

**Japanese Westernization
and Japanese influence in
American Films**

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INTRODUCTION

I have watched many foreign films from Italy, France South America, Mexico and the United States. In the spring semester 2014, I took a Japanese Cinema course, which was a great opportunity to learn a new culture. While analytically watching this Japanese films, I realized that Japanese people was constantly struggling to accept new ideas coming from the west. There was a constant struggle to westernize different sectors of society. Westernization comes in a period social and political instability, which was not well seen by the upper classes. This westernization is better reflected in the film industry, in which many ideas of American films were incorporated in different periods of Japanese cinema. In the other hand we can also see the great influence Japanese films have in not only American cinema, but the worlds entertainment media.

Thesis Statement

When we think of Japan, we might think of a very strict country, in the sense that they might have a lot of social rules that its people might be obligated to follow. A country that is very sensitive of its culture. But I know little of Japanese Westernization and the role Japanese Cinema played in the world films as well, to be more precise, the American films. I would like to investigate how American and Japanese cinema came up to influence each other through out films. I like to verify if there was any rejection or any embracement of such westernization by the Japanese and from American. I want to find out how it affected different sect. I will base my investigation on four watched films, in my Japanese Cinema class Tampopo, Tokyo Story, The Hidden Fortress and Gojira. I will conduct my investigation via books, journal and articles.

Understanding Japan's Westernization

According to the legend collection in the Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki, Japan was founded in the seventh century BC by Emperor Jimmu. During the fifth and sixth centuries, the Chinese calligraphic system and Buddhism were introduced along with other Chinese customs across the Korean peninsula or directly from China. The emperors were official rulers, but the real power remained generally in the hands of powerful noble cuts, regents or shoguns (military governors). During the sixteenth century, merchants from Portugal, Holland, England and Spain came to Japan and founded Christian missions. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the shogunate began to suspect the missions, treating them as precursors of a military conquest by European forces. As a measure of protection, Japan closed any relationship with the outside world with the exception of restricted contact with Dutch and Chinese merchants in the city of Nagasaki. This isolation lasted for 251 years, until the year 1854, in which the American commodore Matthew Perry forced the opening of Japan to the West under the Treaty of Kanagawa. During a long period, the reestablished contact with the West has led to changes in Japanese society. The shogunate was forced to resign and the power was returned to the emperor. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 initiated several reforms. The feudal system was abolished and numerous western institutions were adopted, including a legal system and of western government, along with other reforms in the economic, social and military that transformed Japan into a world power mid to high-level. As a result of wars sino-japanese and russo-japanese, Japan annexd Taiwan, Korea and other territories to their expanding empire.

First World War, 1918, Japan occupied a strong position in the Far East; it had the most powerful navy in the area, exercised great influence on China and had benefited economically from the war (dealt with the orders of the Asian countries, to which the rest of the powers were unable to keep). During the decade 1920-1930, as well as Italy and Germany, problems arose that democracy could not resolve. On the one hand, the more conservative groups like the militia, peers, etc. that were positioned in the upper house of parliament and the Council, they believed that democracy was very weak. The corruption within the government was untenable, accusations among the members of the Lower House continuously caused riots. The increase in business that had been reached after the First World War in 1921 decreased when Europe began its recovery. The dire consequences of the Great Depression, increase in the rates of foreign countries for Japanese products, the worst poverty was reflected in the north where the humble farmers blamed the Japanese government for their misfortune (many villagers joined the army). The sum of these problems and the attitude of China, seeking to displace the Japanese businessmen, led to the invasion of Manchuria (September 1931). This invasion is produced without the authorization of the Japanese government.

When the prime minister Inukai assailed the extremist actions, was murdered by a group of officers (May 1932), his successor considered that should support the actions of the army and so it was that for the next 13 years, the government adopted measures similar to those adopted in Germany and Italy: suppression of the marxists, strict control of education, strengthening the military arsenal and an aggressive foreign policy aimed to conquer territories. This culminated in the second invasion of Manchuria, unleashing a second sino-japanese war (1937-1945).

Japan attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, which led to the North American country to declare war to the Japanese Empire in the framework of the Second World War. After a long campaign in the Pacific, Japan lost Okinawa and was forced to backtrack to the four main islands. The American army attacked Tokyo, Osaka and other cities with conventional and strategic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki with two atomic bombs. Japan finally accepted the unconditional surrender to the U.S. army on August 15 1945 giving end to the war. The conflict ended, the US army occupied the Japanese territory until 1952, after which Japan would begin a very important economic recovery that returned prosperity to the archipelago. Okinawa remained occupied until 1972, and currently the US army maintains several databases in this island.

Although the westernization was designed to promote the exercise of rational thought, this did not prevent to remain entrenched ancestral beliefs that are part of the Japanese religion. Shintoism and Buddhism remained as the beliefs and of greater influence to the point that none of the modern insurance companies, including the most advanced, he proceeded to a new headquarters construer without before realizer "Dyichinsa"; the rite Shingo that recreates the purification of the earth for blessing construction and ask for a good god who avoid all adversity. You cannot leave out the large and small events of social life; be it of the Shinto or Buddhist rituals, since the birth of a child, the marriage or the burial of an elder.

In the art the Japanese also achieved merge tradition and westernization, trends and entered western artistic currents. As well as the usual literature with topics such as the direction d sacrifice, respect and devotion to the family which remained at the center of the approaches.

Also the contemporary architecture especially that which flourished after the war, attained great importance compared to the use of Japanese aesthetic ideas and designs and western techniques.

Films reflecting Westernization

In the film, much of the progress provides further clarification with regard Americans had a strong repercussion, achievement peeled off the weight of the values and tastes artistic own. Although will be used the same techniques of production, the filmography Japanese tended to recreate a lot more to the characters from the characters own of the environment and in harmony with the natural space, paying less attention to elements such as action, vital in the western style. We will begin by describing the characteristics of the westernized the film Tampopo Japanese director and writer, Juzo Itami. Tampopo describes features and connects three westernized, which are the food, sex and death. We can see the social satire about contemporary Japan, we remain further more from Japanese culture than Japanese spectators are from the west. One strong indication is Tampopo itself, which portraits different ways in which Western styles of life that have invaded Japan. In film we can see parodies of Hollywood as is in the case of the truck driver, Goro, whom always wears a western hat, something definitively is not common in Japan. Now if we see Hollywood, is something that was common with John Ford, Indiana Jones, and John Wayne. In the other hand, we have a gangster in which all three elements are combined. He is always accompanied by his mistress. He appears at the beginning of the movie in a movie theatre, acting as if he was the God Father, giving orders and of course with all the food and wine he want. Throughout the film we see him playing along with his mistress with the food as to fulfill their sexual desires. Towards the end of the film we see this gangster, once dying how he still has the desire for food. After the death of the gangster, Tampopo's noodle restaurant opens. Throughout the film we can see her constant struggle for learning to make noodles. And she is not given the opportunity to get in business, since the patriarchal system is stronger than her desire to work and be able to provide for her son. Is not until Goru accepted to help her by breaking with this patriarchal system. At the

end of the film we see a lady nursing her baby, one more time breaking with the patriarchal system, since women were not allowed to do that in public, it is only for proper adults to segregate them. Also it shows the cycle of life through these three elements: food, sex and death.

Tokyo Story was directed by Ozu Yasujiro and is another film that well portrays the changes of a daily Japanese life style and a more westernized style. Ozu started to fuse his American filming influence in the 1940s, although he added his personal touch. Ozu, unlike Hollywood who used 180 degree camera, started to work with 360 degree camera, he also incorporated his low level camera view, since in Japan most of the action, if not everything happened in the down low, for example the Tea Ceremony. Also he adapted a more limited vocabulary in his films as we can see in Tokyo Story film. Tokyo Story is one of the movies where they are most accentuated the Westernization. In the United States, there is this barrier between parents and children, when the children grow up they reject the old age of the parents and put them in an asylum. Other hand in Japan it is assumed that the families supposed to stay together, but the influence of the west changes the mentality of these people, and want to imitate, transforming your life with ideas that come out of his country. We can see how in this film Ozu builds on the tension between traditional Japanese values represented by the life in Onomichi and a modern, westernized Tokyo. After a long time of not seeing their children, Tomi and Sukichi decided to travel to Tokyo to visit them, but to their surprised they found out that their children are trapped in a modernized and accelerated world, "American-life style". Their kids have made a new life and have adapted a new life style. Parents are sent away to "relax" since the daughter and son have no time to take them anywhere. The parents, now grandparents accepted and recognize that time has change, and the people also change with time. The mother in a way wants to believe that all of their kids have responsibilities, for which they cannot spend time with them, in a way

that she is trying to excuse them from their, under the traditions, responsibilities. Although Kyoko which is the daughter-in-law, married to their dead son, treated them with all the respect and puts her life and responsibilities aside in order to comfort the old couple. Even when the mother died, Kyoko was the first one to show up prior to the death and was there to watch the lady until the last moment. Kyoko is the only person that shows true love and respect to the old couple. Even though the couple is aware that she is alone, Kyoko does not want to admit it, because she doesn't want to worry them. Tomi told her that she should re-marry so she is no longer alone; Kyoko responded that she is fine, she doesn't miss her husband, and she is not alone. Kyoko finally admits her loneliness to Shukichi after Tami's funeral, which is the only time Kyoko breaks down showing true feeling that she been keeping only to keep people from suffering though her own sufferings. We can see in Kyoko both sides of the story, a woman that is fighting to accept modernization that came with the westernization and trying to maintain her morals and traditional values.

Japanese Films influence American Films

Absolutely Akira Kurosawa had a great impact not only in the Japanese Cinema but also in the world of filming. We can see it The Hidden Fortress, and the impact it had in George Lucas with one of the most famous saga of Star Wars. In The Hidden Fortress we have a princess whom kingdom has been destroyed, and Lucas has exanimated every possible detail in the Japanese film to be able to develop it into Star Wars. We can see with creation of the funniest characters, C-3PO and R2-D2 that come from Tahei and Matashichi. In Star wars Tahei and Matashichi are portrayed as robots, because in The Hidden Fortress is how they were seem as, always working under someone else's command. If we look at all the clothing that is used in

both, The Hidden fortress and Star Wars, they have similarities although they have been altered to represent a different concept of time. The term Jedai-geki was transformed into the Jedi order. In both films there is a constant fight to defend their territory from the intruders'. If we see in terms of weaponry and clothing it has also been change to a more futuristic style, to make it more realistic on the time star wars is taking place. As we can see the kimonos have been altered in the sense that they were added or removed features. At the end of both film we can see the similar closing, the personal guards and the princess.

Another firm that we can say influence Hollywood was Gojira, the original Godzilla. This film is made during an era where people tend to believe that mutant creatures, monsters, due to the after war radiation. Gojiras' name comes from a combination of two animals, gorilla and whale. It was more than just a Japanese movie, it was a political message. Up to today Japan has been the only country that has suffered devastation as a consequence of atomic bombs. Gojira is raised as a result of the experimental explosion of a hydrogen bomb; the creature emerges from the sea and attacks the main Japanese islands, jumping from city to city, destroying them with his destructive breath until he gets Ginza, the modern district of central Tokyo. The only hope for mankind rests in a lethal weapon, the oxygen Destroyer, recently invented by the tormented doctor Serizawa. Working with his rival for the love of a woman, the captain of a ship Ogata, placed the ingenuity in a submarine site and activated. Soon, the colossal Godzilla is reduced to a cloud of atoms drifting through the ocean. The Japanese and the American version seen to be slow, and at times boring, but the Japanese film brings more meaning to the monster. When Godzilla comes to Tokyo, the director transforms to his creature in a primary driving force of nature, by illuminating the dimly lit monster while using electrical sparking, with diabolical

expression, leads to the mouth of train wagons integers. Unlike almost all other monsters of the atomic era, Honda gets imbedded in Godzilla a shocking brutality. His figure cut against the sky in flames of Tokyo, as if it were an avenging angel immersed in an orgy of chaos and destruction, is one of the best-known images of the cinema of science fiction of all time.

Although there was other film, Hollywood sees the action part of Gojira as a good example of action in the film industry, with later was incorporated in other productions.

Conclusion

I was please to take this course during this semester; before I thought I would have to take a culture history class in other to learn about a different culture. This class and this project allowed me the opportunity to explore a country history a little more through films. Sometimes we, as human beings tent to try to pretend or imitate what we think we know, but in reality we live a world that needs to be explore in other to learn from it, and that exactly what has happen to me. I thought I knew enough but it was nothing I knew. In order be able to comprehended, not only the films but what is behind the story, we have to be able to understand the history of a country first. We do not know and can assume such represented events I a film come out nowhere. I believe that the postwar in Japan market the country in a sense and in a positive as well. Such an event allowed the people of Japan to give a bigger step into modernization, which in most sense was brought with the westernization, which was at first rejected, but as time advanced it seem to be more acceptable.

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