

Tokyo Story
A Weekly Film Report

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JAPN 310 Japanese Cinema
March 10, 2014

This film is a real example of more modernized Japanese culture in comparison to the predominantly traditional Japanese culture of Kurosawa films. Despite a more obvious western influence, there were still many aspects of Japanese culture. Perhaps the most blatant difference when looking at a western culture in comparison to the Japanese culture when it comes to a household is the situation of seating and sleeping. In this movie, because it is based around family life, there are many scenes where everyone is seated around on the tatami talking or eating—even sleeping. In western culture that would be very strange, but in Japanese culture it is completely normal, even for elderly people who may find it difficult. Another aspect of Japanese culture in this film is the offer of a bath immediately upon entering the house when the grandparents first arrive in Tokyo, which is not something as commonly seen in western cultures as far as I know. There are many other cultural aspects evidenced throughout this film, such as the unique shoes at the onsen, the structure of the house—sliding doors, tatami floors, futon—as well as comments such as “born under an unlucky star” which is perhaps a reflection of early Japanese religions. Altogether, this film was a very realistic depiction of a Japanese family at the time of the filming.

The cinematography of this film was very interesting. What struck me the most though was how the actors would speak directly into the camera without speaking to the audience. This was unique because it was as if the actor was speaking through you to the character that was (from their position) behind the audience. Another aesthetic of this film's cinematography was the arrangement of each frame. The scene at the beginning where the mother was running between rooms in the house, the camera stayed stationary but still depicted the depth of the house by the different distances away the mother maneuvered throughout the hall into different rooms. Additionally, the balance between positive and negative space in each frame was very

artistic. There are many specific scenes where this is apparent, such as the initial scene with the train and the hillside, where the majority of the frame (the hill) is stationary with a fraction of the frame in motion (the train). While this does not represent an *equal* balance, it still feels like a balance of a sort in the *asymmetrical* composition. Another interesting cinematography technique was the scene when the grandfather was out drinking sake and the lantern occupied a majority of the screen; this asymmetrical balance between foreground and background was aesthetically pleasant. Sound effects were also used well in this film because there was a lot of attention paid to detail. The specific scene that comes to mind is at the end of the film when the family is gathered in Onomichi and the boats along the river can be heard despite the fact that they are off-screen and not pictured. Similarly, earlier in the film a character walks off-screen to make a phone-call and the sound effects over each dial of the rotary phone. This detail was a great assistance to the film in making the audience feel as if they are peering into the lives of a real family. Other cinematic details that also assisted the storyline were the parallels between the beginning and end of the film; Kyoko leaving the house in Onomichi for her daily route, train passing by, the children walking to school, and the neighbor coming over to speak with the grandparent(s). The repetition really brought the movie to a full circle which helped accent the theme of “the circle of life” or “passing generations.”

When I first learned of Ozu's film style—especially the composition—I immediately thought of the “incomplete” aspect of wabi-sabi when only a fraction of something is shown to represent a whole or the whole arrangement of Japanese artistic values, such as Zen gardens. When viewing the film, I felt that same sort of natural correctness in the asymmetric balance of Ozu's composition throughout the film. In another fashion, this really connected to me on a personal level because I recently lost a grandparent and a lot of the similar actions portrayed in

the film were actions that I saw in my family at the time. For example, hurrying to return home for the funeral, the facial expressions of trying not to show too much emotion, et cetera. Also, the reaction of the family, thinking toward what is necessary—whether they should bring mourning clothes—is a real scenario that must be faced when a loved one dies that many people don't immediately think about but are truths nonetheless. I think that Ozu and the actors did a good job of portraying the reality of the situation.

I would award this movie a four out of five because it was honestly a good film that I may even watch again in the future. It is certainly a film that I would recommend someone with interest in Japanese cinema to watch as well. The only drawback that I could think of for this film is the lack of action or discernable plot, but if this film had either of those qualities it also would not fulfil the genre or do the script justice because it purposely isn't an action film.