

Tanpopo
A Weekly Film Report

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One aspect of the movie that really stood out as an example of Japanese culture was the sense of community. When all of the various characters gathered together throughout the movie to help Tanpopo improve her ramen, they all shared in her accomplishment somewhat at the end, and I don't think that is something you would find as commonly in an American movie. I'm especially thinking about the characters in this example, because many of them met through chance, and I think that is a motif in many Japanese stories. This can perhaps be somewhat connected to the idea of unity, even between strangers, in the Japanese culture as well as the idea that every moment is unique. There were other little things that stood out to me as unique aspects of Japanese culture as well. For example, using chopsticks to cook food. While I don't exactly remember which scene it was in, this reminded me of the fact that I never ever thought—even in my wildest thoughts—that you could use chopsticks while cooking; I always thought they were just for eating. It's just one of those things I never think about because my culture doesn't utilize chopsticks in that way. Something else I noticed was the lack of shoving in the scene where everyone is gathered around the ramen shop by the train station. For some reason, I think that if this were an American film, the people would have been shoving to get in line first and would be more disgruntled about their place in line rather than enjoying the moment as Tanpopo correctly recited everyone's orders. Speaking of restaurants, another unique aspect of Japanese culture is the tatami mats in the restaurants. I don't think you would find any restaurant in American culture where guests sit on the floor. Altogether, once again I find it somewhat difficult to pick apart the unique bigger-image aspects of Japanese culture, and instead focus on multiple small aspects.

I was also caught up the storyline in this movie, especially because the story changed very abruptly to multiple different scenarios and points of view. I kept waiting for all of the

different peoples to meet up sometime in the movie, but in the end their little side-stories were isolated from Tanpopo's story, which I believe was the main story of the movie. While all the side-stories were very amusing and were other elements of food culture that the main storyline was not able to cover as fluidly, it did make it difficult to connect the entire movie together. The camerawork really helped all the various scene changes run together and distinguish between one storyline and another storyline. Especially the transitions that were very obvious, like shrinking the screen into one spot before it disappears. The camerawork was also very unique in that multiple times throughout the movie the actors spoke directly into the camera, which is usually a taboo in fictional movie making. The camera also filmed directly from the actors' point-of-view as well, which was very interesting. The example I'm thinking of here is when Tanpopo is spying on the other ramen chefs and the audience gets the view from her perspective. Speaking of perspective, I also liked the camerawork in the fight between the main ramen coach and the thug underneath the bridge. I thought it was interesting that the camera caught the same fight from many different angles and it really gave perspective to the size of the fight; it really wasn't that big in the grand scheme of things. Lastly, the music and sound effects in this movie were amusing because many of them didn't entirely fit the situation or were exaggerated. For example, the excessive slurping noise or popping noise were funny sound effects. Also, the dramatic music during what is actually a not-so-dramatic moment (final ramen tasting scene) contributed to the overall comedy of the film.

While I am not a chef, I do have a deep appreciation of food, but I have never quite thought about all the different ways appreciate food and/or think about food in their daily lives. This movie was enlightening in this regard and I found it very interesting. Throughout the movie I was unintentionally forming connections between it was the movies we've already views, for

example, the scene with bicycle and jogging as a form of training despite how unrelated it seems to the goal of the movie was something that was also in *Swing Girls*. I found that amusing.

Also, the idea that “a woman” succeeding in what is generally thought of as a man’s occupation was similarly stated in *Chonmage Pudding*. Already, the experience of viewing these Japanese films is influencing how I view the new films, which is an interesting development.

I rate this movie as a four because it really did do a good job of covering many different types of food appreciation while keeping the audience entertained with the main storyline as well as the comedic elements. While I would show this movie to a friend, I don’t think I would ever watch it again for leisurely purposes as I would with some other films, which is why I didn’t decide to give it a full five. I think it deserves more than a three though because it is genuinely a good movie and was not a chore at all to watch.