract stages and Individual Rights and Universal Principles.

1. **Heteronomous Morality** At the heteronomous stage, the children believe that good actions should be rewarded and bad actions must be punished. They begin to recognize that certain behaviors can lead to positive outcomes, such as praise, threats, or other forms of gratification. They believe rules were absolute and dictated by authority figures, and that breaking rules will lead to immediate and severe punishment.
2. **Individualism and Exchange stages**
As children get older, they enter the Individualism and Exchange stages, at which point the children begin to consider what is best for them personally instead of acting in certain ways to receive rewards. During these two stages, children start to understand the world around them in a more individualistic manner, focusing on their own needs and desires.
3. **Good Girl and Boy**
In the Good girl and boy stage people slowly start to understand that there are rules and ways of doing things that everyone should follow. It's like a big game with everyone playing together. If want to be a good player, follow the rules, and help the team win.
4. **Law and Order**
On the other hand, the Law and Order Morality stage starts when individuals recognize the significance of social norms or laws and contribute positively to the collective or societal unit. The meaning of this stage is not just about pleasing others but being part of something bigger. People understand that rules and laws are important and want to contribute and improve things for the whole group.
5. **Social Contract and Individual Rights**
In the Social Contract and Individual Rights stage, laws are recognized as social contracts. People begin to think about society in a very theoretical way, stepping back from their own society and considering the rights and values that a society ought to uphold. They recognize that different social groups within a society will have different values, but they believe that all rational people would agree on two points.
6. **Universal Principles.**
Individuals construct their moral principles in universal principles, which might sometimes deviate from societal laws. At this stage, people follow these internalized principles of justice, even if they conflict with laws and rules. The commitment to

justice strengthens and broadens the rationale for civil disobedience. The principles apply to everyone and include, for example, human rights, justice, and equality.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data source for this study is a novel entitled *The Husky and His White Cat Shizun*. The original version of the series was initially published in Jinjiang Literature City, a popular platform for Chinese web novels. In 2022, Seven Seas Entertainment acquired the rights to the series to make 11 volumes of the novel in English. The novel consisted of 311 chapters and 5 extra chapters.

This study employed a documentation method and note-taking technique. This method involves collecting and analyzing existing data, such as the novel's text. This involved carefully reading the text and identifying instances where the main character flouted moral reasoning at the heteronomous morality, individual exchange, good boy attitudes, law and order, social contract, and universal principles.

A descriptive qualitative method was employed to analyze the data. The data analysis involved several steps. The first stage was identifying the moral development present in the novel by analyzing the moral reasoning and decision-making of the main character. The second step involved using Kohlberg's (1958) theory to determine which of the six stages of moral development the main character's moral reasoning fit into. Finally, the analysis explored how this moral development progressed from the early stages to the later stages, following the systematic development of the main character. By applying this framework, a clear understanding of the characters' moral development stages and decision-making processes was gained. Finally, a conclusion was drawn to explain the complex moral development depicted in the novel

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter contains results and discussions regarding types and how the characters used address terms along with the context of the situation. The data source of this research is a novel entitled *The Husky and His White Cat Shizun*, to analyze the stages of the moral development this research applied theory of Moral Development proposed by Kohlberg (1958), and to analyze how the main character develops personality along moral development.

Mo Ran's Stages of Moral Development

This research found six stages of moral development from Mo Ran throughout the story. These are heteronomous morality, individual exchange, good boy attitudes, law and order, social contract and universal principles. The most frequent stage of moral development in this data is individual exchange, with a total of 6 utterances. The dataset also includes all stages of moral development.

Heteronomous Morality

In the heteronomous morality stage, individuals define right and wrong based on direct consequences. If a person is punished, they must have done wrong, rather than understanding the value of actions.

[3 – 1] If that guy found out that he had stolen things and gone whoring, he'd probably break both of Mo Ran's legs! If he didn't run now, he wouldn't get another chance!

(Rou Bao, 2022 : page 60 Vol 1)

Data [3-1] shows the context in which Mo Ran left the sect to visit a brothel and was caught stealing a prostitute's money. These two actions are grave violations of the sect's rules and would have resulted in severe punishment from the sect's elders. The utterance, "If he doesn't run now, he won't get another chance!" emphasizes Mo Ran's desperate desire to avoid the impending punishment. The urgency of Mo Ran's actions is driven by his instinct for self-preservation and a desire to protect himself from the consequences. Mo Ran understands that this matter will result in his legs being broken as punishment, so he decides to flee immediately.

Individual Exchange

In the stage of individual exchange, individuals judge actions based on how they serve their own self-interest. They prioritize personal needs and desires, often engaging in a this for that mentality where reciprocity is expected.

After a pause, he said, "Just call me A-Ran from now on." Song Qiutong didn't quite dare to address Taxian-jun in this way. "If you don't listen to me, I'll throw you off of this mountain!" Mo Ran snarled, violent and severe.

(Rou Bao, 2022 : page 317 Vol 1)

Mo Ran recalls a moment from his first life when he carried Song Quitong and asked her to address him simply as "A-Ran". This action proves that Mo Ran represented a pre-conventional stage of moral reasoning at individual exchanges. The statement, "If you don't listen to me, I'll throw you off this mountain!" emphasizes Mo Ran's moral reasoning is on self-interest and personal gain. Mo Ran is primarily concerned with his own desires and acts with a mindset that prioritizes his own comfort and wishes. His threat to throw Song Quitong off the mountain reflects his determination to be called by the name he suggested. This shows that Mo Ran willing to use violation inhumane way on Song Quitong to enforce his desires. Mo Ran's behavior demonstrates a strong focus on his own perspective and desires, with limited consideration for others.

Good Boy Attitudes

Individuals at this stage make decisions based on what will please others and maintain social harmony. This stage is often associated with a desire to be liked and accepted by others, and a willingness to go along with the crowd to avoid disapproval.

"Whoa, delicious!" Mo Ran said around a mouthful of steamy chicken. "It's really good. My shidi is so capable." In truth, it wasn't that good, and it was a bit salty too, but Mo Ran still dug in heartily to make his little shidi happy.

(Rou Bao, 2022 : page 883 Vol 2)

The data depicts a moment when Mo Ran feels guilty for leaving Xia Sini waiting for too long, even though they had planned to have dinner together. At that time, Mo Ran immediately ate the food that the little boy brought without hesitation. In the narrative, "It was a bit salty too, but Mo Ran still dug in heartily to make his little shidi happy," emphasizes Mo Ran's effort to please others. Mo Ran tried to comfort Xia Sini, who was much younger than him, by showing appreciation for the soup he made, even though the food is salty. He praised it several times just to make Xia Sini stop being upset. Mo Ran's behavior illustrates that he feels guilty for making Xia Sini wait and attempts to rectify the situation by showing sincere appreciation for the food, even though it's not to his liking. His primary motivation is to make Xia Sini happy and alleviate his disappointment. He is clearly considerate of Xia Sini's feelings and willing to put aside his own preferences to ensure the younger boy's happiness. Mo Ran displays traits of agreeableness, empathy, and a strong desire for social harmony. This aligns with the good boy stage of moral development.

Law and Order

It wasn't that they had come to terms with the impending loss. Rather, they had known all along how things would end, so they had never dared claim it in their hearts to begin with.

(Rou Bao, 2022 : page 49 Vol 5)

The moment in data occurs when Mo Ran sees Ye Wangxi on the same stepping stone as him. Ye Wangxi seems to accept his situation without fighting for her love for Nangong Si, who is already engaged with Song Quitong. Mo Ran can relate to Ye Wangxi in that moment because, just like him, Mo Ran also loves his teacher, Chu Wanning. The line, "They had known all along how things would end," reflects the moral reasoning based on mutual agreement. Mo Ran didn't avoid or fight it because Mo Ran understood the outcome and nothing would change their circumstances.

Social Contract and Individual Rights

At this stage, individuals begin to recognize the importance of social contracts and individual rights. Mutual agreement is a fundamental aspect of social contract theory. Individuals understand that societal rules and laws are necessary for maintaining social order. They prioritize justice and fairness in their decision-making.

Just as a family's dirty laundry should not be aired in public, a sect's internal matters were likewise best kept from outsiders. Mo Ran tactfully rose and bowed to Ye Wangxi.

(Rou Bao, 2022 : page 154 Vol 4)

The data shows Mo Ran watching Ye Wangxi and Nangong Si argue in front of him. From this, Mo Ran learns about the internal issues within their sect. When Mo Ran says, "I should head off," it reflects his decision-making based on principles of social order. As an outsider, Mo Ran could have chosen to intervene or use their argument as a way to gather information about their sect. However, Mo Ran makes a conscious choice to leave, deciding not to stir up the situation or act by eavesdropping on them. Mo Ran recognizes the importance of social contracts, in this case, the unspoken agreement to respect the privacy and autonomy of others.

Universal Principles

At this stage, individuals have developed their own set of moral guidelines, which may or may not fit the law. These principles are considered universal and apply to everyone, regardless of cultural or societal norms.

[3 – 18] *“But that was Xu Shuanglin’s doing—what does it have to do with Nangong Si?” asked Mo Ran.*

(Rou Bao, 2022 : page 287 Vol 6)

Mo Ran is questioning the connection between Nangong Si and the chaos committed by Xu Shuanglin. He points out that while Nangong Si is related to Xu Shuanglin, he should not be held accountable for Xu Shuanglin's actions, especially since Nangong Si himself was deeply harmed by those same actions. Mo Ran's question, "What does it have to do with Nangong Si?" expresses his moral reasoning that emphasizes that moral culpability should rest on the individual conscience and action. From Mo Ran's perspective, Nangong Si should not bear the blame because Nangong Si dragged into a situation where he was unfairly blamed.

5. CONCLUSION

In literature, particularly in novels, readers encounter a diverse range of characters with varying personalities, values, and ethical dilemmas. Novels that present complex, morally ambiguous characters are especially valuable, as they challenge readers to consider nuance rather than simplistic notions of good and evil. The analysis concluded that Mo Ran’s character undergoes a significant moral development, which can be mapped through the stages of Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development. At the preconventional level, Mo Ran's actions are driven by self-interest and fear of punishment, heteronomous morality, or personal gain, individual exchange. His threat to Song Qitong and his decision to flee after stealing highlight his early-stage moral reasoning, where consequences dictate his choices. Moving into the conventional level, Mo Ran exhibits behavior aligned with good boy attitudes, seeking social approval by praising Xia Sini’s cooking despite its flaws. Later, he adheres to societal expectations, law and order, accepting predetermined outcomes, as seen in his understanding of Ye Wangxi’s resignation to fate. At the postconventional level, Mo Ran demonstrates higher moral reasoning. He respects social contracts by avoiding interference in others’ conflicts, recognizing the importance of privacy and mutual agreements, social contract and individual rights. Finally, he reaches universal principles, arguing against collective punishment and advocating for individual accountability, progression through all stages reflects significant moral growth, shaped by experiences, relationships, and introspection. This illustrates Mo Ran’s shift from self-centeredness to a more principled approach to moral decision-making. This development not only enhances the understanding of Mo Ran’s character but also provides insight into the broader implications of moral growth and transformation.

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