

Dreams
A Weekly Film Report

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This Kurosawa film was riddled with many clear and distinct references to Japanese culture. Perhaps the segmented nature of the film made it easier to identify the unique aspects of Japanese culture because of the smaller chunks of concepts to process. For example, the first dream was clearly similar to a children's fable, with the child as the main character and the dire consequence for indulging in curiosity over a mother's warning. While I am sure there are many similar stories all over the world with a similar theme, the essence of Japanese culture in this dream was in the clothing; even in the foxes' wedding procession, the clothes they wore were distinctly Japanese. In the following dream, in addition to the obvious reference toward the Japanese Doll Festival, there was also the underlying essence of Shintoism in this dream. From my understanding of Shintoism, there is a basic belief that everything, both animate and inanimate, has a spirit or soul. The trees in the orchard of this dream all had a soul, which was represented by the dolls, and the young girl that the boy was chasing had the same bell sound as the small tree at the end, which I believe is supposed to link the idea of a soul with the tree; which altogether creates the distinct essence of Shinto in Japanese culture. The following dream of the mountain men in the snow also featured a clear Japanese cultural element: the legend of the Yukionna. While I don't know all the facts about this legend, I think that the Yukionna represents the essence of nature—that it can be both gentle and harsh—which is a defining characteristic of Japanese culture. Another essence of Japanese culture is the ingrained idea of natural disaster and the dire consequences, which are represented in the dream of an exploding Mt. Fuji and nuclear power plants. I think this is a part of the Japanese subconscious—due to a history with natural disasters and nuclear technology—that may not be as prevalent in other cultures. The dream of the post-apocalyptic world with giant dandelions features another

element of Japanese mythology in the people who resemble Oni. From what I know of Oni, they are supposed to be strong beings, but in a world after humans have destroyed nature and the human race, even the Oni are suffering, which I think is a unique way to describe the misery of a destroyed planet using Japanese culture. In the final dream, the town that lives in harmony with nature with a long lifespan of its inhabitants is an essence of Japanese culture because it is a practice that is very unique to Japan, which I believe is a reason Kurosawa ended the film with this sequence because it represents an idealistic life. In addition, this dream also featured a lively festival in which people of all ages participate in, which is another reoccurring aspect of Japanese culture.

The camerawork in this film was similar to other Kurosawa works in that there was a lot of creativity as well as long flowing shots of the camera. Camera shots such as the one following the young man running down the mountain away from the Oni were long and unpausing, which not only must have been difficult to shoot, but increased the feeling of the viewer toward the rush of the moment. Another interesting aspect of this movie was the vibrancy of color; locations with such a variety of flowers and color must have been hard to find or create. Lastly, the lighting was also very interesting in this film because it helped define some of the scenes, for example, in the beginning (when the boy was journeying to the land of the foxes) the field of flowers was in full light, while beyond the rainbow where he was headed was misty and shadowed, which shows the distinction between the areas of his adventure. Overall, this movie was very visual rather than audio or dialogue based, which made the visual effects much more important to the viewer.

While watching this film, I was relating what I was seeing with other Japanese media in which I had seen something similar before. For example, in the dream about the Doll Festival, I

was thinking about where I first heard of it (an anime) and more recently when I was learning about the Heian period in *Samurai Spirit*. Because of this relation, I was really paying attention to the clothing and trying to connect what I knew with what I was seeing in the film. This made me appreciate this scene even more, because I had somewhat of a background idea. Similarly, in prior experiences with the Yukionna legend, I learned that there are many forms the story can take depending on who has told the story, so I was waiting to see what direction this story would lead to. In the scene with Van Gogh, I really appreciated the way that Kurosawa made the art look like it was three dimensional and how he kept an attention to the detail in Van Gogh's style of art with the large globs of paint. I was relating this to previous experiences with the work of Van Gogh, and because I knew of his paint style, I think I appreciated Kurosawa's work even more.

I would give this film a three out of five because despite the beauty of it, I really enjoy a movie with more of a continuous storyline. If all of the dreams somehow came together in the end, I would have given this film a four, but I would have never been able to give this film a five because in the end, I don't want to watch it over again. The slow periods were a little difficult to sit through, despite the beauty of the imagery, and the sometimes hard to decipher meaning in the dreams detracted me from the film. I am glad to have the experience of viewing this film and while I wouldn't want to see it again, I would still recommend it to someone who has the time to see it, which is why I overall give this film a three out of five.