

Reversing Through the Living Hell – Exploring the Value System of Human Spirituality and Rationality in the Demon Slayer Anime Series

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Abstract

During the severe period of the Covid-19 pandemic, as if a living hell had descended upon us, the Demon Slayer anime and film series broke numerous records in 2020 and became known as a source of solace during the pandemic. Through narrative analysis, this study applies concepts of values, dignity and humanism to explore the core power of the opposition against the Ghost King in the anime series and finds that the protagonists' perseverance of human nature is the key to win. Values uphold the narrative logic of the inherent goodness of being human amidst chaotic times and hardships in the context of Demon Slayer series. This article explores the concepts of life and death, human values, narratives of historical heritage and humanistic equality to explain the practice of the ultimate truth through memory, history, and the realization of a shared sense of goodness in public life to achieve the integration of altruism and self-discovery. The powerful value shift of Demon Slayer Squad turns towards humanism, altruism, human dignity, and innovation and that enables protagonists' realization of the inherent beauty of being human which lead to the success of final battle of Infinity Castle.

Keywords: Value System, Humanism, Living Hell, Dignity, Demon Slayer

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Introduction

The Demon Slayer anime and film series broke numerous records in 2020 and became known as a source of solace during the pandemic. During the severe period of the Covid-19 pandemic, as if a living hell had descended upon us, Demon Slayer the Movie: Mugen Train, a Japanese anime film based on manga series broke box office records. It not only became the highest-grossing film in 2020 worldwide but also set the all-time box office records for the highest-grossing Japanese film. The plot is related to how humans fight for survival and maintain human values and dignity with almost unconquerable Ghost King. The themes of the Demon Slayer anime and film series is about how victims of killings could possibly regain their happiness and wellbeing through unifications under human heritage and courage. For people living in an almost unchangeable quagmire as a living hell, how value system of human spirituality and rationality help fight the war with the evil for their perseverance of “being humans” is narrated, especially at the crucial moment for huge human loss. The plots of the series are listed as follows. After the family of the protagonist, Kamado Tanjiro, is slain by the demon king, Kibutsuji Muzan, he joins the Demon Slayer Squad with the hope of restoring his sister, who has turned into a demon, back to humanity and seeking revenge for their family. Together with their comrades, they confront the organization "Twelve Kizuki," lead by the demon lord which not only eats humans but also turns humans into powerful demons. The fights of contrasting forces of the good and the evil are not only about individual fighter's force but also about symbols of human altruistic values against evils' lies and distorted persuasion. As members of the Demon Slayer Squad, the protagonist and their leader through unwavering commitment to humanity and life-and-death confrontations finally won the almost impossible task.

Sorokin (1951) had been famous for his studies of values in human society and practice of altruism. Mangone and Dolgov (2020) state that Sorokin had an intuition that synthesizable the idea that the future of humanity and its development lies in the hands of humanity itself. Engaging in historical research on sociological theories with a focus on values, Sorokin points out that, under normal circumstances, moral sentiments are generally consistent. However, during chaotic periods, selfishness and altruism tend to become extreme (Tang, 1995). Demon Slayer Squad's completion of its goal actually arises from protagonists' perseverance to uphold the narrative logic of the inherent goodness of being human even amidst chaotic times and hardships. This connects the idea of practicing truth is about the pursuit of happiness for human values as belief and action. This study argues that plot should be explored by the value systems to empower human to fight evils in our society by exploring the imagination of spiritual liberation and the pursuit of freedom within a fantastical spiritual and reasoning system in the background of modernization of Japan.

Pursuit of Happiness in a Society Are Involved Not Only With Materials and Power but Lies in the Moral Values of Altruism and Self-Discovery

The words “love” or “altruism” by referring to all actions that “produce and maintain the psychological and/or physical well-being of oneself and others through altruism,” Mangone (2020, p.165.) He explained Sorokin's concept of altruistic creative love and argued that Sorokin's idea that “love is the energy (force) through which altruism manifests itself.” Mangone (2020) cited Sorokin's concept of altruistic creative love to diagnose a crisis of his time by identifying steps through which to produce and improve the love energy such as the increase of creative heroes of love as the great creators and thinkers and the heroes or apostles of love; the increase of creative heroes of truth and beauty, thinkers and creators in

different fields of science and the arts of the highest value; the increase of love by the rank and file; an increase in the production of love by groups and institutions; and the increase of love-production by culture and the total culture (p.162). Aristotle discussed that happiness is the end of human endeavor, moral virtue is formed through action and habituation, humans need to practice good action and to discover the human good we must identify the function of a human being and he argues that the human function is rational activity (2009). In short, the happiness he speaks of is an abiding sense of well-being coming from living a virtuous and purposeful life. Values are defined as an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. Rokeach (1973) identified and defined two sets of values: terminal values and instrumental values. The former refer to desirable and end-state existence and the goals a person would like to achieve during their lifetime and may vary among different groups of people in different cultures. The latter, instrumental values refer to preferable modes of personal behavior and refer to as means of achieving the terminal values. Four categories (Table 1) are divided for further explanation: Terminal values as an end-state dimension of social (focus on others) or personal (self-focused) categories. Instrumental values as a behavioral aspect of moral (focus on morality and relations) or competence (focus on competence).

Demon Slayer Corps have stronger terminal values for social purposes such as a world at peace, a world of beauty, equality, family security, freedom, mature love, national security, social recognition, and true friendship. In addition, Demon Slayer Corps have stronger terminal values for moral purposes such as broadminded, forgiving, helpful, honest, loving, cheerful, obedient, polite, responsible. For example, plots of cooperation with ghosts such as Tamayo, Yushirou, and Nezuko. All of them helped the Corps to defeat the Ghost King. For example, Tomayo, as a doctor, tried to prevent humans to turn into ghosts and successfully reverted Nezuko into human and finally sacrifice herself to inject several doses to kill Muzan. The leader of Demon Slayer Corps, Ubuyashiki Kagaya, organized a strongest team ever by his charisma as empathetic, resolute and strong. In addition, he is willing to take chances to trust and accept the three ghosts to fight together against the Ghost King. Demon Slayer Corps build trust and collaboration with Tamayo, Nezuko, and Yushiro when the three with the intention to turn back to humans or support humanity. In addition, even after engaging in life-and-death battles with these demons, Tanjiro still felt the sadness and remorse of the departed demons. This ability of Tanjiro to bestow respect upon the deceased ghosts reflects his warmth and compassion which draw demons back towards humanity. In the Spider Mountain storyline, there is a poignant moment where the weary ghost, seeking to recover memories but is burdened with sadness, Tanjiro stretches his comforting hand to the shoulders of Rui. This gesture emphasizes the importance of respecting the departed demons with regrets, as ghosts were once human too. Tanjiro said to Tomioka Giyuu demonstrates that his belief in humanism:

Those who felt pain and regretted their own actions, I won't tread on them. Because demons were once humans. Just like me, they were humans too. Please remove your feet. He wasn't an ugly monster. They are hollow creatures. They are sad creatures. (Tanjiro's quotes from Demon Slayer Season 1, Episode 21)

Table 1
List of Terminal and Instrumental Values (Rokeach, 1973)

Terminal Values (End-States)	
<i>Social (Focus on Others)</i>	<i>Personal (Self-Focused)</i>
A World at Peace	A Comfortable Life
A World of Beauty	An Exciting Life
Equality	A Sense of Accomplishment
Family Security	Happiness
Freedom	Inner Harmony
Mature Love	Pleasure
National Security	Salvation
Social Recognition	Self-respect
True Friendship	Wisdom
Instrumental Values (Behavioural)	
<i>Moral (Focus on Morality and Relations)</i>	<i>Competence (focus on competence)</i>
Broadminded	Ambitious
Forgiving	Capable
Helpful	Clean
Honest	Courageous
Loving	Imaginative
Cheerful	Independent
Obedient	Intellectual
Polite	Logical
Responsible	Self-Controlled

From Rokeach's Instrumental and Terminal Values as Descriptors of Modern Organization Values, *International Journal of Organizational Leadership* 5(2016) 151–161, P. 154. by Krista Tuulik, et al.

Humans' Free Will and Dignity Versus Ghost King's Dictatorship and Ghosts' Loss of Humans' Memories

Edlund (2013) explains creation, responsibility, freedom, duty, and obligation are related to assumptions about human dignity rooted in European humanistic traditions. He describes that “creation gave human beings a freedom and a responsibility that involves an indestructible holiness and human value” and “Responsibility, a dimension of dignity... is mutual but also asymmetrical and cannot be claimed by the other;” in addition, humans cannot escape their freedom...the inner freedom means that humans always have a choice regarding how they relate to a situation and “The internal duty is something that is a responsibility of the human being, while the outer duty is understood as an obligation” (p. 855).

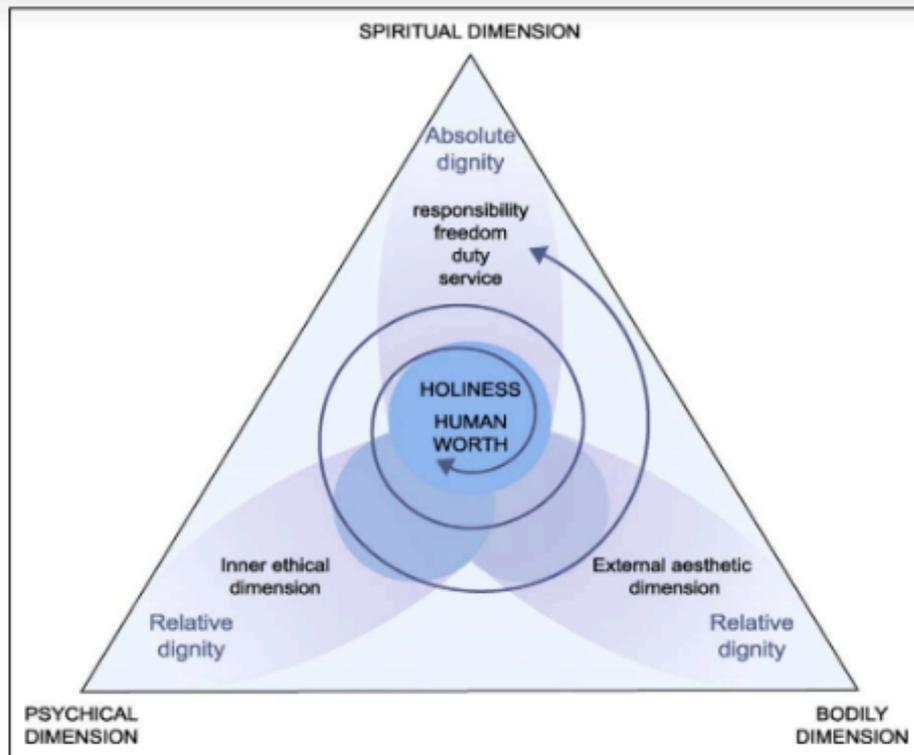


Figure 1. The concept model of dignity.

Concept determination of human dignity. P.857. Edlund, M., Lindwall, L., Post, I. V., & Lindström, U. Å. (2013). *Nursing Ethics*, 20(8), 851-860.

Edlund (2013) explains absolute dignity through which human beings have been given the obligation of serving their fellow-men and a unique position among created beings and its conspicuous categories are obligation, calling, position, and value with their sub-ordinate qualities; An inner ethical stance confers awareness of one's own and others' dignity: pride, nobility, dignity, position, rank, and status related to this category influenced by the culture and the tradition in which the individual human being exists; as to external dignity and aesthetic conducts related to respect, grandiosity, authority, and composure (p.853).

The Value System of Human Spirituality and Rationality for the Good Makes Human Beings Superior Than Might Ghost King in the Demon Slayer Anime Series

Teng explains that values can be compared, measured, and combined into a system with distinctive characteristics and this system encompasses the impact on institutions and structures, interpersonal relationships, diverse situations, and the complexity of personality (1995). It influences observations of culture; progress, freedom, relativity, and respect for objectivity and rationality are prominent in Western value systems (Teng, 1995).

In Demon Slayer series, values are emphasized very Chrystal clear. "What is the value of a life to you?" when the most talented slayer Yoriichi first met and asked Ghost King, Muzan. The context of plots explores the concepts of life and death, human values, narratives of historical heritage and humanistic equality to explain the practice of the ultimate truth through memory, history, and the realization of a shared sense of goodness in public life to achieve the integration of altruism and self-discovery. This culmination, through the sources of human dignity, confidence, and innovation, enables the realization of the inherent beauty of being human.

As the leader, Kagaya Ubuyashiki, of Demon Slayer Corps said that the immortality of humanity relies on “the transmission of will” which reflects the concept of life and death. After the death of members of Demon Slayer squad, they met with their family members and in Tanjiro’s case, his family members and ancestors help him to win the war. In contrast with demons and the Ghost King in this series works, humans with an aging issue and fleshy bodies seems weak. However, when humans with emphasis on humanism and dignity to pursue a shared sense of goodness in public life to achieve the integration of altruism by self-discovery to achieve these goals, chances of reversing living hell happen. Through memory and history as truth seeking, narratives of love, historical heritage and humanistic equality, all of these help the weak create opportunities for new blood of genius and the turning point of possibility. The squad members are willing to sacrifice themselves to practice the truth as the pursuit of happiness for their love to their leader and comrades. Value systems empower human to fight evils in a society with the imagination of spiritual support and the pursuit of freedom in the background of modernization of Japan.

The narratives of conditions of life and death and historical heritage such as Tanjiro presented as the context for the pursuit of human values, and humanistic equality. As the temper of Muichiro Tokito changed after Tanjiro talked to him how we might save the weak may finally help ourselves later. “Helping Other people also ends up being beneficial for you at the end of the day.’ Life of Muichiro was changed and saved after these words of Tanjiro help him retain his memory of truth.

When Muichiro died and met his beloved family souls in different dimension space, he said as follows:

“As for the reason I was born, I know that full well. I was born to be happy...When I was alone, there were many hard and painful things, but then... I made friends, and there were good times, so I was able to smile again. There were countless moments when I thought I was happy. Was that not enough? I don’t regret risking my life for my comrades.”

Demon Slayer Corps are not fascinated with being the strongest. As Rengoku Kyoujurou fought with Akaza, “*Whether through aging or death, both are the beauty of the fleeting nature of humanity.*”

Rengoku’s mom talks to him as follows:

“Do you know why you were born stronger than the average person?”

“Because you are meant to protect the weak.”

“People born with greater abilities must use their strength in this world, for the benefit of others.”

Kokushibou asked his brother Tsugikuni Yoriichi about how possibly there will be no talents to learn from their skills?

“My brother... we are not that great. We are merely a fragment of humankind’s long, long history. At this moment, those whose talent will surpass ours are uttering their

first cries. They may come to reach the same place. There is no need to worry. We can draw the curtain of life closed without unease at any time.”

Lies, Cruelty of Ghost King and Demons as Totalitarian Ruling by Terror in the Demon Slayer Anime Series

The value system of the tyrannical rule of the Ghost King, involves serving King as their main purpose of life, erasing their memories and history, rendering truth meaningless. From then on, only lies, continuous killing, and the fear of being killed remain. Due to cannibalism killing, elegance and refinement vanish from demons, leaving only the most basic biological needs for demons. Among the Twelve Demon Moons, the Upper Moons retain some semblance of humanity due to their obsessions, but others gradually lose their human appearance, humanity, and human values.

This totalitarian ruling system is not only the result of the Demon King's influence on demons but also stems from the inherent indifference, cruelty, and ruthlessness that demons experienced when they were humans. The psychological crisis leads to the disappearance of virtues, serving as a warning to people. It highlights how a momentary decision, whether to harm or save one, could contribute to the creation of such a different result. For example, Kanahi, one of Nine Pillars, hesitated to harm demon Zerosu, awondering if, had it not been for her sisters' saving her, she might have become Zerosu?

The eight Psychosocial stages of Erikson theory help explain possible demons' early psychosocial struggles. The failure of these struggles contributes to the development of an individual's personality and sense of self. These stages are as follows: Trust vs. Mistrust (infancy), Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (toddlerhood), Initiative vs. Guilt (preschool), Industry vs. Inferiority (school-age), Identity vs. Role Confusion (adolescence), Intimacy vs. Isolation (young adulthood), Generativity vs. Stagnation (middle adulthood), and Ego Integrity vs. Despair (late adulthood) (Main, P., 2023). Therefore, some demons suffering psychosocial crisis may lose the basic virtues such as hope, will, fidelity, love or care but instead they may suffer from mistrust, shame, guilt, inferiority, role confusion or despair (See Table 2).

Table 2. Psychosocial Crisis versus Virtue

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Basic Virtue
1.	Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope
2.	Autonomy vs. Shame	Will
3.	Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose
4.	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competency
5.	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity
6.	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love
7.	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care
8.	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom

Retrieved from Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development. McLeod, S. A. (2013). Table is adjusted by the author.

Demons as evil products who worship evil powerful ones without morals and values. Violence and terror as Demons' powerful strength is stronger than average humans but they live without memories, history, truth, love, and friendship; in fact, they turn to be the lower species because of their loss of free will and innocence. Demons in this series usually have traits of selfish, the relentless pursuit of being strongest or focusing only on their lower-level of selfish basic needs for justification of their human-killing. They are rarely shown as life with happiness or joy that should pervade in a good life but they like to show their strength to kill humans at ease to become stronger to please Ghost King. Man may turn demons because their respective inferiority complex, superiority complex (Lan, 2023) or their suffering from a living hell. When demons once were humans, their bad experience of hates shape their twisted personality and made them want to eat humans for revenge. As Aristotle explains when man reaches perfection, he is the best of animals; however, if he departs from law and justice, he becomes the most inferior animals, for unjust power is more perilous (Leung, 2017, p.65). For example, Kokushibou faced with the possibility that losing everything to his younger brother when his brother outperformed him and was once designated to inherit the family. This unhuman custom of handling male twin babies and his father's preferences on selection of heirs solely on swordsmanship above all leads to Kokushibou's distrust of society. In addition, Douma was asked by his parents to deceive followers by making him the cult leader. Years of manipulating fake sympathy toward cult believers in his childhood, he is devoid of genuine emotions and this may lead to a distorted personality which made him believe that consuming followers could liberate them. Tragic past of Akazah, Daki and Gyuutarou in their human era made them like had been living in the hell before they turned into demons. Maybe that is why Gyuutarou said he will always choose to be a ghost. To him, humans' world may be uglier than that of demons or ghosts.

The Powerful Shift of Values Turns to Humanism, Human Dignity, and Innovation

"Fate is about to take a dramatic turn! The consequences will be widespread," Ubuyashiki said." When he gets the death news of Upper Moon Six killed by the Demon Slayers, he knows that it never happened for 100 years. For him, the first time he starts to believe that he can kill Muzan in his generation. At that moment, the powerful shifts of values of Demon Slayer Corps are fast moving toward the highest hierarchical needs described by Maslow which has expanded its model to eight stages. Maslow explains eight stages as "physiological", "safety", "belonging and love", "social needs" or "esteem", "self-actualization" and "transcendence" to specify the pattern through which human needs and motivations change. From a humanistic approach, Maslow explains the stage of self-actualization is to emphasize on fulfilling human potential and self-actualization (Wills, E. & McEwen, M., 2014, p. 308). For the seventh stage of self-actualization, characteristics of a self-actualized person are listed as follows: a realistic orientation, spontaneity, acceptance of self, acceptance of others, close relationships with others, autonomous thinking, appreciation of life, reactivity to others, consideration of others, and respect for others (Wills, E. & McEwen, M., 2014, p.296). In contrast, Abraham Maslow offered his description about needs of transcendence, needs of the eighth stage (Garcia, 2010):

Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general... (1971, p. 269)

For the eighth stage as transcendence, persons are more likely to be motivated by values that transcend beyond self-actualization and represent the human desire to connect with a higher

purpose with the emphasis on altruism, spiritual connection, and helping others to achieve their potential or a deep sense of unity; in addition, it also referred to as spiritual needs and when this need are fulfilled, it may lead to integrity and take things to another level of being (Gautum, S., 2007).

Hundreds of years ago before the protagonist's (Tanjiro) time period, the most outstanding swords master, Yoriichi, appeared and initiated the use of the Sun-breathing style (Hono no kokyū), Red Swords, and the Transparent-world eyesight, all of which contribute to enhancing demon-slaying abilities. However, all the Swords masters who turned on stripes, except for Yoriichi, all passed away before the age of twenty-five. They were contemporaries of Yoriichi at that time, and the early demise of sword masters made them unable to forgive him. Even his brother, Michikatsu, who wanted to extend his life and turned into a demon. Additionally, Yoriichi spared life of Tamayo as a ghost. All of these reasons made his teammates so angry as to expel him from the Demon Slayer Corps. In short, the strongest Demon Slayer Corps happened hundred years ago, however, Demon Slayer Squad failed to kill Ghost King. In contrast, with Tanjiro's character and values described above, his Squad members not only develop transcendent values and get united more than those in the age of Yoriichi. Sparing lives of ghosts when they turn humanistic is one of the key factors for the Squad's final victory. As Nezuko's and Tamayo's blood demon art and Tamayo's killing doses help the generation of Tanjiro have a big breakthrough for the war. In addition, many members of Nine Pillars all learn the skills of Red Swords inspired by his ghost sister Nezuko and many of them have the Transparent-world eyesight learned from Tanjiro's father and many of them have stripes on their faces and bodies. This time they are ready to sacrifice with no one complaining about dying before at the age of 25.

Conclusion

This paper discovers that the core power of the opposition against the Ghost King in the anime series actually arises from protagonists' perseverance to uphold the narrative logic of the inherent goodness of being human even amidst chaotic times and hardships.

With the context of globalization, not only virus can be spread rapidly and globally. The Southeast Asian transnational human trafficking cases (also known as Southeast Asian job scam or transnational job scam) refers to the human trafficking industry chain incidents that occurred in 2021, spanning across mainland China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Myanmar, among other locations. These notorious crimes are also related to massive organ trafficking and kidnapping and murder cases. It turns into a new humanity disaster when people in some nations are worried about the failure of law and order in these areas. It is important to notice that humanity crises happened at several historical moments and mankind in different nations still faces severe sufferings as living hell.

Possibly, the World War III is looming and is warned and discussed by news media after the war between Russia and Ukraine and the war between Israel and Hamas. The living hell describes the existence of human disasters, tortures, pains, sadness, and huge human loss. We can save one soul and increase the spirits of humanism to stop the living hell. It is human value system that may change human beings into demons or save more souls to reverse the living hell as what this study describes "shift of value system."

As Muzan Kibutsuji said, I haven't got any punishments. I have been forgiven for killing hundreds of thousands of humans. I haven't seen God or Buddha for thousand years (Demon

Slayer vol.16). The Demon Slayer Corps have proved Muzan is wrong as Sorokin identified to produce and improve the love energy by increasing creative heroes of love as the increase of creative heroes of truth and beauty, thinkers and creators in different fields of science and the arts of the highest value, an increase in the production of love by groups and institutions. It is possible that a shift of value system is the answer for how to reverse the living hell or to avoid living hell in the future.

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