



Tanizaki Junichiro's Attempt at a Film Play in "Whispers of the Moon"

Yiching Tsai(✉)

School of Foreign Languages, Zhaoqing University, 1st. Donggang Road, Zhaoqing,
Guangdong, China
2039299858@qq.com

Abstract. In this paper, I focused on the author's explanation as "the script has been modified to make it suitable for reading" ("Whispers of the Moon Preface", 1921) about the cinematography script "Whispers of the Moon" ("*Gendai*" 2-1~2, 1921) [1]. This paper will consider the phenomenon of many film reading materials and scripts published during the Taisho period and the connection with movie fans' act of "reading" movies as a habit at that time.

Keywords: Tanizaki Junichiro · "Whispers of the Moon" · Film Play

1 Introduction

For a short period of one and a half years, Tanizaki Junichiro worked as an advisor to the script headquarters of Taisho Katsuei Film company [2] and he made four films then—"Immature Club" (1920.11.19, Yurakuza Theater. Starring Hayama Michiko), "Katsushika Sunako" (1920.12.28, Yurakuza Theater. Starring Kamiyama Sango), "Hina Festival Night" (1921.3.30, Chiyodakan Theater. Starring Tanizaki Ayuko), and "Serpent Woman" (1921.9.6, Yurakuza Theater. Starring Kurizawa Yoko and Okada Tokihiko). Although the films had been lost now, their filming commentary could be confirmed from the stills and scripts. And these works have always been referred to when talking about Tanizaki's film-shooting experiences [3].

"Whispers of the Moon" (1921) is a "mystical tragedy" written under Tanizaki's idea that to make your cinematic play completely as your art, you should straitly write it down into a scenario rather than writing a story." And as an outcome, the author also mentioned that "I intended to make a high-class film with a certain amount of confidence", and "when it comes to something like this work, I am keenly aware that there is no other way to express myself than to write my scenario", and "I write it with a pleasure that I have not experienced recently" ("I can't help but be grateful for the joy of writing," 1920.12). When it was published in the magazine "*Gendai*", he reworked it as "reading material" and added that "I didn't write it as a novel from the beginning, so I would like the readers to read it with this intention" and "it would be interesting if this writing style could give readers a feeling of excitement as watching moving pictures, that's also interesting." ("Whispers of the Moon Preface"). Since his

descriptions were also included in the self-selected “The Complete Works of Tanizaki Junichiro Volume 11” (1958.5.10, Chuokoronsha Publisher), it should be noted even more as a film shooting work that was given a certain evaluation by the author.

2 The Cinematic Style of “Whispers of the Moon”

In the November issue of the general magazine “Gendai” which published “Whispers of the Moon” also published the novelization of the movie “New Carmen” (America, 1920.4.4, Japan, 1920.9.1, Imperial Theater) provided by Daikatsu Film Company. From this content, it can be said that the “Gendai” had the publication basis to publish “Whispers of the Moon” as “reading material”. The popularity of “movie story books” and the fact that novelizations were published in general magazines as well as film magazines indicate the fact that the custom of writing films into characters was becoming common in the Taisho period.

2.1 Outline of “Whispers of the Moon”

The outline of “Whispers of the Moon” is cited as follows.

Nomoto Shokichi, a college student who traveled to Shiobara Onsen to recuperate after suffering a nervous breakdown, was attracted to Yamauchi Ayako, a mysterious woman he met there. One night, as Ayako walked out, he witnessed Ayako playing with a chain necklace under the moonlight. Ayako while escaping from Shokichi, hallucinated her lover Teruo Ikeda, whom she strangled with her chain to the dead a year ago, and fell into a pond. An old man (in fact Ayako’s real father) who was watching all this situation saved Ayako then, but Ayako woke up and tried to kill Shokichi. After Ayako left Shiobara, the two are reunited by chance, but Ayako robbed away the chains that Shokichi was holding and left. For warning, Ayako’s father confided Ayako’s past to Shokichi about Ayako’s propensity, which gets excited when she saw the moon, and her past of committing murder. However, Shokichi still sought out her and committed suicide then. Ayako’s father found their two bodies and made suicide then.

2.2 Background of the Creation of “Whispers of the Moon”

Regarding the shooting plan of this work, the information was published in the “Kinema Junpo” (1921) as “This film is scheduled to be shot in May, and the performers are currently in the casting recruitment”, and it was lined up in an advertisement for the list of Daikatsu Film Company on the “Activity Club” (1921). And the advertisement was announced during the “Whispers of the Moon” serialization, and it seemed to intend to have a promotional effect responding to Tanizaki’s statement “This text will be produced by the same film company and will be announced early next spring,” so “please read this material as an explanation for the film” in the preface. In addition, at the end of the article, it is labeled as “This is the first attempt by Tanizaki, and at the same time, it is also called Japan’s first film drama recorded in the history of Japan Film History”. So it can be seen that mutual promotion may have been attempted during a serializing process to enhance the visual effects and collaboration of the literature and film industries.

When writing the script, Tanizaki expressed his intention to create "scenes of moving pictures" rather than "stories," and later argued that "The future of art cinema lies only in the author's thoughts directly composing each scene without going through literature form while the inner impulses are expressed directly through the form of cinema." ("The Future of Cinema" 1921.7) The work of structuring the sequence by combining shots and scenes can be said to be a cinematic method, but in a film script, expressions such as short sentences in the present tense and verbal pauses may play a role in assuming the image of the screen.

2.3 Novelization for "Reading" a Film

In the early film industry in Japan, films with simple plots were produced randomly, such as those inspired by Kodans, and the narrative was often quite weak [4]. However, at that time, challenging the situation of low-quality films being mass-produced, and the movement to turn the film into "art" was an aggressive attempt that is customarily called the "pure film theater movement" in film history. Tanizaki joined Daikatsu Film Company to make the film in Taisho era might be said also under this movement.

Tanizaki stressed that the film's "essence is not fully expressed" because of "incomplete script and scenes," and that "the plot must be improved and the author and engineer must be awakened to the selection of scenes," ("Japan Moving Pictures Requiring Modification," 1920.5.9) and that the plot must be "rewritten into a story with a human touch, a story closely related to modern life." ("Japan Moving Pictures," 1921, 3). It is obvious that Daikatsu Film Company requested Tanizaki's abilities as a writer, and the connection between these two is engraved in the literary history of moving pictures as an example of the intersection.

Therefore, taking a look at the format of "Whispers of the Moon" once again, the stage setting is indicated by the "title" at the beginning of the film play. Subsequently, the contents are spelled out in prose form, but in addition to the designation of "title", technical terms such as "close-up", "C, U" (close-up), "F, G" (foreground), "B, G" (background), gradually increased. Since then line breaks and short sentences for shots and scenes became the mainstream of a film play. In other words, it moves almost from novelistic expression to the form of a screenplay. As mentioned earlier, a script with locations and angles is different from a typical novelistic narrative and serves as the basis for a cinematic narrative that constructs a story by connecting shots. Tanizaki tried to revise it as a "reading material" due to he probably thought that the way it was told as a "film play" was much more appropriate. In the next chapter, I will analyze how Tanizaki persevered through these forms and examine the characteristics of his writing in the film play.

3 Features of a Film "Writing"

When writing the script, Tanizaki expressed his intention to create "scenes of moving pictures" directly rather than "stories," and mentioned "composing each scene without through the form of cinema." ("The Future of Cinema" 1921.7). This paper will consider two characteristics in the depiction related to "close-up" and the use of the effect of "light" in images next.

3.1 Depictions Related to “Close-Up”

One of the major features of “Whispers of the Moon” is the macromeric use of “close-up”. This technique has been mentioned in Tanizaki’s other film plays and applied to novel expressions, and I would like to reconsider it from a contemporary perspective to see how the “Close-up” technique is effectively used in Ayako’s body and facial expressions.

Under Mount Horai. When the woman finally reached that point, as if she had exhausted her strength, she threw herself onto a rock, fell on her back in the moonlight, spread her hands wide, and dozed off with her eyes closed and gasped. Her hair was disheveled, her kimono collar was widened, and her belt was untied. C. U. of the woman on the rock. Woman’s upper body. C.U. Her eyes were filled with ecstatic pleasure, and a convulsive smile formed on her lips. After a while, she grabbed both ends of the chain hanging around her neck and pulls them as if tearing them apart, and she bit them into her lips as if she were eating a thread. Biting, grinning again, and shaking the yoke.

And when she tries to put Shokichi in her hands, the text specifies details that can be captured by “Close-up” techniques, such as “a cruel, crazy smile, like a beast that is now trying to eat prey”, “eyes are bloodshot with fear”, “an expression of extreme ferocity, brutality, and morbid joy”. In “Techniques in the Film” (1921.10), Tanizaki presents that C.U. is not only a way to “attract the attention of the audience,” but also as an opportunity to “forget the progress of the play” and “be fascinated by the good looking actors,”. That means simply staring at the images that appear on the screen without examining the implications of facial expressions. The effect of “Close-up” is also discussed in Tanizaki’s film novel “Meat Lump” (1923) depicts the controversy between film director Onoda Yoshinosuke and his assistant engineer Shibayama. Yoshinosuke retorting against Shibayama points out that the actress’s C.U. shootings are too many. While Shibayama suggested that “you should get drunk on the beauty in their expressions”. Tanizaki tried to express his opinions about the chain of ephemeral aesthetics, which is similar to C.U. theory in “meat lumps”.

In “Whispers of the Moon”, C.U. was used as a method that shows Ayako’s psychology, and it also has the effect to bring about a vivid visual experience of virtually assimilating the audience to Shokichi who is attracted to Ayako. The fact that you can’t help but watch some attractive situations you shouldn’t see is the main theme of “Whispers of the Moon.” Anyway, C.U. symbolized visual pleasure that could be inverted into madness and was adopted as the best way to match the narrative content with the film’s unique format. Therefore, even though “Whispers of the Moon” was made into a “reading material,” it had to be woven into work with a cinematic style reminiscent of a series of shots, rather than a prose narrative that pushed the story forward. The film methodologies that superimpose depicted visual images and convey meaning and narrative contents seem to have led to the preservation of a self-referential criticality of the film in “Whispers of the Moon.”

3.2 Full Use of the Effect of “Light” in Images

While “closes up” was used to show Ayako’s inner madness, the effect of light was described as Kawamoto Saburo said, “The moonlight that confuses people and drags

them toward madness and dreamlike perversion is exactly the metaphor of 'film' itself, which tries to take people away to a world of white light and shadow in the darkness" (2008) [5], it could be identified as the composition in which light evokes a crazy tone reminiscent of the state of cinema. According to the description of Ayako's father due to his wife's inheritance, Ayako "gets strangely excited when she sees the light of the moon" and will kill a man with chains. Ayako's dialogue "Will you die with me?" is emphasized in the subtitles to unleash irresistible magic as a Salome-like "moon madwoman" who brings death.

Cinema is a device of light. In the process of filming projection, "light" is indispensable while making a film. Even in the film viewing scene in Tanizaki's work "The Secret" (1911), the light effect is described as "rays of the film" that pierce the eyes. Tanizaki's favor of using "light" is also certified by the actress Hayama Michiko, who participated in the "Immature Club" (1920) filming for the first time, said "What terrified me the most was the strength of the artificial rays at the studio," and the rays were "irresistible" ("Artificial Rays and Potatoes," 1921).

Moonlight may be weak compared to the rays in the film, and Ayako's weakened nerves will perceive any stimulation with hypersensitivity. Ayako not only gazed at the moon, but also was ecstatic with her favorite "gold chain" "sparkling on the moon", and "fell in love" with the water flowing "while harboring the light of the moon" on her hand with "countless rings studded with various jewels" dipped in the river, and the "subtle rays" woven by the jewels.

Moonlight is reflected, amplified, and emphasized in every form. The aspect in which the rays of light awaken Ayako's madness can be read as a metaphor for film technology and to create a different world. And the light of the moon also splits Ayako's personality. "She was so excited about the moonlit night that she forgot that she killed Ikeda, but for a moment, a distant memory appears vaguely as if she sees something across the clouds, causing her conscience to suffer." Ayako's "hysteria" shows no signs of recovery, but rather seems to only get worse.

Lots of previous research pointed out that Ayako's "sleepwalking" aspect is similar to the silent movie "Dr. Caligari" (Germany, 1920, Japan, 1921, Yokohama Odeon Theater) [6]. The uncontrollable makeover leads to Ayako's self-destruction due to an alter ego or a divisive phenomenon. Since "Whispers of the Moon" approaches the context of German cinema in terms of theme, we can see how Tanizaki designed the plot that Ayako is eroded by madness by "seeing" the moon is similar to the state of the audience who is unconsciously controlled by the film.

In addition, Shokichi was also a "nervous breakdown" ephemerally infected by Ayako's "madness". The act of being deprived of consciousness by the phenomenon at present and weakening one's independent thinking, and simply throwing oneself into ecstasy and pleasure, paradoxically implies the potential violence of all visual representations. Thus, although the chain of "infections" of madness ends in the story, the work is presented to the audience (reader) as a fictional but possible world. In this way, "Whispers of the Moon" is expressed as a cinematic style, which was preserved as a "reading" film of the Tanizaki creation style.

4 Conclusion

Although Tanizaki revised “Whispers of the Moon” to be “suitable for reading”, the script’s expression used shooting techniques such as C.U. to maintain a novelistic narrative to show the factor of madness. The foreground of insanity and murder as subjects is proof that the narrative nature of Tanizaki’s films was closer to the obsessive-compulsive and neurotic context of German cinema than to the Hollywood narrative and spectacle. In the “Reading” script, the message was based on the premise of the reader’s film literacy, as Tanizaki urged in “Cinematic Techniques” (1921). Unlike movies that are watched passively, the act of reading requires active participation by mobilizing knowledge. The “Reading” scenario, which was provided by applying a mode of “looking at moving pictures” in the head, can be said to be a dense communication tool where the author and reader virtually share in a single film.

Tanizaki also wrote in the text of the “Complete Works of Modern Drama” (1925.9) “I believe that ‘drama for reading’ is by no means completely abandoned. The act of launching a text in anticipation of a performance or screening format is a different experience for authors and readers than the creation and reception of a novel in general. Generally, the experience of writing the screenplay “Whispers of the Moon” and publishing it as a work that was revised as “reading material” but retained the script format is considered to have been an opportunity to reconsider the framework of novel expression. It is necessary to further examine what kind of technique Tanizaki used and passed through a cinematic narration, utilized in his novels later. As analyzed by Toeda Yuichi [7] in Tanizaki’s works, the mode of representation of the film is either “severing” (cutting) or “continuous” (a non-breaking form). This paper do not have time to examine these writing techniques, but I will discuss them in the future.

References

1. The texts of Tanizaki Junichiro cited in this article, except as otherwise noted, are based on the “Tanizaki Junichiro Complete Works” 30 volumes (1981.5.25~1983.11.10, Chuokoronsha Publisher).
2. Nagaie Hironobu, “Tanizaki Junichiro’s Theory of Underground Story” (1992.6.30, Sobunsha Publisher).
3. Akari Chiaki “Whispers of Human Faces: Films that Tanizaki Junichiro could not make” (*Showa Literature Studies* 53, pp.1~13, 2006.9.1, Showa Literature Society). Akari also praised the sharp expression that made full use of cut-backs and overlaps in “Whispers of the Moon”.
4. Kishi Matsuo, “Commentary” (Collection of “Japan Scenario” edited by the Scenario Writers Association, pp.794~812, 1973.10.25, Maruyon Production Scenario Bunko Publisher).
5. Kawamoto Saburo, *Taisho Phantom* (2008.4.16, Iwanami Shoten Publisher).
6. The stimulation of light is pointed out in Takahashi Seori’s article “Vertigo and Eroticism: Tanizaki and Sakutarō” (“Sensory Modern: Sakutarō, Junichiro, Kenji, and Rampo”, p. 117~128, 2003.12.25, Serika Shobo Publisher).
7. Toeda Yuichi, “Aspects of Stylistic Styles Inspired by Film: An Aspect of Modernist Literature” (*Stylistics Studies* 40, pp.73~85, 1994.3.25, Japan Stylistics Society).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

