

# The Absence of Matsuko's Self-Identity in the Life of the Disgusted Matsuko from the Perspective of Lacan's Mirror Stage Theory

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## Abstract

The Life of The Disgusted Matsuko is a work that shows true humanity and explores the pursuit of human self-identity. Although self-identity research has made great progress in recent decades, the validation of the construct validity of self-identity, its influencing factors, and developmental mechanism and process are still areas for future research. Jacques Lacan's mirror image theory is an important theory in the study of self-identity. Based on Jacques Lacan's mirror-image theory, we explore Matsuko's pursuit of self-identity, find her absence of self-identity, and then we analyze the reasons for the protagonist's loss of self-awareness. One reason is the father's neglect and mother's absence. Another reason is the negative effect from the essential others, bad intimate relationships and rarely having friend relationship. Even though her brave pursuit that made her life not only absurd and unsuccessful, she lived a life seriously without giving up hope.

**Keywords:** Self-Identity, Lacan's Mirror Image Theory, Matsuko

## Introduction

The Life of The Disgusted Matsuko, the representative of Soki Yamada, was published in 2013 and has gained high popularity both in Japan and internationally. It is a work that shows true humanity and explores the pursuit of human self-identity. The protagonist, Matsuko, goes from a middle school teacher to becoming a seductive girl, she is driven away by her family, abandoned and betrayed by her lover, and seems to be tapped in a tragic circle of fate. At the end of her life, she wrote the most well-known sentence "I am sorry to be born as a human being". At present, in terms of psychology, the most prevalent themes mentioned in this novel are intimacy and self-esteem (Hou Xiaofang, 2012; Xiao Sa & Huang Man, 2017). In fact, it also depicts Matsuko's relentless pursuit of self-identity. Jacques Lacan's mirror image theory is an important theory in the study of self-identity. It points out that the self always exists in connection with others (Sheng Chunyan, 2017). Based on Jacques Lacan's mirror-

image theory, we explore Matsuko's pursuit of self-identity and analyze the reasons for the protagonist's loss of self-awareness.

### **Lacan's Mirror -Image Theory and the concept of "others"**

Based on Freud's theory, Jacques Lacan put forward the mirror-image theory and re-explained the concept of self and other. He divides the subjective psychology into three stages: the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. The imaginary stage lasts from around 6 to 18 months when the baby begins to distinguish between their own body and the outside world, it is during this stage that the baby realizes that he and the mother are no longer one, the concept of self and other begins to form; Then it enters into the "symbolic" order, full of various laws and structures, constantly building the concept of self through the projection of others, and finally completes the self-construction in the "real" stage through the completion of others. In fact, the "self" at this moment "has been deconstructed and exists entirely dependent on the concept of the Other. Others can be understood not only as a macroscopic and abstract concept, such as a social system or social values (Li Feng,2009), but also as various more concrete images, such as specific characters and scenery (Du Huaqin,2010). In short, self-construction is a process of internalizing others, That is, self-identification always relies on others, and self is constructed in the relationship with others (Feng Mei, 2013).

### **The absence of Matsuko's self-identity**

According to Lacan's Mirror-image theory, an important way of personal identification is the imaginary recognition of others' mirror in the mirror stage, which is the alienated reflection of the facial image. After comparing the secular images in other's mirror with oneself, self-alienation may occur and results in the imbalance of self-identity (Zhu xuhan,2019). As for Matsuko, she has lost his self-value for a long time and experienced the imbalance of self-identity for several times. In childhood, there are neglect from father and absence from mother; in adulthood, all her lovers like writers who committed suicide, married men with low self-esteem, widowed men who are ruthless and widowed, cowardly street gangsters, they are violent and sadistic without exception. Similarly, Lacan further points out that the "mirror" is not limited to the real mirror, but also contains the self-reflection of the subject in the eyes of others round. And under the drive of convergent identity model, the subject will try to satisfy certain mistaken identity image (Sheng chunyan,2017). Matsuko said that she would follow her cohabiting boyfriend Yamegawa to hell or anywhere. then when this boyfriend suicided, she soon looks forward to the next boyfriend, falling into a circle of the constraints of boyfriends. To Long Yangyi, her another cohabiting boyfriend, she said, "It doesn't matter if you beat me or kill me, it's better than being lonely." This kind of spiritual emptiness made Matsuko suffer a lot, even throughout her whole life.

In Lacan's opinion, the issue of how to deal with the relationship between self and others has profound and far-reaching effect on the pursuit of self-consciousness. Once there is contradiction between self and others, self-identify will be greatly influenced and develop towards unpleasant direction (Ye haosheng,2002). For Matsuko, she has been accompanied by the conflicts between self and others all the time, which led to herself dislocation. Throughout Matsuko's childhood, she has never received any positive evaluation. After being an adult, she received little positive judgment from the people around her all her life. they just arrived at conclusions easily that she was a shame. In the end, contradiction between self and others made Matsuko absence of self-awareness.

### **The Reasons For The Absence Of Matsuko's Self-Identity**

In Lacan's opinion, the family of origin in which an individual is born and raised will have a decisive impact on the shaping of character and the development of life. Matsuko was born into a family with a 'seemingly' sound structure on the surface, but actually dysfunctional. And his original family has a strong but negative effect on the initial formation of his self-consciousness. The lack of paternal love in childhood makes Matsuko unable to complete the process of identity construction that needs to be done in cooperation with parents during the initial stage of life, this leads to a constant sense of helplessness and anxiety in the pursuit of "love" throughout in later life.

### **The Growth Circumstances in family**

#### ***Lack of Mother's Image***

Mother, as the most important "other" surrounding baby, is absent from the family, and the interaction between Matsuko and her mother is rarely seen in the book. In Matsuko's inner fantasy, there are a father, a sister, and boyfriends, but the face of mother has never appeared. Perhaps "mother" never existed in Matsuko's heart as a nurturing figure, and a secure attachment relationship was not established during the early mother-infant relationship. The early mother-child relationship partly explains Matsuko's great fear of separation and abandonment in her adult intimate relationships. In the face of her boyfriend's violence, she said, 'it's okay if you hit me'; in the face of her boyfriend's depravity, she said, 'I will follow him no matter if he goes to hell or anywhere'; When having sex with her boyfriend, she asked him to say "we will always be together" to her over and over again. So as the most important companion of the child in the mirror stage, mother's image was absent for Matsuko. It was difficult for Matsuko to grow into a woman without complete self-awareness because nobody could make up for the absence of a mother's status for a child.

#### ***Father's Image missing***

In childhood, Matsuko lived in the shadow of his sickly sister. His father's indifference, neglect, eccentricity, and even spiritual abuse deeply affected Matsuko, causing her to experience the feeling of "I am not good, I am not loved", Everything was required to be considered from the perspective of the younger sister. To win his father's favor, praise, and approval, and to become the ideal daughter in his father's eyes is Matsuko's biggest motivation. Her father only took her to the amusement park once, and the beautiful and warm memory of this one time haunted her in her dreams. In order to experience this feeling again, she could only instinctively please her father, and developed the habit of making funny faces to make him happy. Therefore, she used this expression every time to seek her father's affirmation, and this expression has been with Matsuko throughout her life. That is, whenever Matsuko encounters doubts and incomprehension from others, she will always make this expression to gain affirmation and recognition. She ran away from home after being expelled from school for covering up student theft because she believed that her 15 years of efforts to meet her father's expectations had failed. Then all the love partners are violent and sadistic. These men, like her father, could not give her true love and emotion. They abused, betrayed, abandoned her, let her down and disappointed her, repeatedly confirming the denial and distance from her father that was deeply ingrained in her heart. She gave and delivered love recklessly, just like she tried her best to make Dad smile when she was a child.

In short, Lacan's mirror stage theory holds that subject and self exist in the relationship with others, and broken subject and lost self occur in the communication with others; void of

the subject makes self more susceptible to the influence of the others (Fuyun taiping,2002). As a subject, Matsuko's mother absence causes the primordial lack of mother's image. And her father's image was missing in a certain sense. Since her parents' images were unattainable during the stage of her self-cultivation, she had to turn to others for recognition.

### **Influences Of Essential Others**

As mentioned before, because of Lack of Mother's Image and Father's Image missing, the influences of essential others affected her deeply. While others played an important role in the shaping of her self-identity, it could also be a destructive force for her.

### ***Intimate relationship***

As mentioned above, Matsuko's parents generated a profound and negative impact on his self-awareness, so she had to turn to others to gain recognition in order to build up her self-identity. Being abandoned and betrayal in every intimate relationship deepens Matsuko's personal consciousness of "I'm sorry as a human being" repeatedly, resulting in loss of her self-identity.

After running away from home, Matsuko soon lived with Yamegawa, a young writer who was addicted to writing. Due to poverty and a lack of inspiration, the writer often mistreated Matsuko and even asks her to be a bathroom girl. But Matsuko has always been submissive, and will never leave. She even went to borrow money from her younger brother with eyes swollen by her lover, and didn't care about being cut off from her family. Then, the lover chose to die alone, and she was deceived into a third party of Yamegawa's good friend Takeo Okano, but after Okano's wife knew about it, Takeo Okano ruthlessly left Matsuko. she experienced the betrayal and deceit of her lover during these times.

After the bathroom closed down, Matsuko, who was a bath girl, lived with Onodera Yasushi and started a business partnership at the same time. But she still encountered betrayal. Onodera not only had affairs with other women, but also wanted to keep the money she earned. In the final entanglement and fight, Matsuko chose to kill. During the 8 years in prison, she kept asking "why am I alive", and she thought it was because of love. And it also foreshadowed her still tragic intimacy in the following.

After being released from prison, Matsuko, who had become a hairdresser, ran into Long Yangyi, the student who framed her back then. Matsuko once again did not hesitate for love: first they committed suicide by taking sleeping pills together, and then she waited willingly for Long Yangyi to be released from prison. But when Long Yang was released from prison, he saw Matsuko with a clean smile, but he was as frightened as if he had seen a ghost. He punched Matsuko to the ground and ran away screaming. After that, Matsuko's life entered a state of complete self-abandonment, and she completely lost herself.

### ***Friend relationship***

And according to Lacan, others around the subject will easily influence one' cultivation of self-consciousness. Apart from family, friend plays a significant role in the forming and shaping of one' self-identity(Xiong jian,2013),because lack of parents' love and indifference of lovers, Matsuko obtained incomplete image before the mirror and experienced self-identity crisis. As a result, she had to turn to connecting others--her friend, to gain recognition to make up for her self-awareness. But in fact, her disconnection from her only one friend deepens her lack of personal identity.

After being released from prison, Matsuko began working at a beauty salon, where she met Ahui, a friend who had also been in prison. Ahui and her husband ran a modeling agency. Ahui regarded Matsuko as a good friend and often chatted with Matsuko. But Ahui's success hurt Matsuko's feelings. Ahui once gave her a business card that said "Megumi Sawamura, Chairman of Sawamura Planning Company". But Matsuko threw it away. At the end of her life, Matsuko sighed, "Ahui, why did you give up on me?" In fact, she had given up on herself.

## Conclusion

Although self-identity research has made great progress in recent decades, the validation of the construct validity of self-identity, its influencing factors, and developmental mechanism and process are still areas for future research (Dong Yanpeng, 2022). Lacan's mirror-image theory states that the subject of each person who enters the socialization process is "in a state of absence and vacancy"(Zhang yilei & Sun zhihai,2014). One's self-identity is not gained naturally and congenitally, but based on the relationships with others: mother, father and those who form the whole social environment. with the help of Lacan's mirror theory of the self and other, starting from the literary novel "The Life of The Disgusted Matsuko ", we focus on analyzing the influence of others on Matsuko's self-identity absence, from The growth circumstances in family (Lack of Mother's Image, Father's Image Missing) to the influences of essential others in her life (intimate relationships, friend relationships), elaborating on the interaction between the concept of "others" and self-seeking the development of self-identity. It vividly demonstrates the development process or mechanism of self-identity from one aspect and finds that others have a very significantly important impact on self-identity. This enriches the research on self-identity and predicts the relationship between others and self-identity to a certain extent. The pain of the protagonist Matsuko in "The Life of the Disgust Matsuko" fundamentally comes from the loss and disintegration of her self-identity as a subject, which is unavoidable. However, it is this lack of self-identity that has led her to love and seek the concept of identity throughout in her life. It is her perseverance in brave pursuit that made her life not only absurd and unsuccessful, but also a serious life without giving up hope.

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