

The Character Development of Suzuko in *One Million Yen Girl* movie: A Descriptive Qualitative Study on Characterization and Social Representation

Rayza Aulya Nahari¹, Otong Setiawan Djuharie²

English Literature Departement, Faculty of Adab and Humanity, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Jawa Barat, Indonesia^{1,2}

Email: rayzaaulia05@gmail.com¹, otongsetiawandjuharie@uin.ac.id²

History Article:

Received 06 25, 2025
Accepted 06 30, 2025
Published 07 03, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the character development of the main protagonist, Suzuko, in the film One Million Yen Girl directed by Yuki Tanada. The focus of the research is on how Suzuko's character is constructed and evolves through key scenes and dialogues that reflect her personal struggle against social stigma and her quest for freedom. The method used is descriptive qualitative, employing purposive sampling to select 15 key scenes that represent Suzuko's character transformation. The data are analyzed in depth to describe the physical, psychological, and social aspects of Suzuko's character as well as her emotional development throughout the film. The results show that Suzuko evolves from a closed and pressured individual into an independent, strong person who gradually opens herself to others. Suzuko's life journey, full of conflicts and struggles, mirrors a realistic and complex character change. This study contributes to the field of film character analysis and enriches the understanding of social representation in audiovisual art works.

Keywords: Characterization, film, main character

How to Cite:

Rayza Aulya Nahari, & Otong Setiawan Djuharie. (2025). The Character Development of Suzuko in *One Million Yen Girl* movie: A Descriptive Qualitative Study on Characterization and Social Representation. *Jejak Digital: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin*, 1(4b), 1974-1978. <https://doi.org/10.63822/tzbpqb07>

INTRODUCTION

Movies as audiovisual works not only serve as entertainment, but also as a medium to display and develop complex and realistic characters. Character is the representation of a character in a story that includes the character's traits, character traits, and feelings, which are displayed through behavior, conversations, and responses in literary works. Characterization is the process of describing a character clearly, either directly through the narrator's explanation or indirectly through dialogue, actions, and responses of other characters, so that the character looks alive and realistic like a real person (Nurgiyantoro, 1998). One of the films that is interesting to study in terms of characterization is *One Million Yen Girl* by Yuki Tanada. The author's interest in this film is based on the portrayal of the main character, Suzuko, who is unique and full of dynamics-from background, motivation, to changes in attitude in the face of social pressure and her life journey. Suzuko's strong characterization, as well as the interactions and conflicts she experiences, make this film relevant for deeper analysis.

This study uses a theory that distinguishes characterization methods into two, namely direct methods (telling) and indirect methods (showing), (Pickering & Hooper, 1981). The direct method shows the character through narration, explanation, or explicit comments from the narrator or other characters, while the indirect method shows the character through dialog, actions, reactions of other characters, and the situation at hand (Natalia, 2024). In addition, this research also utilizes a three-dimensional approach to character-physiological, psychological, and sociological-to get a complete picture of the main character.

The research method used is descriptive qualitative with an intrinsic approach. The research steps taken include: (1) preparation by watching the film carefully and reading references related to characterization; (2) data collection by identifying scenes, dialogues, and actions that accentuate Suzuko's characterization; (3) in-depth data analysis based on the theories and methods that have been chosen, both telling and showing, as well as through physiological, psychological, and sociological dimensions (Jayantrina; Sedeng; & Laksmi, 2023).

Suzuko's journey in *One Million Yen Girl* shows complex character development through various aspects. Her independence and persistence shine through in every job she takes in various cities, proving her determination to start a new life. However, behind that resilience, Suzuko is also portrayed as a vulnerable figure, seen in her indecision and emotional deliberation in the face of social pressure and past stigma. Her simple yet distinctive physical appearance, her straightforward yet sometimes hesitant style of speech, and the important decisions she makes all reflect an inner conflict between the desire to be free and the need to be accepted. Her interactions with those around her, who are often judgmental and inconsiderate, further emphasize Suzuko's character as a strong yet wounded individual. Through a combination of descriptive narration and scenes that directly show her emotions and struggles, the audience is invited to understand Suzuko's motivations, internal conflicts, and character development in depth, thus forming a strong, meaningful, and empathetic narrative.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

The qualitative approach in this study allows for an in-depth exploration of the characterization of the main character in *One Million Yen Girl*. Through detailed analysis of dialogue, key scenes, and character actions, this research seeks to capture the nuances and complexities of characterization that might be missed using quantitative methods. The descriptive and interpretive nature of the qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore the meaning contained in each element of the movie and understand how these elements contribute to the characterization of the protagonist. Thus, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the characterization in *One Million Yen Girl*, as well as its implications for the narrative and message that the film wants to convey.

The method used is descriptive qualitative method with content analysis technique. This method allows researchers to identify, categorize, and analyze the elements of characterization that appear in the film, both through dialogue, expressions, and actions of the main character, Suzuko. The analysis was

conducted systematically to find the meanings contained in the movie related to character portrayal. The movie *One Million Yen Girl* was produced in 2008 with a duration of about 120 minutes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A total of 15 key scenes containing important dialog and actions that reflect Suzuko's character were selected as analysis samples. This selection was done by considering the diversity of situations and character development throughout the movie.

1. **The start of the conflict in apartment**

Suzuko lives with Takeshi, her coworker's ex-boyfriend, and finds an abandoned kitten that she takes care of. When Takeshi dumps the cat, Suzuko gets angry, throws away his belongings, and ends up being jailed for property damage. This scene shows Suzuko's emotional, assertive, and vulnerable side and the beginning of her conflicted life.

2. **Detention and release**

Suzuko served a short sentence and paid a 200,000 yen fine. After getting out, she faced social pressure from family and neighbors who judged her past.

3. **Return to parent's house**

Suzuko felt uncomfortable staying at home due to the gossip of neighbors and criticism of her sister who was struggling with bullying. This emphasized her social isolation.

4. **Decision to collect one million yen**

To be free from the stigma and start a new life, Suzuko is determined to raise one million yen before moving to a new place. This marked her determination and independence.

5. **Work at the beach house**

Suzuko works at a beach stall, showing her skills and seriousness. However, her dislike for the attentions of a male customer led her to move on after reaching her savings target.

6. **Working in a peach orchard**

Suzuko works as a peach picker and is praised for her skills. However, when the village forced her to become a "Peach Girl" for promotion, she refused for fear of her identity being exposed.

7. **Rejection of being a "Peach Girl" and confession of the past**

Suzuko refuses the role and in a village meeting, she reveals that she is an ex-convict, which triggers a negative reaction from the villagers. This scene shows Suzuko's courage and honesty as well as the social pressure she faces.

8. **Moved to a small town and worked in a DIY store**

Suzuko gets a new job at a home goods store and meets Ryohei, a college student who she starts getting close to. This opens up Suzuko's social and emotional side.

9. **Conversation with Ryohei at the coffee shop**

Suzuko tells Ryohei about her past and the rules of her life, which makes him feel vulnerable and regretful. This dialog shows both her open and hesitant side.

10. **Relationship with Ryohei develop**

They began to get close emotionally and physically, marking a change in Suzuko who began to open up to others.

11. **Financial conflict with Ryohei**

Ryohei borrowed money from Suzuko repeatedly, triggering Suzuko's suspicion and disappointment. This scene shows Suzuko's assertiveness in maintaining self-respect and relationship boundaries.

12. **Decision to leave Ryohei and the city**

Feeling taken advantage of, Suzuko decided to leave before her savings reached one million yen, asserting her life principles and independence.

13. Parting with Ryohei

Ryohei returns the borrowed money and tries to pursue Suzuko, but they part with a meaningful look, marking the end of their relationship chapter.

14. Journey and letter to little brother

Along the way, Suzuko writes letters to her little brother who is facing bullying, showing her caring side and complex family relationships.

15. Hope and closure at the end of the movie

At the end of the story, Suzuko begins to accept the possibility of building a new relationship and faces the future with hope, marking a significant character development.

The entire scene presents Suzuko's character as strong, independent, determined, yet vulnerable and human, struggling against social stigma and seeking freedom through her long journey.

Based on the data above, Suzuko showed a significant transformation from a depressed and closed person to a more independent, strong person, and began to open up to others. This change is reflected in her increased confidence in making decisions, her courage to express her opinions, and her ability to build healthier and more meaningful relationships with those around her. Initially isolated and full of doubts, Suzuko is now able to face challenges more optimistically and proactively, and is no longer afraid to show her true self to the world.

Initially, Suzuko is portrayed as an emotional and vulnerable young woman, caught in legal trouble due to a minor conflict that led to her incarceration. After being released from prison, she faces social stigma from her family and neighborhood that makes her feel alienated and uncomfortable living in her parents' home. This pressure fuels Suzuko's determination to live independently by making her own rules of life, which is to raise one million yen before moving to a new place so that she can start a life without the shadow of the past.

Throughout the journey of moving between cities and working at various part-time jobs, Suzuko shows a persistent and independent side. She worked hard, learned to adapt to new environments, but kept an emotional distance for fear of her identity as an ex-convict being revealed. This introverted attitude became her trademark, protecting her from social rejection.

However, over time Suzuko began to experience emotional development. She begins to open up slowly, especially after meeting Ryohei, who shows her care and kindness. This relationship reveals Suzuko's soft and vulnerable side that has been hidden. Nevertheless, she sticks to her life principles and is not easily dependent on others, like when she decided to leave Ryohei because she felt taken advantage of financially.

In the end, Suzuko realizes that the freedom she seeks is not just about money or moving, but also about accepting herself and building genuine relationships with others. She begins to face her past and opens up to a more open and optimistic life, marking a character development from a closed and isolated person to one who is more whole and ready to face the future.

Suzuko's character development includes:

1. From emotional and vulnerable to independent and persistent in managing his own life.
2. From being introverted and avoidant to opening up and accepting social relationships.
3. From being oppressed by stigma to bravely facing the past and building new hope.

This development makes Suzuko a complex and realistic figure, reflecting an individual's struggle with social pressures and search for personal freedom. Her internal conflict between fulfilling family expectations and pursuing her personal passions creates a strong emotional layer in her character. Suzuko's transformation from a submissive girl to an individual who takes risks and determines her own path is at the core of her character's appeal. Through Suzuko's journey, viewers are invited to reflect on values such as courage, perseverance, and the importance of listening to one's inner voice in facing life's challenges.

CONCLUSION

The results of research on Suzuko's characterization in *One Million Yen Girl* make an important contribution to the scientific development of film and literature studies, especially in understanding the construction of complex and dynamic characters. In-depth analysis of the dialogue, scenes, and actions of the main character enriches insights into how characterization is not only built through direct narration, but also through social interaction, inner conflict, and realistic emotional development. This approach confirms the importance of qualitative methods and characterization theory in studying audiovisual works as a reflection of human social and psychological life.

The scientific implications of this research also open up space for interdisciplinary studies between film and literature, especially in understanding character as a multidimensional entity that develops in certain social and cultural contexts. This research confirms that strong characterization can be an effective medium to convey social criticism and evoke empathy from the audience or readers, thus enriching the aesthetic value as well as the educational value of literary works and films.

The impact of the research on the object of study, the movie *One Million Yen Girl*, is to provide a deeper and more structured understanding of Suzuko's character as the center of the narrative. Thus, the film is not only seen as entertainment, but also as a work of visual literature that is able to represent social issues such as stigma, independence, and the search for identity. This research helps to elevate the artistic and social value of the film, while opening up the possibility of new, richer and more critical interpretations of the messages conveyed.

REFERENCE

- Butler, A. (2023). Characterizing the Female Main Character.
- Natalia, M. (2024). Karakterisasi Tokoh Utama Film Das Privileg karya Felix Fuchssteiner dan Katharina Schöne. *E-Journal Identitaet*.
- Nozawa, S. (2013, November). Characterization.
- Nurgiyantoro, B. (1998). Teori Pengkajian Fiksi (II, Vol. 2).
- Pickering, J. H., & Hooper, J. D. (1981). Concise Companion to Literature. Macmillan.
- Pratiwi, K. R., Indrawan, M. I., & Putra, W. N. (2021, Desember). THE STUDY OF CHARACTERIZATION OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN BRAVE MOVIE. *IJELAL Vol. 02*.
- Rondonuwu, T. H. (2020). ANALISIS KARAKTERISASI TOKOH UTAMA DALAM FILM BARBIE OF SWAN LAKE (2003).
- Suzuki, M. (2012). Becoming Modern Woman: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture.
- Tanada, Y. (Director & Writer). (2008). *One Million Yen Girl* [Film]. Nikkatsu.
- Yefta Helen Jayantrina, N., Sedeng, I., & Laksmi, L. (2023). Characterization Of The Main Character In The Movie "The Unborn" Based On Physiological, Sociological, And Psychological Dimensions. *Humanis*, , 207-215.