

Redefining Family: Alternative Family Narratives in Hirokazu Koreeda's *Manbiki no Kazoku (Shoplifters)*

Wawat Rahwati

Japanese Literature Department, Universitas Nasional, INDONESIA

Rima Devi

rimadevi@hum.unand.ac.id

Japanese Department, Universitas Andalas, INDONESIA

Aulia Asyifa

Japanese Literature Department, Universitas Nasional, INDONESIA

Abstract

*This article explores an alternative family narrative in the Japanese film *Manbiki no Kazoku (Shoplifters, 2018)* by Hirokazu Koreeda. This film portrays a group of marginalized individuals living together as a family despite lacking legal marriage and blood ties. Through an analysis of the film's narrative, this research examines how the alternative family dynamic is presented in *Manbiki no Kazoku*. Using a literary sociology approach, the analysis applies social exclusion theory to contextualize the Shibata family's marginalization within broader issues of poverty, neglect, and precarity in contemporary Japanese society. The results reveal that Koreeda's narrative challenges conventional Japanese kinship structures by presenting a "chosen family" that fulfills essential functions of emotional support and socialization. The film shows how the idea of an alternative family grows out of the characters' experience of social exclusion. Unlike the Japanese *ie* system and nuclear family, which depend on blood ties and legal marriage for legitimacy, the Shibata family comes through shared experience and solidarity of individuals living on the margin of society. By situating the film within debates on social exclusion and the transformation of family in modern Japan, the study demonstrates that *Manbiki no Kazoku (Shoplifters)* redefines family as a flexible institution grounded in solidarity and mutual responsibility, offering a narrative as a form of negotiation to face the social problems in Japanese society.*

Keywords: *alternative family; manbiki no kazoku; social function; sociology of literature*

Article information

Received:
4
November
2025

Revised:
12 April
2026

Accepted:
20 April
2026

Introduction

Film is a medium that represents and communicates social issues within the society in which it is produced. As a form of cultural expression, cinematic works provide a space for directors, as members of society, to articulate and interpret social realities (Mohamed et al., 2024). Films, in addition to their function as an entertaining medium (*dulce*), are also beneficial (*utile*) (Tombu, 2024) because they deliver insight into various aspects of society, such as values, norms, traditions, and social issues.

Many Japanese films address current social issues. Issues such as declining birth rates, poverty, and domestic violence are prominent themes featured in Japanese films. Directors present these themes not only to provide information but also to raise public awareness about various social issues, including family issues.

The family is the smallest social system in society and is a crucial space for parents to fulfill their role in caring for and educating their children. In general, a family (Panchal & Dubey, 2025) is defined as people who are connected by marriage, descent, or adoption. They live together and perform both instrumental and expressive functions within the family. As the smallest unit in society (Furstenberg, 2019), the family typically consists of parents and their children, commonly referred to as a nuclear family. However, in addition to nuclear families, extended families are frequently found, comprising not only parents and children but also other relatives connected by marriage and blood ties who live and interact under the care of the head of the household. Nuclear and extended families both share similarities, as they are bound by marriage and blood ties.

With the complex social issues prevalent in Japanese society, such as poverty, declining birth rates, and the reluctance of young people to marry, the concept of the conventional family seems to be shifting. It is evident in the emergence of the *rentaru kazoku* (rental family) phenomenon, a rental service for those seeking substitute family members, such as fathers, mothers, and children. *Rentaru kazoku* are typically used for special occasions, such as weddings and funerals, and many providers

currently offer services for around 20,000 yen for four hours (Gigazine, 2018). McCartney (2026) explains that rental family services in Japan provide companionship and social validation for those experiencing isolation.

Japanese films and dramas, frequently explore family narrative, often placing them within various problematic contexts. Several Japanese films have family themes, such as *Yokame no Semi (Rebirth, 2011)*, *Kazoku wa Tsurai (What a Wonderful Family, 2016)*, and *Manbiki no Kazoku (Shoplifters, 2018)*.

The film *Manbiki no Kazoku (Shoplifters)*, directed by Hirokazu Koreeda, does not explicitly address family issues but vividly highlights the social realities in contemporary Japanese society. The film portrays several characters who live together as a family, bound not by blood but by mutual care and solidarity in the face of poverty, marginalization, and social exclusion. The household consists of Hatsue Shibata; her son Osamu and his wife Nobuyo; a young woman named Aki; a girl named Yuri (also called Lin) who has suffered domestic abuse; and a boy named Shota. They share Hatsue's home and form the Shibata family. Through their daily interactions, the narrative foregrounds pressing social issues, such as the isolation of the elderly from their families, economic hardship, and domestic violence, which shape the film's storyline. These challenges compel the characters to live together and support one another. To meet their needs, they engage in manual labor, pension fraud, working as prostitutes, and shoplifting at large supermarkets. Their daily practice of surviving together demonstrates their precarious situation and dependence on collective survival strategies.

Since the film's release, many viewers have responded to it, which has won several awards, including the 2018 Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or, the 2018 Mainichi Film Awards' Best Film award, and the Asia Pacific Screen Award for Best Feature Film (Frater, 2018). Critics recognize *Manbiki no Kazoku* as an extraordinary film for its portrayal of family ties, as it employs a unique narrative strategy. On The Guardian page, Bradshaw (2018) stated that Hirokazu Koreeda was able to create a complex, subtle, and mysterious film with an

extraordinary final twist. Meanwhile, Marsh (2018), who wrote on the South China Morning Post page, stated that Hirokazu Koreeda is a filmmaker who tends to highlight the stories of marginalized people in modern life and exposes problems and relationships that Japanese people have forgotten.

The narrative of marginalized people is depicted in the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* through the problems experienced by each character, such as poverty and domestic violence. With their respective issues, these characters, who initially did not know each other, meet and create a shared interaction space like a family. What is interesting about the film is the narrative presented by the director, which provides space for these unrelated characters to create an alternative family structure.

The term “alternative family” in this case refers to the relationships formed between individuals that do not conform to the traditional concept of a family bound by marriage and blood ties. Thus, alternative families can be formed under various conditions, such as living together without being married. This understanding is consistent with the findings of Ronald et al. (2018), who demonstrate that in urban Japan, there are increasing numbers of single individuals due to shifting socio-economic conditions and housing constraints. In the Japanese context (Ochiai, 1997), the traditional *ie* system centered on patrilineal continuity and hierarchical authority was legally abolished after World War II, giving way to the nuclear family as the dominant model. However, ongoing social changes, including economic instability, demographic aging, and household fragmentation, have further reshaped the meaning of family in contemporary Japan. Regarding the narrative of the alternative family presented in the film *Manbiki no Kazoku*, this study examines how the narrative of the alternative family is depicted in the film and how this alternative family narrative is intertwined with social problems that occur in recent Japanese society.

Previous research on the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* includes Paxton (2019), who examines Hirokazu Koreeda’s directorial strategy in portraying moments of joy amidst poverty.

Anggraini and Suryawati (2022), along with Mokharisma et al. (2022), discuss the film’s conflict and broader social issues; however, they do not specifically address the theme of family. In contrast, Darmadji (2022) analyzes kinship in *Manbiki no Kazoku (Shoplifters)* using critical discourse analysis, showing how everyday acts of care and affection shape what we understand as a family. However, his study mainly focuses on the realities of Indonesian families and does not engage with the social context of Japanese society or examine how family systems function within it. Meanwhile, research on alternative families was discussed by Devi (2012) through a novel by Ogawa Yoko, which analyzed a single mother who formed a family without the bonds of marriage, thus being referred to as an alternative family.

From the previous studies, it is evident that there has been no discussion about alternative families related to this film. Therefore, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the field of literature, particularly in relation to the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* within the framework of literary sociology. By using social exclusion theory to analyze Hirokazu Koreeda’s narrative, the study demonstrates how film can function as a cultural text that reflects and critiques social realities. In particular, it highlights the representation of alternative family structures as a response to exclusion and as a reflection of shifting cultural values in contemporary Japanese society.

Methodology

This study is a sociology of literature approach, using social exclusion theory (Levitas, 2005) as the theoretical framework to examine how marginalized characters in *Manbiki no Kazoku (Shoplifter)* build an alternative family narrative. We conduct the analysis in two stages. First, we focus on the film’s story, scenes, and characters as key elements of narrative construction and characters-driven interaction (Sharman & Arkansas, 2020; Zhang, 2024). Through this approach, the study explores how characters’ relationships and everyday interactions contribute to the formation of an alternative family structure. Second, by applying the sociology of literature (Wellek & Warren,

2016; Váňa, 2020), the study examines how the film narrative reflects and connects with social realities in Japanese society. To build an understanding of how the characters in *Manbiki no Kazoku* present an alternative family, we discuss it in contrast to the regular or non-alternative family models in Japan. The regular family in Japanese society refers to the *Ie* (家) system, as conceptualized by Nakane (1970), emphasizing a hierarchical and enduring social unit that extends beyond the notion of biological family and serves as a model for social organization in Japan. Building on this perspective, later studies suggest that the *Ie* can be understood as a patriarchal and patrilineal structure and shaped Japanese kinship and social relations prior to World War II (Rahmah, 2017; Devi, 2023). However, the *Ie* system (Ochiai, 1997) has been abolished in the postwar transition, and the rise of the nuclear family reshaped social relations, gender roles, and household functions. Furthermore, Kato (2013) shows continuity changes in Japanese family structures across the twentieth century, including the decline of extended families and the fragmentation of nuclear families. The alternative family narrative reflected in this film is expected to offer a nuanced portrayal of the evolving concept of family and its connection to the complexities of social issues in Japanese society.

Results and Discussion

1. An Alternative Family Narrative in the Film *Manbiki no Kazoku*

An examination of the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* (*shoplifter*) reveals the existence of an alternative family narrative amidst the various social problems experienced by the characters in this film. The complexity of social issues, such as economic limitations, neglect, and violence within the family, becomes the framework that underlies the story of the meeting of socially marginalized people. The characters, who initially do not know each other, meet and create a shared interaction space, much like a family. These characters support each other to overcome various problems and work together to meet daily needs by stealing goods at the supermarket,

committing fraud related to pension money, and working as prostitutes.

The conditions depicted in this film contrast with the narrative of a typical Japanese family historically rooted in the *Ie* system, which emphasizes patrilineal continuity and hierarchical household structure (Nakane, 1970; Rahmah, 2017). In other words, men play a crucial role in the family. The *Ie* system became the dominant regular family in Japanese society, lasting until World War II. However, this system gradually shifted toward the nuclear family, although it still placed emphasis on blood ties and legality as the basis for family legitimacy (Ochiai, 2017). The change occurred for several reasons, such as an economic shift from industrialization to urbanization and a demographic transition by a decline in birth rates and an increase in life expectancy. This condition is also highlighted by Kato (2013) as a cause of the decline in extended families and the fragmentation of nuclear families.

The story of the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* unfolds through a series of events presented sequentially, starting with the introduction of the dominant characters, namely Yuri and the Shibata family, which consists of Nobuyo, Osamu, Shota, and Hatsue. The introduction of each character in this film begins with Yuri's arrival at the Shibata family residence. Yuri is presented as a girl who was abused and abandoned by her parents, who often fought. She was found by Nobuyo, and out of pity, she was cared for and became part of the Shibata family. After two months had passed, news emerged about the disappearance of a child named Juri or Yuri. However, the Shibata family chose not to return Yuri because they feared her parents abuse again. To avoid recognition, Nobuyo Shibata altered Yuri's appearance by cutting her hair short and changing her name to Lin.

The story continues by telling the death of Hatsue, a grandmother who was part of the Shibata family. After Hatsue's grandmother's death, the story then shows a scene of Shota being caught by the police when he invited Yuri to steal in a supermarket. Shota tried to escape by jumping from a bridge, but he fell and was injured, so he was taken to the

hospital. With Shota's arrest, Osamu and Nobuyo panicked because they did not have identity cards or health insurance. To avoid further questions from the police, they decided to take Yuri and Shota away from their house. However, their plan failed because the police managed to arrest them. The arrest of Osamu and Nobuyo succeeded in exposing the crimes of the Shibata family. The film's story concludes with a scene in which Yuri reunites with her parents after going missing. The state provides Shota with a place to live and access to education, while it detains Osamu and Nobuyo for various crimes.

The death of Hatsue and the arrests of Shota, Osamu, and Nobuyo demonstrate the vulnerability of the Shibata family, which reflects neither the *ie* system of families, which historically emphasized patrilineal continuity, hierarchical authority, and legal recognition of family membership (Nakane, 1970; Rahmah, 2017; Devi, 2023), nor the nuclear family, which is formed based on legal marriage and biological parentage. The Shibata family was formed without legal marriage ties, and they are not the biological parents of their children. The arrests of Osama and Nobuyo, who were declared criminals by the police, emphasize that although the nuclear family has fragmented in contemporary Japanese society (Kato, 2013), legitimacy through legal and blood ties remains the basis for family recognition by the state.

The alternative family, contrasted with the normative or regular family represented by the Shibata family in the film *Manbiki no Kazoku*, emerges as a reflection of social exclusion (Levitas, 2005) and can be understood as a response to the marginalization of vulnerable individuals facing economic hardship, unstable jobs, and the elderly. The Shibata family's lack of identity cards, health insurance, and legal status shows their exclusion from state institutions, which implies limited access to education, welfare, and legal protection. The state's intervention, by returning Yuri to her biological parents and insuring Shota's life and education, along with the criminalization of Osamu and Nobuyo for caring for children who are not their biological children, confirms that society still affirms the normative or regular

family model and has not fully accepted alternative forms of family, such as those represented by the Shibata family.

The film *Manbiki no Kazoku* portrays several key characters who interact intensely with one another throughout the storyline. Through their complementary roles, these characters form a bond resembling a family, even without blood and marital ties. Among the several characters who appear, Osamu is the dominant figure in the series of events. Before joining the Shibata family, Osamu was named Enoki Shota. He played his role as Nobuyo's husband and became a father to the children who joined the Shibata family. Osamu worked as a day laborer with low wages, so to meet his daily needs, he also stole goods from the supermarket. However, he still positioned himself as the head of the Shibata family and was responsible for supporting the family by working as a laborer and engaging in theft.

信代: もう少しさ、お金のニオイのするもん
捨ってきてなよお。
治 : 父ちゃん、あんま鼻よくねえからな。
(05:05 – 05:11).

Nobuyo: Can't you bring home something that makes money? Money for us?
Osamu : Your husband is not very clever at seeking profit.

From the conversation between Nobuyo and Osamu in the quote above, it is clear that Osamu positions himself as a husband for Nobuyo by calling himself '*otouchan*,' a term referring to a husband. Their interactions resemble those of a married couple; however, without legal recognition, their relationship remains socially unrecognized. As the main adult male figure in the Shibata family, Osamu takes on the role of a responsible leader who provides guidance and support for the other members. He acts as a father figure to Shota and Yuri, despite having no blood relation with them.

治 : いたいた。やっぱな。ああ、寒い！。ゆり心配して、ずっと玄関に座ってんの、嫌いか？、ゆりのこと。

祥太 : うーうん。
治 : じゃあ、なんで？
祥太 : 男2人のほうが楽しい。
治 : まあそりゃ、そうだけどよ、ゆりもな…なんか役に立ったほうがあの家にはやすいだろ。なっ、分かった？
祥太 : わかった。
治 : ゆりはお前の…ん？
祥太 : 妹。
治 : そうだよ そうだ そうだ そうだ。じゃなあ、俺はお..？
祥太 : いい。
治 : 言えよ、ほら。一回ちょっと呼んでみるよって、ほら。
祥太 : いつかね。 (35:36 – 37:02).

Osamu : You are here, huh? Ah, it is cold. Yuri was so worried, she waited for you at the door all night. You do not like Yuri?
Shota : (shakes his head)
Osamu : So, what?
Shota : It is more fun if it is just the two of us.
Osamu : Of course. But for Yuri, if she helps us, our lives will be lighter. Right? Understand?
Shota : Understood
Osamu : Yuri who?
Shota : My little sister
Osamu : Right. Then who am I? Ay..
Shota : I do not know.
Osamu : Come on, just say it. Just say it once, Come on.
Shota : Later

The interaction between Osamu and Shota in the dialogue above demonstrates Osamu's role as a father who provides attention and affection for Shota and Yuri. Osamu expresses his paternal role by comforting Shota when he is sad, giving him praise, and playing with him. He does the same for Yuri, even though he has recently taken her illegally. Osamu can establish a father-son-daughter relationship, enabling Yuri to experience the comfort she lacked while living with her parents.

Initially, Osamu was just an ordinary man, but when he saw abandoned children, a desire arose to care for and protect them like a father. Osamu does not concern himself with

providing for the children's future; instead, he focuses on keeping them safe in the present. Therefore, for them to survive, he was only able to teach the children he cared for to earn money by stealing. In addition to his roles as husband to his wife and father to his children, Osamu also plays the role of a son-in-law to Hatsue, an older person who is part of the alternative family built by Osamu and Nobuyo.

初枝 : ただいま！
治 : ああ、お帰り、おばあちゃん！
初枝 : お祈りさんの池の氷珍しく張ってたよ。
治 : おー、そうか。ほら、気をつつけねえとほら、すべて腰とか打ったら、大変だからよ。 (26:51 – 27:04).

Hatsue: I'm home.
Osamu: Welcome, Grandma.
Hatsue: The ice in the pond at the temple is very thick.
Osamu: Oh yeah. Wow, if you are not careful, you could slip, and if it hits you...Your hips. That will definitely be a problem.

In the dialogue above, Osamu is seen positioning himself as a son-in-law to Hatsue by welcoming her home and caring for her safety. Even though Hatsue is a stranger by blood to Osamu, he still calls her 'Obaachan,' 'Grandma.' Osamu feels sorry for Hatsue, an older person who lives alone and is neglected by her own family. Therefore, he decides to live with her to take care of the elderly Hatsue and also to benefit Osamu, who has no place to live.

A key figure who also plays a dominant role in the emergence of the alternative family is a female character named Nobuyo Shibata. Previously known as Tanabe Yuko, Nobuyo plays the role of wife and mother in the Shibata family, taking care of the household, including cooking and laundry. In addition to domestic chores, Nobuyo also works part-time to help support her family.

祥太 : うれしい？「お母さん」って呼ばれて。
信代 : えー、誰に？
祥太 : うん… りんとか、…
信代 : 呼ばれてみないと分かんないかな。

な一んでそんなこと聞くんだよ～
祥太 : え? 呼べって言うからさ、「父ちゃん」って。

信代 : 呼べないんだ?

祥太 : うん、まだね。(1:22:56 – 1:23:57).

Shota : You like being called mom

Nobuyo: By whom?

Shota : Lin, for example

Nobuyo: I will not know until he does. Why do you ask? Like that?

Shota : Because he also wants me to call him "Dad."

Nobuyo: But you cannot.

Shota : Not yet, I'm not able.

Although Nobuyo is neither legally married nor biologically related to Shibata family members, she embraces the role of wife and mother through the emotional bonds she forms with them. For Nobuyo, these emotional connections matter more than formal ties of marriage or blood. She carries out this role by caring for the husband and looking after the children, including those who have been abandoned. In doing so, she fulfills her desire for family life and a sense of belonging. Nobuyo carries out these responsibilities with sincerity and affection, as seen in small but meaningful actions, such as buying new clothes for Yuri. By caring for Yuri with warmth and attention, Nobuyo helps her begin to heal from trauma caused by her parents' conflict.

Next, there are the characters Shota and Yuri, who appear in this film and play the role of children adopted by the Shibata family. Shota is a boy whom Osamu always invites to steal goods in supermarkets. Since becoming part of the Shibata family, Shota was not sent to school by Osamu and was only taught how to survive by stealing. However, despite not attending school, he was still able to read books. Most of his time was spent wandering and stealing. Shota first met Osamu and Nobuyo when he was stranded in a car, and they both saved him by inviting him to live with them as the Shibata family.

祥太 : 僕の時はさ、助けてくれたとき

治 : あ? 何?

祥太 : あの時も、何か盗もうとしてたの?

治 : いや、バカ! 違えよ、お前。あんた

時はよ、お前を助けようと思って
たんだよ。(1:25:14 – 1:26:39).

Shota : Back when you saved me...

Osamu : What?

Shota : Did you also try to steal something from
The car?

Osamu: No, you idiot. How could that be
possible? I was trying to save you.

Like Shota, Yuri also became part of the Shibata family after being found abandoned in front of the Shibata house by Nobuyo, who had left her parents' often-quarreling home. Yuri is a minor girl who is traumatized and injured by the violence perpetrated by her parents. However, after moving into the Shibata home, Yuri's condition changes and becomes happier due to the affection of those in the family.

ゆり : お兄ちゃん!

祥太 : はーい! どうした?

ゆり : セミ。

祥太 : どれ?

ゆり : セミがまだ剥いてないやつがある。

ゆり : 毛虫…かゆくなんないでね。おっ。

祥太 : 触った!

ゆり : おっ!

祥太とゆり: 頑張れ、頑張れ。頑張れー、頑
張。(51:59 – 52:30).

Yuri : Brother

Shota : Yaa. What is wrong?

Yuri : Cricket

Shota : Where?

Yuri : It has not come out of its shell yet

Yuri : It's still a caterpillar, so don't let it
itch. Okay?

Shota : Do not touch it

Yuri : Oh!

Shota & Yuri: Go, go, keep going!

The interaction between Shota and Yuri in the dialogue above also reveals their respective roles, with Shota playing the older brother who encourages Yuri, whom he considers his younger sibling. Shota's presence within the Shibata family provides Yuri with valuable experiences. While Yuri previously, experienced violence and felt lonely due to the absence of an older sibling figure, now, with the Shibata family, she finds a warm space that is interpreted as family.

Hatsue is another character who is described as part of the Shibata family. Hatsue is an older woman who owns a house used to accommodate members of the Shibata family, alongside Osamu, Nobutyō, Shota, and Yuri. Hatsue is an older woman who owns a house used to accommodate members of the Shibata family. In the Shibata family, Hatsue is positioned as the mother of Nobuyō and grandmother to Shota and Yuri. For her daily needs, she uses her late husband's pension. This character is described as a grandmother who lives alone in a shabby and unkempt house, so social committee officers often come to monitor her condition. Unbeknownst to the committee officers, Hatsue's house serves as the residence of the Shibata family.

For Hatsue, Osamu was initially a stranger living there, but his presence in her home helped dispel her loneliness as she spent her old age. Furthermore, with Osamu and Nobuyō around, her house remains well-maintained, as they assist Hatsue in cleaning it. Hatsue also strives to fulfill her role as Osamu's mother-in-law, preparing breakfast for Osamu every day before he leaves for work.

The social interactions among the characters in the film *Kazoku no Manbiki* portray the Shibata family as warm and emotionally supportive despite their limited economic circumstances. With their respective roles clearly defined by each character, it is evident that they work together to share life's problems and strive to meet the family's needs by filling each other's shortcomings. This depiction of a family represents an 'ideal' family, where the presence of parents (Pribesh et al., 2020) who carry out their role of caring for their children with love is central. Although all members of the Shibata family are not bound by legal marriage and blood relations, as in the conventional family concept, they are still able to build a harmonious family. Moreover, after Yuri's arrival as part of the Shibata family, the Shibata family's life becomes more colorful. From the depiction of social interactions between these characters, it is clear that the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* offers a narrative about an alternative family for people to choose from when they cannot meet conventional family standards.

2. Alternative Families as a Form of Compromise to the Complexity of Social Problems in Japanese Society

The exploration of the storyline and social interactions among the characters in the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* demonstrates how socially marginalized individuals construct an alternative family as a shared space of care and solidarity. The Shibata family's interactions closely resemble those of a conventional family, expressed through daily activities, such as sharing meals, joking, enjoying fireworks, and spending time together at the beach. These moments reflect a strong sense of intimacy and mutual support as the members work collectively to navigate challenges they face. The film's alternative family thus reflects a form of compromise among marginalized individuals who lack the power to confront existing social realities directly.

The social problems depicted through the social interactions between the characters in this film are complex, ranging from issues of older people, poverty, and violence against children by their parents. The film illustrates that problem faced by the character of Hatsue, an older woman abandoned by her family. Before Osamu and Nobuyō moved in, Hatsue felt lonely because no one from her family was willing to live with her. The conditions experienced by Hatsue in the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* also reflect the social reality that occurs in Japan. The growing number of older people each year (Whill, 2021) has led to an increase in elderly individuals living alone (一人暮らし; *hitori gurashi*) and being abandoned by their families. By living with Osamu and his alternative family, who provide her with daily care and companionship, the film suggests that such a family structure can offer meaningful support to elderly people who live alone.

The film also addresses the issue of violence and neglect of underage children through the characters of Yuri and Sota. Yuri is portrayed as a girl traumatized by domestic violence and parental neglect, as her parents frequently fight due to economic problems. Similarly, Shota was also found by Osamu and Nobuyō when he was alone in the car, while his

parents were busy gambling at pachinko. The film further develops Shota's background through a dialogue in which Nobuyo asks Osamu about his situation.

祥太 : ごめんなさい。僕が捕まったら。
治 : いいんだよ。いつもうまくいかね
よ、なっ。なっ？
信代 : どう？施設は？ちゃんと学校行っ
てんの？
祥太 : うん。国語のテストは 8 位だっ
た。
信代 : 祥太。あのね、あんた拾ったのは
ね。松戸のパチンコ屋～
治 : おい～
信代 : 松戸のパチンコ屋。車は赤いのヴ
イツ。ナンバーは習志野。
治 : おいっ！ (1:46:49 – 1:48:49)

Shota : I'm sorry because I got caught.
Osamu : Don't worry, things don't always
work out, right?
Nobuyo : How is the place? Do you go to
school every day?
Shota : Yes, I got eighth place in the
Japanese test.
Nobuyo : Shota. Listen, we found you at the
pachinko arena. Pachinko arena in
Matsudo. The car is a red Toyota
Vitz. The license plate is from
Narashino.
Osamu : Oh.

The case of violence and neglect against underage children by their parents in the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* has become a significant issue, reflecting the social reality of Japanese society today. Cases of violence against underage children continue to increase in Japan year after year. It is evident in data released by Anya (2021) regarding the number of cases of violence and neglect against children from 2003 to 2020.

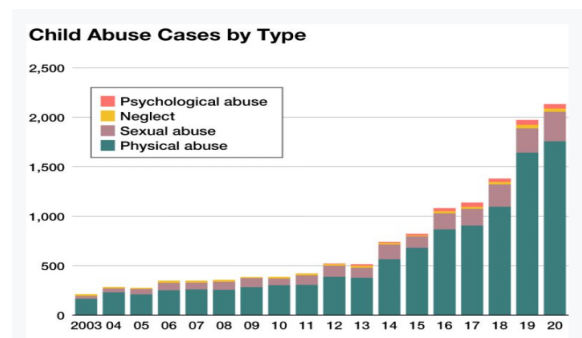


Figure 1. The number of cases of violence against minors in Japan. Taken from Anya (2021)

Based on data obtained from the Japanese police, it is indicated that cases of violence against children continue to increase, especially from 2018 to 2020. The increase in violence against children, as seen in the figure above, indicates the increasingly complex social problems that Japanese society must face today. The heavy burden that parents must bear due to the economic recession that occurred in 2018 (Reuter, 2020). This condition indirectly affects their children, who often become victims of the problems their parents face.

In the film *Manbiki no Kazoku*, the characters Yuri and Shota represent the condition of underage children who experience violence and are neglected by their parents. They experience trauma and the loss of their parents, but in return, Osamu and Nobuyo appear as alternative parental figures for Yuri and Shota, providing attention and affection. The alternative family narrative presented in the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* offers a response to social problems in Japan. By presenting an alternative family, the film aims to critique the conventional concept of family and suggest that families can be formed beyond marriage or biological relationships. By asking 「産んだら、みんな母親になんの？」 "Does giving birth mean everyone can become a mother?" (1:43), Nobuyo critiques the conventional belief that giving birth automatically makes someone a nurturing mother.

However, the concept of an alternative family offered in this film does not appear to be readily accepted by society as a solution to Japan's social problems. It is evident in the arrest of Osamu and Nobuyo by the police, who were accused of committing a crime by illegally taking custody of Shota and Yuri from their biological parents.

警察 : でも産まなきゃ、なれないですよ。
あなたが産めなくて辛いのは分かるけどね。羨ましかった？ だら、
誘拐したの？ (1:43:13).

Police : But you cannot be a mother unless you've given birth to her. I understand it's hard for you, not being able to give birth. Are you jealous? Is that why you kidnapped her?

From the quotation above, it is clear that, from the police's perspective, what Nobuyo and Osamu did was a criminal act because they kidnapped Yuri. The police still blamed their actions, even though the reason was to save Yuri from her parents' violence. Nobuyo acts as an alternative mother to help Yuri recover from the trauma caused by parental violence, but society and the law regard her actions as violations of legal and social norms. Although Nobuyo deeply cared for Yuri, she had no legal right to raise her, as she was not her biological mother. The police statement above suggests that society often associates the concept of family in society with biological relationships. Thus, the arrest of Nobuyo and Osamu suggests that the alternative family presented in this film has not been able to replace the conventional family structure established in society. In this case, the film also implicitly suggests that the concept of an 'alternative' family has not been able to replace the conventional family concept. It is because Japanese society's view of the concept of family still primarily refers to a marriage bond and blood relations between family members.

Conclusion

After analyzing the narrative elements of the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* and observing the social issues that arise in it, it can be concluded that the film presents an alternative family

narrative that emerged in response to social exclusion. Unlike the Japanese *ie* system and nuclear family, which emphasize blood ties and legal marriage as a foundation of legitimacy, the Shibata family is formed through solidarity among individuals marginalized by existing societal institutions. Their daily interactions, such as eating together, caring for each other, and surviving the social problems they face, are a strategy in redefining the family as a flexible social space, built on a foundation of care that is not necessarily based on biological or legal ties. The alternative family portrayed in the film reflects both the vulnerability and resilience of groups marginalized by poverty, neglect, and social change, while simultaneously challenging the conventional family in Japanese society. Accordingly, the narrative of the alternative family in the film *Manbiki no Kazoku* can be understood as a form of negotiation with increasingly complex social conditions. It indicates that this alternative family model is deeply intertwined with broader social issues in Japan, including aging society, poverty, and domestic violence against children by their biological parents.

From the film *Manbiki no kazoku*, it becomes clear that Hirokazu Koreeda believes that family is defined not only by blood ties or legal marriage but rather by relationships such as affection, solidarity, and shared experience. By presenting an alternative family, the film critiques the traditional Japanese family system and offers a new perspective: family can be chosen and maintained without being bound by blood ties or legal frameworks. However, the scene at the end of the film form is fragile and not yet fully accepted in Japanese society. In this way, Hirokazu Koreeda portrays a family that values flexibility and human connection while also showing how it struggles under the pressure of traditional family norms.

References

- Anggraini, V. Y. & Suryawati, C. T. (2022).
Social problems in *Manbiki kazoku's*

- movie by Hirokazu Koreeda. *Proceeding of the International Seminar ECKLL*, 10(1), 78-84.
- Anya. (2021, April 16). Angka kasus kekerasan pada anak di bawah umur Jepang meningkat pada tahun 2020. *Japanese Station*.
<https://japanesestation.com/news/crime/angka-kasus-kekerasan-pada-anak-di-bawah-umur-jepang-meningkat-pada-2020>
- Bradshaw, P. (2018, November 21) "Shoplifters review – Koreeda's audacious latest steals the heart" *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/nov/21/shoplifters-review-hirokazu-kore-eda>
- Darmadji, B. N. I. (2022). Menegosiasikan kekerabatan dengan rasa peduli: Analisis Wacana Kerabat dalam film *Shoplifters*. *Humanika*. 29(2).
<https://ejournal.undip.ac.id/index.php/humanika/article/viewFile/48316/22805>
- Devi, R. (2012). Keluarga alternatif dalam masyarakat Jepang abad milenium pada novel *Hakase No Aishita Suushiki* Karya Ogawa Yoko. *Indonesian Journal of Japanese Studies*. 1(1).
- Devi, R. (2023). *Ie* system in modern Japanese society. *Andalas International Journal of Socio-Humanities*, 5(1), 40-52.
<https://doi.org/10.25077/aijosh.v5i1.50>
- Frater, P. (2018, May 19). "Why 'Shoplifters' director Hirokazu Koreeda is Cannes favorite Japanese auteur" *Variety*.
<https://variety.com/2018/film/asia/hirokaz-kore-eda-cannes-favorite-japanese-1202816938/>.
- Furstenberg, F. F. (2019). Family change in global perspective: How and why system change. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 45, 1-20.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12361>
- Gigazine. (2018, Mei 12). "Rentaru kazoku sabisu wo gaikokujin ga taikan shita kansou to wa?". *Gigazine*.
<https://gigazine.net/news/20180512-japans-rest-a-family-industry/>
- Kato, A. (2013). *The Japanese family system: Change, continuity, and regionality over the twentieth century*. Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research.
- Levitas, R. (2005). *The inclusive society? Social exclusion and new labour*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marsh, J. (2018, July 3). *Shoplifters film review: Masterful family portrait that won Cannes Palme D'Or sheds light on Tokyo's underclass*. *South China Morning Post*.
<https://www.scmp.com/culture/film-tv/article/2153611/shoplifters-film-review-masterful-family-portrait-won-cannes-palme>
- McCartney, M. (2026, January 10). Japan's 'rental family' boom explained. *Newsweek*.
<https://www.newsweek.com/japans-rental-family-boom-explained-11295637>
- Mokharisma, N. L., Nurita, W., Aritonang, B. D. (2022). Konflik sosial dalam film *Manbiki Kazoku*: Kajian sosiologi sastra. *Janaru Saja*. 11(1), 1-8.
<https://doi.org/10.34010/js.v11i1.5290>
- Mohamed, S. S. H., Nirmala, M., & Elango, S. (2024). An analysis of the contemporary use of film as a medium for investigating social issues. *La Ogi English Language Journal*. 10(2).
<https://doi.org/10.55678/loj.v10i2.1584>
- Nakane, C. (1970). *Japanese society*. University of California Press.
- Ochiai, E. (1997). *The Japanese family system in transition: A sociological analysis of family change in postwar Japan*. LTCB International Library Foundation.
- Panchal, A. & Dubey, N. (2025). A study on nuclear family as a social problem in current scenario. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. 30(3). 74-80.
<https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.30-Issue3/Ser-4/G3003047480.pdf>
- Paxton, S. (2019). Stealing and healing in downtown Tokyo: A review of *Manbiki Kazoku (Shoplifters)*. *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*.
<https://japanesestudies.org.uk/ejcs/vol19/iss2/paxton.html>
- Pribesh, S. L., Carson, J. S., Dufur, M. J., Yue, Y., & Morgan, K. (2020). Family structure stability and transitions, parental

- involvement, and educational outcomes. *Social Science*, 9(12), 229. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9120229>
- Rahmah, Y. (2017). Konsep *ie* dalam organisasi sosial masyarakat Jepang. *Kiryoku*. 1(3), 39-47. <https://ejournal.undip.ac.id/index.php/kiryoku/article/view/16764>
- Ronald, R., Druta, O., & Godzik, M. (2018). Japan's urban singles: Negotiating alternative to family households and standard housing pathway. *Urban Geography*, 39(7), 1018-1040. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2018.1433924>
- Sharman, S., & Arkansas, J. (2020). *Moving picture: An introduction to cinema*. University of Arkansas.
- Tombu, J. (2024). Filmmaking as a medium of public communication in addressing social problems. *American Journal of Communication*, 6(4), 1-16.
- Váňa, J. (2020). Theorizing the social through literary fiction: For a new sociology of literature. *Cultural Sociology*, 14(2), 180-200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975520922469>
- Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (2016). *Teori kesusastraan* (M. Budianta, Trans). PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Whill. (2021, Maret 9). Problem and solution for elderly people living alone: How to live a life that is satisfying for both parents and children. *Whill*. https://whill.inc/jp/column/29_elderly_living_alone
- Zhang, Z. (2024). Strategies for partitioning narrative. *Sage Open*, 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241268809>