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JAPN314

Japanese Visual Culture

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┌ In the Japanese film "Departures" (Okuribito 2008), I was able to see another perspective of the Japanese culture and how they view life and death. In this film, death was one of the main topics as well as life. The main character was, to me, the middle point between life and death. He was able to see both perspectives of life and death. The film helps us see Japan as a country that has symbolism, respect, love and care for their lost ones. The process or the ceremony for those who have died is very symbolic and respectful for the families. It is the last chance to see their loved ones as who they used to be.

↓ After watching the film, my perspective of death has change. The film gave a deep symbolic meaning of the dead and those who give their last goodbye to their loved ones. One example from the film were this is represented is when the man who owned the departure company told the story of his wife. He motioned how he started that business because of his wife's death. He explained how he fixed his wife so pretty and got her the most beautiful casket. He smiled when he explained that he had done such a wonderful job with her arrangement and that he had never seen her so beautiful as that day. In his comments in that scene I remember he said how it was sad when one of the two die but that it was harder when you were the one that was left alone with the memories. In that scene he helps me realized how symbolic is the last goodbye for the family.

The process of the ceremony is also made important in the film. In the scene where the lady from the bathhouse past away was, for me, a turning point in the characters in the film. It was a turning point for the son of the lady and the wife of the one performing the ceremony because they realize the importance of the ceremony and how sensitive and delicate it is to the families. In that scene, the friend of the one performing the ceremony was able to appreciate his friend's job and the importance to give a proper burial ceremony to the mother whom he loved.



Both death and life are expressed in the scenes that I described because we see the dead represented as a symbolic memory and as the last goodbye to the loved ones. The ones that are still alive are represented as the caring ones and whose emotions we are still able to see. In the scene were the young woman committed suicide but was actually a man, after the ceremony, the father just poured his emotions out and thank them for the ceremony they had performed. He said that even if his son dressed as a girl he was still his son. In that scene we are able to see the love of a father, the respect for his son's memory and the admiration of the ceremony.

┌ I come from a Mexican family were we see life as a religious phase. We admire the older people in the family and respect them as the wiser ones. I see life as the next step to eternal life and you are judge as how you act. I am a strong believer in karma; you get back what you do to others. Life to me is a gift and we must cherish every moment of it. I try to be helpful, respectful and loving to others. I grew up with the idea of being proud of whom I am and were I came form and I think that is important in life to never forget who you are.

In the film, I saw how the lady that worked in the departure agency gave advice to the young man from personal past experiences. She tried to show him another side of the story and to understand how his father might of felt after he abandoned him. The similar story happened to her and her son. She left him over in her hometown to run away with a man, she did not dare go back and see her son because of the pain she had caused him after she left. She tried to help him understand his father and that's a great example of helping others emotionally and being caring for others.

└ After watching the film I realize that there is more to the Japanese culture. I realized that death is important to them and a proper ceremony is the last goodbye to there loved ones. Its the last chance for them to expressed how much they loved them and in a way it helps them



remember how they used to look like. The job of giving a ceremony to the dead is also very important. You have to be respectful for the ones suffering and give a proper ceremony in order for the families to have peace also.

ƒ In the lectures from the classroom I have learned of the ikebana. The ikebana is the arrangement of flowers. The ikebana is a simple arrangement but it's not just the arrangement but the process of the arrangement. It requires mental peace and it is said that it represents your emotions. In order to practice you have to be mentally and physically well being. Its after practice that it shows who you really are. The flowers represent the past, present and the future when they are full-blown, half open or a tight bud; it's the life cycle. In the video that we watched in class about the ikebana, it help me learn more about the process and its uniqueness to the individual practicing their own arrangements. When the guy in the video tried to make an arrangement at first it was hard for him to concentrate in making his arrangement but after he tried to connect mentally with the flower and the arrangement. When he did that it help him create his personal arrangement of the flowers.

Another thing that stood out from the class lectures and videos was the geisha. The process to become a geisha is really intense. It is emotionally and mentally hard. First, you have to separate from your family; you have little to no contact with your loved ones. Second, it takes about five years to be a geisha. But what shocked me the most was how, some, I don't know if all geishas live a life fully dedicated to being a geisha. They don't get married or have kids and they lived a lonely life. After they spend all their lives dedicated to beauty and simplicity it is really hard to se another look at their actual lives.

I have enjoyed taking this course because it has helped me see Japan in a different perspective especially the culture. I see Japan's culture as something really symbolic and full of



meaning. I enjoyed watching the film because I was able to see a different meaning of life and death. We all have very different ideas about life and death and in this film I think it captured a really beautiful meaning of death and life.

9.5/10 very good work!!