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## Japanese Film's Reflection on Family

### INTRODUCTION

In most Japanese cinema there is some sort of familial elements present. Family is essential and everywhere in cinema, whether they are family by blood or bond. In Japanese cinema we see mainly traditional family settings. These settings greatly reflect on even our modern society and the ideals present in it that are pushed upon the people in family situations. One way is through the gender roles present. In cinema they tend to be very traditional with the father earning for the family and mother staying at home, which is also seen in modern society. Another thing is the interpersonal relationships between the family member. How the people, like father-mother, feel about each other can influence how real people react to each other. Lastly, although these settings do reflect and influence us, there are some differences between what we see in these movies and reality.

### GENDER ROLES

In many of the films that we have watched, women seemed to have a very traditional role in the family, especially the mothers. In the films we viewed, mothers tended to stay at home and take care of the household and the children. Even the daughters, or even daughters in law, helped to do things around the house. The mothers and daughters tended to serve the food, set the table, do the laundry, or cook for the whole family. In these portrayals of the women, we see a

traditional family structure, not many modern women who work. These gender roles seen with women reflect on what women have or some may expect in modern family situations.

Just like with the women, we saw the men in traditional family roles as well. We see the fathers and even sons as leaders of the household. They usually seem to be making the rules and controlling and leading the family. Men are also seen as the providers, they bring in the money for the family. This role that Japanese cinema portrays men in is seen as traditional, just like with the women. This role for men is what most people seem to expect in our modern society.

In one article, the authors mentioned a theory that relates to the idea of men and women conforming to these gender roles. The authors called this theory the Gender Schema Theory and it:

... posits that over time, people develop and continue to refine sets of characteristics that they attribute to men and to women. While the media represent only a small portion of exposure to male and female roles and behavior, numerous studies have demonstrated that attitudes about gender are often reinforced by stereotypical depiction of gender in the media. (Bresnahan et al. 208-209)<sup>1</sup>

So, even if Japanese cinema is only a small portion of what people are exposed to, it can still affect the people and their views on what men and women should be doing in a family setting. People may of already had similar views, for which their ideas could be strengthened. Then those who may have had opposing views may just be influenced into changing what they imagine gender roles to be.

## RELATIONSHIPS

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<sup>1</sup> Bresnahan, Mary Jiang, et al. "Players and Whiners? Perceptions of Sex Stereotyping in Animé in Japan and the US." *Asian Journal of Communication*, vol. 16, no. 2, June 2006, pp. 207-217. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/01292980600638728.

There are many different interpersonal relationships involved in a family setting. Each person acts differently with different people in the family. Since Japanese cinema shows more traditional family settings, the roles would likewise be traditional. People's interactions in the family reflect upon how people interact in real life.

One type of relationship is between the father and mother, or even father and daughter. The females in the family would usually treat the father or head of the household with respect. We can see one example of the relationship between father and daughter can be seen in Ozu's *Late Spring* (1949).<sup>2</sup> She treats him with respect and pretty much obeys his wishes. Even when she did not originally wanted to get married, because her father to pushed her to go through with it she finally conceded to his wishes because she respects her father. Then in *Shall We Dance*<sup>3</sup> we see a relationship between the father and mother. Just like with the father-daughter relationship, the father-mother relationship has the wife showing respect to the male leader of the household. In the beginning she just was happy he was becoming happier, even if she did not know why. then , even when she was suspecting him of cheating, she did not really want to think that way out of her respect and trust in him (1996).

Another relationship is between the women in the family. In the movies that we see the mother-daughter or daughter in law can change greatly. In the movie *Summer Wars*<sup>4</sup> we see a more positive relationship between the two. They generally got along and did not have much conflict between them (2010). However, in *Samurai Rebellion*<sup>5</sup> the relationship between the

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<sup>2</sup> *Late spring*. Directed by Yasujirou Ozu, Shochiku, 1949.

<sup>3</sup> *Shall We Dance*. Directed by Masayuki Suo, Toho, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> *Summer Wars*. Directed by Mamoru Hosoda, Madhouse, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> *Samurai Rebellion*. Directed by Masaki Kobayashi, Toho, 1967.

mother and daughter in law is not as positive (1967). This could be due to the situation, but also maybe the times.

These relationships can also be reflected upon the people in real life. These types of relationships can be found in real households in modern Japan. There is usually some sort of respect for the males in the household from the women and a variety of relationships between women depending on circumstances. I think these portrayals of familial relation are accurate regarding our modern society. Even if the relationships are more traditional they are not in the least outdated. People still have respect for the male leader and there are still problems between people. These relationships can also be seen and influence people who may have different relationships leading them to have more respect or not.

#### CINEMA VS. REALITY

These traditional family value roles portrayed in Japanese cinema are pretty similar to family value roles in real life. However, there are some differences between traditional and modern values. As mentioned earlier, women usually take care of the house, while men produce for it. This is what we see in the movies. This is also the stereotype for what is expected now in family households. However, this setup is not always followed.

The major reason that the stereotype is challenged now is because women have become more independent. One article states that “the percentages of women in leadership positions increased from 1999 to 2009, including ministers from 4.8% to 11.8%, prefectural governors from 0.0% to 6.4%, and managerial members of private companies from 2.4% to 6.6%”

(Yamamoto and Weina 921).<sup>6</sup> These kind of changes are due to the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society in 1999, which Yamamoto and Weina talked about in their introduction on page 921. These kind of statistics and laws can show the progress being made for women to become more equal to their male counterparts. Usually men are shown to have important roles in the family. The husband or father in Japanese cinema would have these types of important jobs. The women are even shown as jobless, or in a lower position. Even in a movie like *Tampopo*<sup>7</sup> where the mother owned the shop, she still needed some sort of male influence as help (1985).

We see these stronger women in more modern Japan, however, cinema still seems to portray women in traditional family settings. Even in more recent movie that we watched, like *Shall We Dance* or *Summer Wars*, we see the women, mothers and daughters, as the people who stay home in the family and take care of the house while the fathers and sons go to work. Even if the women from *Summer Wars* were depicted as strong, they still conformed to gender roles (2009). So, although Japanese cinema, both older and more recent, show women in traditional gender roles, in the real world some women are becoming more independent and breaking out of those pre-existing ideals.

## CONCLUSION

There is some sort of family element everywhere in Japanese cinema, and most seem to have a more traditional Japanese family setting. We can see this in many parts like the way the family members interact with each other or the role that each person has in the family. This

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<sup>6</sup> Yamamoto, Masahiro and Weina Ran. "Should Men Work outside and Women Stay Home? Revisiting the Cultivation of Gender-Role Attitudes in Japan." *Mass Communication & Society*, vol. 17, no. 6, Nov/Dec2014, pp. 920-942. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/15205436.2013.860989.

<sup>7</sup> *Tampopo*. Directed by Juzo Itami, Toho, 1985.

traditional portrayal in cinema almost mirrors what we see now in reality in Japan. We see respect for the father and mothers staying at home. However, there are some deviations from this ideal in real life. Even when there are these deviations, the reinforcement from seeing similar family settings repeatedly encourages people to live lives similar to what they see in the movies.

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