

Ugetsu
A Weekly Film Report

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There are many interesting elements of the Japanese culture depicted throughout this film. One example would be the examples of Japanese homes, from the potter's house with the raised floor and inlaid stove area to the noblewoman's manor with extensive tatami floors and shoji screens. Another tangible element of Japanese culture would be the pottery and kimono, which are clear signs of a Japan. The kimono are more obvious, but the Japanese culture was even further evidenced through the use of the pottery when Lady Wakasa used the bowls in a Japanese-style meal with many different plates. The multi-bowl meal is a unique essence of Japanese culture. A less tangible example of Japanese culture could be found in the religious elements seen throughout the film. This is most obviously seen when the priest approaches Genjuro to help him realize and exorcise the spirit of Lady Wakasa; the exorcism and belief of spirits is closely related to the Japanese religion of Shinto. A similar example is in the final scene of the film when Genjuro's son honors the mother's grave. Even today, it is a part of Japanese culture to honor deceased family members at an altar in the home. The scene with the young boy acting similarly at a gravesite close to the home is reminiscent of this cultural essence. Some other religious beliefs are seen in the actions of the characters as well. For example, the idea of "not pushing your luck" is similar to the cautious attitude prevalent in Japanese culture, like the idea that taking more than is necessary is a grave mistake. This is perhaps derived from the connection between Japan and nature in that taking too much from nature will cause an insufficiency in the future. The idea that "one must always be courteous of others" seen in Japanese culture is also expressed in this film through the moral story that "selfishness is not rewarding." All of these cultural elements expressed throughout the film—from religious to artistic to ideology—create the overall essence of "Japan" in *Ugetsu* and give clear examples of the uniqueness of Japanese culture.

What also really contributed to the essence of Japan in this film was the Japanese music played in the background that was often overbearingly loud. The use of traditional Japanese instruments also helped create the environment and set the tone for an age-old period in the history of Japan. Similarly, the Rembrandt-style of lighting with many shadows and little light also helped set the seriousness and mystery of the mood. An interesting side-application of shadow used by Mizoguchi was the shadows of the characters displayed upon the terrain as a way of depicting their movements. Variation like this was also seen in the perspective changes of the camera in a single shot. For example, when the characters were running from the army through a bamboo forest in the beginning of the film, the camera slowly moved from a high vantage point to a low perspective. This also happened in Lady Wakasa's manor and was a very interesting type of establishing shot. The plot of this film was also very interesting in that there were a lot of morals and messages conveyed through a single entertaining storyline. Stories with life-long morals are usually shorter and independent from one another—one more reason that this film is interesting.

I could connect to this film really well because of the abundance of moral stories conveyed all throughout the plot. For example, the line "It is not the kimono, but the kindness that makes me happy" really touched me because that is a feeling that I often share when someone does something for me, whether it is a gift or an action, especially if it was unnecessary or unexpected. Although people ask if I like the gift, it's really the thought that is most important in these types of situations. I also really connected with the idea that "you can always make more pottery" in that, sometimes when I find myself in a tough situation or stuck in a decision, I try and imagine what I can do later and what must be done (or can only be done) at the moment. I think that Miyagi also had this idea in that they only have one life to protect;

pottery on the other-hand is less important because it can always be remade. Similarly, the idea that the value of things is all a matter on context is something I connect to deeply. In the film, this idea is expressed when both Genjuro and Tobei realize that money and fame are not enjoyable unless they are with family. In real life, I imbibe this idea in my vision of the future; rather than pursuing a career where it is almost guaranteed that I will make a lot of money, instead I will pursue a path that will allow me to enjoy the context of my career in addition to the profits. I can also relate to Genjuro and Tobei's mistakes in that they first had to be stupid to learn. Despite being warned and chastised by their wives, both men had to go ahead with their actions before realizing their mistake. I have done this in the past as well—perhaps with not as great of a consequence—but I believe it is part of the adolescence to be headstrong and discover on one's own rather than the wise who can see the consequence ahead of time. I hope to be more like Miyagi with her wisdom and foresight in comparison to Genjuro who lost almost everything in while chasing his ambition and greed. Lastly, I can also connect with Genjuro and Tobei in that they were never fully appreciative of what they had; they had to experience what it is like to have a hollow version of “more” before coming to their senses and returning home. Sometimes I feel as if I must appreciate what I have a the moment more because I know that it could always disappear; while *Ugetsu* presented this in a rather extreme way, it is still an important message nonetheless.

I would rate this film at a five out of five because it is truly an excellent example of Japanese cinema. Perhaps what I liked most in this film was that there were many important morals and messages to be learned throughout this film and they were all conveyed through a single storyline. While I was sad with the ending and frustrated with the mistakes made by the characters, I was still able to connect with the film well, which I believe is essential.