

The Influence of Food Culture in Chinese and Japanese Movies

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ABSTRACT

As the old saying goes “Hunger breeds discontentment”, appetite and sexual desire are indispensable and can be controlled rationally, which will last a whole lifetime. In this article, in the contrast between China and Japan’s family films, through food, table, time and city as a symbolic memory unit to analyze the family concepts and ethic theory in two countries, the implicit and reserved in family relationship and the inheritance and continuation of dissociating family culture. Furthermore, to a certain degree, food culture has made influence on the current society. In conclusion, it is argued that the food culture scenes which in certain type of family movies could be ignored, as well as the neglected elements like family relationship, thus bringing local food culture concept into the family film era, which is, an era that needs to reevaluation the influence of food culture in family films.

Keywords: *Food culture, Family film, Hirokazu Koreeda, Family relationship*

1. INTRODUCTION

When comparing Japanese director with Chinese director, or in their film, it can be seen that how they hold different opinions about traditional food cultural that influence their films. For example, in the film *Eat Drink Man Woman*, food is a certain medium to illustrate the concept of family aesthetics. What is more, movies like *Our Litter Sister*, *Still Walking* and *After the Storm*, food is more like a catalyst in the way of promoting story-line, and the appearance of food are mainly to reification the internal emotion out of the character. In this paper, the author compares the Japanese representative family films director Hirokazu Koreeda’s family films in with those of China, through the elements hide in the film, including things that could be seen but not been emphasized in the films, or the things could not be seen visually but some of the audience still can feel that ideas behind the screen. These details lead to the research question of this paper, what is the actual effect of food culture in these types of family movie, and how to perceive the obscurity in Chinese and Japanese family movies? The author will make specific analysis in the following parts.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF FOOD CULTURE IN FAMILY MOVIES

Food culture has similar natures in China and Japan, but it is represented in different forms which result in different emotions and memories carried by the food itself. In the film *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), with the usage of plenty of food elements, in the beginning, director Ang Lee successfully transport the idea of maintaining the family relationship through these meals and meticulous care [2]. The whole movie is full of the gentle and elegant temperament of Chinese traditional culture. In spite of its mediocre narrative, its storytelling is more realistic, it brings Chinese culinary art into the drama of family and emotion. From the start of the movie to the invigorating cooking scenes when Lao Zhu was preparing for the Sunday dinner, or to the bento he prepared for the little girl who lives in the neighbor’s house, all reflected China’s extensive and profound food culture. At the same time, it is not hard to find that in Chinese culture, banquets and gatherings are often used to maintain the feelings between relatives or friends, when food is used to convey our feelings. Lao Zhu and his three daughters can only gather together during dinner which is the time all the primary or minor things in the family are brought up at the table, but every time a family member "has something to announce", the result always

end up with nothing definite, reflecting the close relationship between food and emotion in Chinese culture.

Here, there will be an obvious and intense conflict between the characters and the plot, unlike Lee Ang, in Hirokazu Koreeda's movies, there are various contradictions and conflicts undercurrent. The main carrier of food, the dining table, becomes a turning point for family conflict and relaxation. And the gentle and slow narrative rhythm is a pang of conscience, pain, also an image of normalcy. In the movie *Our Little Sister* (2015), the children have few childhood memories of their divorced father, because they are too unfamiliar, and even the sparse hatred disappears over time. The construction of the image of the father gradually appeared with the appearance of the younger sister Suzu Hirose, and the tenderness and delicacy of the father's love were revealed through a series of Japanese delicacies. The food under the lens is exquisite and full of temperature, revealing the hidden emotions of the characters in the form of concrete. Every dish on the table is closely related to family members, flat pickles are the taste of the elder sister; the fragrant plum wine is the taste of the grandmother; the rice bowl covered with tiny shrimps is the taste of the mother; the small sardine Donburi is the taste of my father. Inheriting through taste is Suzu Hirose's exploration of the unknown image of his father, and it is the reconstruction of the intimate relationship between sisters as well as the relief of the guilt that brought by the last generation to the younger generation.

3. INFLUENCE OF FOOD CULTURE IN JAPANESE AND CHINESE MOVIES

3.1. Cultural Symbol of External Food

The cultural symbol of food is an external manifestation of the pursuit of family harmony, and the same interpretation of words is unparalleled centripetal force and cohesion. The dining table assumes the diverse functions of building family relationships, participating in recalling narratives, and showing the mood of the role. Therefore, to understand these elements, we use the reunion method to gather the family, relying on the material carrier of kitchen or dining table, the dining table corresponds to the food which has become one of the essentials of integrating the family. As a country of etiquette, the Japanese are extremely elegant in table etiquette, tableware placement, and other details. Hirokazu Koreeda deliberately played down the sense of ceremony on the dining table in his movies. The dining table, as a collective family symbol, staged each family that has a central argument, on a platform where families face conflict and opposition will be placed in front of the stage. The dining table in *Still Walking* (2008) [1], is the adhesive that bonding the broken three generations, in *Nobody Knows* (2004), the dining table is a witness to

the painful memories of the children. Dining table is an empty but very inclusive space, every time it appears is to reorganization and reconnect between characters. All the memories of the family are all portrayed at the small square tables [3].

3.2. Effects of Food to Express Emotion

The same scene of dining table changes the combination of space and characters, resulting in unlimited story lines. The depiction of the dining table is also often expressed as a stable empty camera discourse on the dining table, for example, the presence and absence of the paternal characters can change the perception of the space. In the film *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), although Lao Zhu decorate the dining table with various of foods, it still give the audience an inexperienced sense of emptiness [5]. With the absent of Lao Zhu, the relationship between the three sisters became tense and sharp, but with his presence, the relationship between them became gentle but rigid. From other perspective, looking down on the family from the top of the dining table, and peeking at home from the kitchen, in various movies, the kitchen and dining table are actually separated by the door, and the emotions are half hidden. As long as the door is opened, the food, kitchen and dining table form a triangle. The dialogues from the dining table space and the sounds from the kitchen space, the flavors associated with them, along with the passage of time and the stacking of memories, fill this limited space. The edges and corners of the rectangular dining table record the unfolding of conflicts, manifested as the mutual mirror image of the living and the deceased, the estrangement between the three generations, and the interpretation of the divergent relationship between tradition and modernity. But these internal conflicts are unfolding with extreme restraint [4], even at the most intense point: in the film *Still Walking* (2008), the son directly refuted his father about inheriting his career at the dinner table, it only ends up with relative joked about himself to resolve disputes, which is different from the West that the face-to-face explicit language and body conflict in the movie.

4. COMPARISON AND DISCUSSION

The different natural geographic environments, climatic conditions, resources and specialties, local customs, and unique historical development experiences of various countries in the world have created very different food cultures in the world, showing different food customs. China and Japan are separated by a strip of water, facing each other across the sea. Since the Han Dynasty, Japan has had frequent contact with China, sending envoys to the Sui Dynasty and Tang Dynasty, bringing not only advanced means of production to Japan but also Chinese characters. Regardless of cultural

origins or living habits, people have had unprecedented close contacts in all aspects of exchanges. But the fact is that the food of China and Japan also has different personalities and connotations in detail, especially in films and television programs. In such an extremely condensed social microcosm, the audience can better appreciate the differences in food details between the two countries.

In the film *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), the male protagonist, Lao Zhu, was busy dealing with a variety of dishes at the beginning of the shot. Following his series of skillful methods, the film not only reflects Lao Zhu's superb cooking skills, but also indicates that Lao Zhu has paid significant attention to the upcoming family meeting. Whether it is in China now or in the past, the spread of such scenes are enough to prove the status and importance of this banquet to the chef and its participants. Carb with Vegetable, Duck Oil Sauteed Pea Sprout, and Louts-Leaf-Covered Shake Fin [6], when these dishes are compared to those only appear during the Spring Festival, the comparison is emphatically depicted in the film, which further describes the Chinese diet features [7] that Chinese cuisine pays attention to taste as well as "color, flavor, shape". Meanwhile, it maintains the natural flavor of cooking ingredients or makes the food perfect through cooking as the fundamental purpose and highest requirement of cooking, achieving the harmony and unity of color, flavor, shape and beauty. People enjoy the high degree of unity of spirit and material. Based on this concept, eating cooked food is the (tree) branch, rich dishes in seasons are leaves, and drinking hot water through straws is the vein, forming the general diet structure of China [8].

Unlike China, Japanese maintains the original taste of food from beginning to end, that is, its deliciousness cannot exceed the original taste [9]. In the film *Our Little Sister* (2015), Suzu's father taught her make sardine toast, the last jar of plum wine brewed by grandma, and the curry rice made by the sisters. In the film *Still Walking* (2008), Grandma's Minghe Green Bean Rice was cooked to ease the pain of lost her son, and the smell of corn tempura filled in the house. In the film *After the Storm* (2016), Grandma picked up the boiled food and muttered her food philosophy, such as the curry udon made by grandma on rainy days. These seemingly deserved solemn dishes are so ordinary, even if it is an important day, it will always be as usual to eat them. Japanese cuisine habitually maintains the original shape of the food, using as little or no spices as possible, and all dishes are of original taste on the premise of ensuring the freshness of the ingredients. Compared with the food itself, Japanese people pay more attention to the appearance of the food, the utensils that hold the food. The environment and other external things, just like some people say that Japanese dishes are not for eating, but for seeing with their eyes. The Japanese always pass on the virtues of

their ancestors. In the entire eating environment, there is a subtle and introverted beauty that could not to be ignored.

5. CONCLUSION

Food culture is produced with the emergence of human society, and is enriched with the development of human material culture and spiritual culture. The long-standing food culture not only satisfies people's material life, but also enriches people's spiritual life. Food culture is of incomparable importance to the past, present and even the future. The "food language" presented by the director in the films expresses the inner emotions of sadness and happiness in the form of objects. At the same time, food has also merged in a subtle and hidden way to start a variety of family faces. And its different family forms build a more complete social family structure. As a medium and its expression, film better narrates the local food culture, and it is a foothold in the international scope. Due to the similar elements between China and Japan in food culture, this paper has not made a further discussion on food culture influence of other countries in their movies, yet it may provide a reference for scholars who study global food culture.

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