

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Existentialism is a philosophical thought that concerns itself with questions of human existence in the world and centers itself on human choice. Existentialist philosophers often ask questions such as the meaning, value, and purpose of human existence. It was most influential in Europe from about 1930 to the mid-20th century, and its origin is from the writings of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. There are many ideas associated with existentialism, one of them is Authenticity which was introduced by Jean-Paul Sartre in his book *Being and Nothingness* (1943). 'Authenticity' considers how to live a 'free' life. Authenticity comes from owning up to choices that define us and going beyond our situation to make something of ourselves. "To deny your freedom is to deceive yourself", It means we are scared of our freedom and can manifest itself in self-deception, in applying an identity given to us by someone else, or believing in determinism. Sartre held the belief that we must give Authenticity to our lives as a moral obligation (Abbagnano, 2022).

The issue of existentialism is not something new since many studies have taken it as the main topic to be researched. For example, Khanday & Paliwal (2023) discussed the issue of existentialism in the novels of Arun Joshi to examine its existential themes. It revealed that the characters of Arun Joshi are committed to the principles of freedom and Authenticity. Joshi in his novels highlights

individuality and Authenticity in its characters. Most of his main characters never surrendered to fate but fought against it for a better future. Bouthenia & Khawla (2021) looked into the theme of existentialism and the sublime in the Japanese comic series and its animation adaptation of *Mob Psycho 100*. In the research, both of them found that the characters in the comic series were unsure and in search of the meaning of life in one way or another. The characters in *Mob Psycho 100* are often found asking questions that reflect existential crises. Research done by Das (2022) found that the Japanese comic series *One-Punch Man* and *My Hero Academia* express the themes of existentialism and absurdism by drawing parallels between the comic series and Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The heroes in the comic series found purpose in their lives by fighting evil. Even though they cannot vanquish said evil, they find purpose in life by doing so.

The topic of existentialism in literary works has been researched extensively throughout the world. However, the researcher has not yet found any research trying to correlate the values of existentialism in a literary work with the society that produced said literary work. For this reason, the researcher tries to see how existentialism, especially the concept of Authenticity by Jean-Paul Sartre, can be correlated with Japanese society. The researcher chose Japanese society as it is famous for its conformist society where it is highly frowned upon when a Japanese person does not conform to traditional values (Woodman, 2023). Japanese culture is perfect for this research regarding existentialism as existentialism emphasizes individual freedom while Japanese culture emphasizes conformity.

Not only for its cultural conformity, but Japan is also infamous for the long working hours of its workers. In 2016, the Prime Minister of Japan rolled out the Work Style Reform Action Plan, to significantly reform the way Japanese people work. There were many reasons for the plan, and they were interrelated. One of the reasons was an urgent need to decrease the culture of long working hours. International comparisons have shown that working hours in Japan are longer than in other developed countries, especially among full-time employed persons (Ono, 2022). One of the many reasons that Japanese people work long hours is because there is a cultural expectation that they stay to work even if their colleagues are still working, even though it is already their schedule to go home (Takami, 2019).

In Japan, people of all ages read Japanese comic books, also known as manga. It is a huge part of their culture as seen from its booming industry domestically and more so internationally. The range of manga genres is diverse, ranging from teenage romance comedy to philosophical themes and from history to science fiction. Oftentimes, a Japanese manga will try to depict contemporary Japanese society even though the setting of the manga does not resemble Japanese settings at all. A science fiction manga can even depict the Japanese work culture through its narrative and characters. With this, the researcher chose *Heart Gear*, a Japanese manga series, as the corpus of this research.

Heart Gear is a Japanese comic series written and illustrated by Tsuyoshi Takaki. The series began serialization on Shueisha's Shonen Jump Japanese comic website in April 2019 and has been on hiatus since December 2022. As of August 2022, the series' chapters have been collected into four volumes. When creating the

series, Takaki decided to use a young human girl and a robot as protagonists in a post-apocalyptic setting to write a science fiction comic that is understandable to a wide audience. In this post-apocalyptic world, humans no longer existed on earth, except for the female main character, Roue. In the plot of the comic so far, she is the only human that is alive. Accompanied by a male robot, Chrome, who is also a main character, she searches for a way to repair her “father”, Zett, who has been attacked by a malfunctioning robot and only has his hard drive remaining. Throughout Roue’s journey to repair her father, she meets with many different robots who are still executing their program even though the humans who programmed them have become extinct, and they know it. For example, there is a robot barber who still waits patiently for a human customer to come to his shop. He does that simply because he is programmed to do so even though the program has become obsolete due to the extinction of the human species.

This research analyzes the depiction of existentialism, specifically the concept of Authenticity, in the comic series *Heart Gear*, and see the correlation of this comic series and its existentialist theme with the issue of Japanese work culture.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How does the comic series *Heart Gear* depict Japanese work culture?
2. How does the comic series *Heart Gear* depict the concept of Authenticity in its characters?
3. How does the concept of Authenticity correlate with Japanese work culture in the comic series *Heart Gear*?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study is to see how the comic series *Heart Gear* depicts Japanese work culture. This study also aims to see how the comic series *Heart Gear* depicts the concept of Authenticity in its characters. Not only that, this research is conducted to see how this comic series with its existentialist theme, specifically Authenticity, correlates with Japanese work culture.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on analyzing the depiction of Jean-Paul Sartre's Existentialism, the concept of Authenticity and its correlation with the Japanese work culture, specifically the issue of overworking in Japanese work culture. *Heart Gear* comic series was chosen because of its relatively new publication, predominantly existential theme, and Japanese origin. This research analyzes the dialogues, narratives, and visuals of the characters, specifically the minor and the supporting characters (see chapter 4, data description, for the explanation) achieve its purpose. The researcher determined that main characters of the comic series do not depict enough values of Authenticity, hence why this research only analyzes the minor and supporting characters.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research will be useful for the readers as references, especially in related fields such as literature, cultural studies, and philosophies. Also, the result of this study is aimed to give academic input to improve the quality of life in Japanese society, mainly in its work culture and its issue of overwork.