

The Expression of National Character in Japanese Movies

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During the development of Japanese movies, filmmakers paid special attention to integrating their own national characteristics into movies. On the one hand, the national character provides an opportunity for the development of Japanese movies; on the other hand, it also restricts movie activities to a certain extent. The national character has been embodied in the audio-visual language, character creation, and theme expression of Japanese movies.

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Japan is a country that knows how to cherish. Many traditional literary styles left over from ancient times have been well preserved, and many folk customs and customs from ancient times have also been fully developed to the present. This preservation and development are reflected in many aspects. In the development of national films, Japanese filmmakers paid special attention to integrating their national characteristics with films. Throughout the evolution of Japanese movies, movies and their national character present a unique dynamic relationship.

A Brief Analysis of the Influence of Yamato's National Character on Movies

As a unique oriental nation, Japan has formed relatively stable folk customs, national literature and art, and national spirit in the long-term development and changes. This is its national character, that is, the form of expression of national character. In short, the well-known cherry blossoms, kimonos, haiku and samurai, sake, and Shintoism are specific representations of the Japanese national character of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. And these special national symbols have a long-lasting and profound influence on Japanese movies.

The Display of Traditional Culture and National Spirit Provides Opportunities for Film Development

The contradictory character of the Japanese *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* is widely and profoundly expressed in the movie. The vivid reflection of these national characteristics in movies is inseparable from the subtle influence of Japanese traditional culture on many filmmakers. What is particularly noteworthy is the creation of the Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa—in his works, the light of traditional culture flashes everywhere. He was born in a samurai family and was deeply influenced by samurai culture since he was a child. After becoming a film director, most of his works are also contaminated with the spirit of Bushido, showing the beauty of masculinity in the traditional sense of Japan... It is precisely that he has always been

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committed to dissolving traditional Japanese culture and national spirit into film art that leads to a far-reaching, and unique oriental movie spectacle, thus opening the door for the West to understand and appreciate Eastern movies.

“What belongs to the national belongs to the world” is fully reflected in Kurosawa’s films, which is also an important reason why he can become the “No. 1 in Asian movies”. When Western movies, especially Hollywood movies, dominate the world, in order to win Eastern movies a place in the world, they must rely on their own national cultural heritage and the support of national spirit. The famous director Zhang Yimou once said, “Kurosawa made me understand that when facing the outside world, it is necessary to maintain the Chinese character and style. This is a very important lesson he taught Asian filmmakers”. Accordingly, the presence of national character provides an opportunity for the development of Japanese movies.

The Limitations of Yamato Spirit and Aesthetic Consciousness Restrict Film Activities to a Certain Extent

The Japanese admire powerful men, which is a philosophy in the spirit of Bushido. They often feel “hunger” and “internal emptiness” when dealing with their national culture (Wang, 1994). As a result, the Japanese are willing to accept the law of the jungle, and meanwhile, they are also good at accepting everything. The most obvious manifestation of this feature of Japanese spirit in the film regulations is that there is no quota for imported films. This makes local films under great pressure in the domestic market. According to statistics from relevant agencies, Japan’s film industry has not improved much in the past 10 years, and the scale of the industry has almost reached saturation. At present, there are more than 3,000 screens in Japan, with an annual box office receipt of about 200 billion yen. The average per capita viewing is 1.2 times a year, and the average ticket price is about 1,200 yen. These figures are not much different from that 10 years ago or even in the 1990s. Various statistical curves have not changed at all (Sina Entertainment, 2014).

In addition, the cherry blossom as the national flower of Japan also has a great influence on the Japanese aesthetics. The Japanese people have formed an elegance and sadness as the cherry blossom embodies, with pure and warm aesthetic consciousness, that is, “the beauty of the mysterious”. This awareness has a huge impact on the film industry. The new romantic youth film directors represented by Shunji Iwai have carried forward it and injected fresh modern vitality into Japanese movies. Until now, pure love movies still dominate the Japanese movie market. However, the golden age has passed, and this aesthetic concept has not been replaced in time, which has to a certain extent caused the audience’s aesthetic fatigue and the lack of blockbusters.

The Specific Expression of National Character in Japanese Movies

The influence of national character on Japanese movies has permeated all aspects of the movie from the beginning to the present. Below I will analyze its specific manifestations from the aspects of audiovisual language, character creation, and theme expression.

The Expression of the Concepts of Japanese Aesthetic Culture in Audio-Visual Language

Color has an important position in Japanese aesthetic culture. The color matching of Japanese traditional kimonos embodies the Japanese color aesthetic style: The overall plain color is lined with a few bright colors, and the simple color and simple style close to nature are still the mainstream of social aesthetics. This color aesthetic concept also plays an important role in modern film art. The use of color in Japanese movies mostly

conforms to this mainstream color aesthetic. A typical example is the opening shot of Shunji Iwai's classic *Love Letter*, where the heroine lies on the white snow with a black coat... The indifferent colors can even be ignored, but this picture has become a classic that has been passed down to this day. The role of lens and color rendering cannot be ignored. The boundless white snow symbolizes the heroine's pure and endless love and regret, and the black coat conveys her sadness... Without a simple word, the faint resentment and euphemism of the Eastern sentiment emerge spontaneously.

The paintings of the Muromachi period in Japan have something in common with the Chinese ink paintings in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, that is, "leave blank". This coincides with Japan's long and simple aesthetic culture. The use of this composition technique in film art conveys the charm of Eastern tranquility. In Kurosawa's late peak work *Ran*, there is a video in the form of a static painting, and the dynamic people in the movie move on the static painting to produce amazing visual effects. The people who act in this scene also follow the color matching and composition principles of Muromachi's paintings, so that people and the scene form a harmonious and unified character landscape. This form of picture composition has created and developed the national films with a painting style. It has an important positive influence on the spread of Japanese national art and aesthetic culture, and has become a classic for many directors to learn from.

In addition, Japanese traditional music and modern film music have greatly changed in form and tune, but this change is still in line with the spiritual core of their national aesthetics—most of the music style is gentle, giving people hope, healing or enlightening people. This matches with the melodious and profound aesthetic culture of the Japanese nation. For example, the movie music "Summer", which is played by the film music master Joe Hisaishi for the work *Kikujiro no natsu* directed by Takeshi Kitano, has a misty and dim sound, and the split rhythm enhances the power of the melody, highlighting the active and cheerful mood, and is connected to the storyline of the movie, which makes the audience feel the warmth of summer in the music. Combined with the film information, it fully reflects the beautiful vision of the little boy and the sincere kindness of adults.

The Expression of Japanese Bushido's Concept of Life and Death in Character Creation

Bushido spirit is one of the most prominent characteristics of Japanese national character, and it is also the key theme of Japanese movies for a long time. The Bushido spirit can be briefly summarized as righteousness, benevolence, honor, loyalty, self-denial, and so on. One of its major characteristics is unconditional loyalty to the monarch, and treating selfless dedication as the samurai's highest obligation and final act (Xue, 2008). This spiritual core is fully reflected in the movie. In 2005, the famous director Junya Sato launched a controversial anti-war film *Yamato* that won the box office champion of the year. Leaving other factors aside, from the perspective of character creation, Bushido's spirit of "knowingly die but doing it" has been humanized. There is a dialogue in the film. Eda asks the captain, "What is the difference between Bushido and Shido?" The captain replied that "Bushido sacrifices himself without asking for anything in return, while Shido still lives upright in the spirit of sacrifice". As a soldier with the image of a samurai, the captain's words are actually a deeper explanation of Bushido. That is, for a real samurai, life and death are for dedication. This image of a thoughtful, humane, and faithful warrior is awe-inspiring. At the same time, this film also reflects the life and death view of the Japanese national character. The Japanese associate cherry blossoms with the Yamato national bushido spirit and believe that life is as short as cherry blossoms, and should contribute their own light and heat during their lifetime. To put it simply, life and death must "get what they deserve".

The Bushido spirit has long been in a position of authority in Japan and has an inescapable role in promoting the popularization of Japanese patriarchy. Moreover, the patriarchal thought has already been confirmed in some movies. For example, in Tetsuya Nakajima's masterpiece *Memories of Matsuko*, Matsuko is a woman who cannot live independently and can hardly bear loneliness in the film. Her destiny is always dominated by different men, and a man is her only hope in life... Undoubtedly, Matsuko is just one of the victims of Japanese patriarchal thinking. Even though Director Nakajima's narration is popular and comical, it still cannot conceal the connotation of tragedy.

The Presentation of the Consciousness of National Crisis in the Theme Expression of Japanese Movies

For a long time, a sense of crisis for living and unease about the bleak future have always plagued the hearts of Japanese people, causing them to form a sense of distress (Yan, 2010). However, it is the expression of this crisis consciousness in the theme of Japanese film performance that inspires the unique charm of Japanese film. For example, Japan's large-scale disaster film *The Sinking of Japan* launched in 2006. The whole film revolves around the theme of that "if the country has no future and the nation goes to destruction, what will be the road for people". It was rated as the most shocking disaster giant in history since the film *The Day After Tomorrow*. It is the sense of distress that inspired the precious part of the Japanese national spirit, that is, unity and striving. This kind of national spirit of mutual aid is also fully embodied in this film. There are many people in the film who silently contribute to saving Japan, and it is their efforts that finally made Japan out of danger.

Japan's unique geographical environment and other factors have caused Japan to suffer from natural disasters such as tsunamis and earthquakes. Therefore, the Japanese nation has always embraced the heart of respect for nature and pursued the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. This theme expression has a very important position in Hayao Miyazaki's animated films. Many of his works are dedicated to expressing this thought in the Japanese national character. A typical representative work is *Princess Mononoke*. The film reviews the damage to the environment from the standpoint of equality between humans and nature, and ponders how humans can truly live in harmony with nature. It is thought-provoking.

Conclusion

As a unique oriental nation, Japan has formed a relatively stable folk customs, national literature and art, and national spirit in the long-term development and changes. These are their national character, that is, the manifestation of national character. And these special national symbols have a long-lasting and profound influence on Japanese movies. On the one hand, the display of traditional culture and national spirit provides opportunities for film development; on the other hand, the limitations of Yamato spirit and aesthetic consciousness restrict film activities to a certain extent. The influence of national character on Japanese movies has permeated all aspects of the movie from the beginning to the present. The main manifestation is the expression of Japanese aesthetic cultural concepts in the audiovisual language, the expression of the Japanese Bushido concept of life and death in characterization, and the expression of national crisis consciousness in the theme of Japanese movies.

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