

Kamikaze Girls
A Weekly Film Report

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It was a very jarring difference between identifying elements of traditional culture, as we have been, and suddenly looking at Japanese culture in the modern world. In a way it is almost easier, because we are more familiar with the world as it is and can compare to the Japanese culture easier, but at the same time there are many elements that are shared between the two cultures in the modern world. One large element of this film that I felt was a very unique aspect of Japanese sub-culture would be the Lolita style. While it is obviously inspired by a period in Western history, the adoption and dedication toward a single style of fancy dress, with an entire store and staff dedicated to the Lolita style, is something that does not exist to the same degree elsewhere in the world as far as I know. While Momoko may not represent the majority of Japan, the Lolita style is still something very unique to the Japanese fashion culture, especially in comparison to other styles such as the gangster/rough style that can be seen all over the world. Another interesting cultural diversion from other cultures is the choice of weapon in gangs. While I believe gangs in other cultures will use a gun, knife, bat, etc. I don't think that it is common to see a sword as a gang member's choice of weapon, unless it is in Japan, which is probably due to Japan's long history with swords. Similarly, elements of the motorcycle gang featured in this film are pretty unique to Japan, especially with the extreme modification of the motorcycle. Even if Ichigo's bike is an exaggeration, the fact that this exaggeration exists in fictional form is unique to Japan as well. Another interesting Japanese cultural essence in this film is the variety show. Recently I was discussing with my friends "What is a variety show?" and we could not think of any type of show we were familiar with to compare it to. While there are definitely elements of a game show and talk show in America, I cannot think of a regular and common program with the same elements as the variety shows of Japan.

The cinematography of this film was very interesting; very different from other films. The high saturation of color was the first really eye-catching element of the cinematography. Many times throughout the film I was looking at the sky because it was a very unique color that contrasted against the characters. Another interesting element of the cinematography in this film was the inclusion of various people and objects in the surrounding area to assist the storytelling. It gave the film a very comical element while moving the story along at a good pace so the audience didn't get bored; this was especially apparent during the long segment of backstory at the start of the film. Many different techniques were used at this part of the film, including the commercial-like use of the people at the lettuce stand to convey the idea that Momoko is against the cheap clothes of Jusco, the TV set in the train station to tell the story of her parents on the news, etc. The flashback not only set up the story setting, but it also set up the mood for the rest of the movie, where there was more voiceover and random people used to further the scenes. For example, the voiceover was used repeatedly all through the film to express Momoko's thoughts. Usually, this would be a little awkward, but the set up at the beginning made it seem natural and almost expected.

I really liked the comedic, playful mood that was prevalent throughout this film, but what I really connected to all throughout the movie was the feeling like it was a manga. There were many scenes where I could just imagine the exact moment in manga form. I heard somewhere that the same story was adapted as a manga, but I don't know if that was before or after this film. Either way, I definitely felt that element while I was watching the film. For example, the voiceover as insight to Momoko's thoughts—I could imagine her as one of those classic characters that always have a contrary thought written beside them. The expressions and the overall exaggeration throughout the film was reminiscent of manga as well, like the hairstyle of

“Unicorn Ryuji” and Ichigo’s expressions, especially the “che”-spit that is classic for gangster-type characters. The scene I felt was the most manga-like though was the elaborate lie Momoko strung along at the end to escape the biker girls. Every time the “don!” sounded between her outrageous statements, I could almost *see* the manga sound-effect font 「どん」 and I was actually expecting it.

I would give this movie a five out of five because I’ve already recommended it to others and I’ll definitely be seeing it again when I show them. I really like manga, so I think this is another reason that I really enjoyed the film. While the film was exaggerated and super ridiculous at times, but it wasn’t so silly that it lacked any sort of meaning, which is why I liked it. I think if it were just a tad more ridiculous, I wouldn’t have been able to like it as much.