**Japanese Families: The evolution of family through the portrayal of film**

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Japanese families: The evolution of family structures through the portrayal in film.

Mom, dad, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers. These members are what usually make up an immediate family or an extended family. Either way, family is a very important aspect in Japanese culture. In an article written by Anne E. lmamura, she writes about the structure of family, and more specifically after the Second World War. Imamura defines a traditional family in the Japanese culture as having a stem system. The traditional family has a stem system which is a simple way of saying that the family is a multi-generational one. The eldest son has his parents living with him while also having a wife and children of his own. If there is not an eldest son or if the family only had women, the eldest daughter would live with them and her husband would be a substitute for the eldest son. After the Second World War, the definition of what is a traditional family was challenged and changed throughout time because of the new circumstances. There was a time where it was a modern family. This modern family was partly due to the fact that many families were moving into smaller apartments and houses that were not specialized to accommodate the multi-generational household. In previous movies that we saw, like Red Beard, you could see that the building that they were in had many rooms, were spread out and had sliding doors to have more privacy. After the world war, most of the houses were small enough to have a four member family. Just like the families before the world war, the men would go and work and make money for the family while the wife stayed home and cooked, cleaned and took care of the children, if they had any. This was called the “Salaryman” family. In the 70’s more and more women started to work and contribute to the family salary and getting out of the house. They were getting jobs and finding activities outside of the house. The women managed to find a healthy balance of their professional life and still meeting the main roles at home. The theme of family has been present in more than one film that we have seen throughout the semester. The idea and portrayal of a traditional family is something that has been less prevalent in today’s society both in but since when has the idea of a traditional family and its structure been challenged to what makes a family? In the three films that I have chosen to analyze: *Tokyo Story, Always: Sunset on Third Street and Summer Wars,* they challenge this idea of a traditional family and also correlate to the time periods in which it is being portrayed in.

In the previous paragraph, it talked about family after the Second World War. *Tokyo Story* was set after the Second World War. In the beginning of the movie we see the two parents living with their youngest child. Their other children live in different cities than they do. The parents were still living in a traditional family setting because they were living with their youngest child, which happens to be a daughter. The other children were living the “salaryman” family stereotype because they were living in small apartments and the male household figure would go out and work. This could be seen when one of the families had to accommodate their families in their house but they had to make special arrangements and move things out of the way in order for the parents to have a comfortable stay.

Another theme in *Tokyo Story* that was seen and that is related to modern families after the second world war was union or lack thereof between the family members. When the mother and father went to Tokyo to visit their children, they were too busy to fully spend time with their children, which was the whole point of the trip. The children thought that a quick fix to the situation would be sending them to a resort to relax but that was not their intent. The daughter in law, wife of the late son, payed more attention and was mindful of them when their blood sons and daughters were too busy. Although she did not have much, she gave what little spending money that she could to her mother in law even though she might have needed it herself. She was there for the mother and father more than the own kids. The only time that they were truly together and focused on their family was when the mother passed away. Families shouldn't just be together when there is a bad occasion but when there is also vacations where they have to cherish the time they have left.

Along with the theme of the generation gap, it was very primitive in this film as well with the grandparents and the grandchildren. One thing that really stood out was the fact that the grandchildren did not show respect to their grandparents and were throwing tantrums and things of that nature showing that they did not like that they were there. I believe that this was because they did not spend much time with their grandparents because they live so far away that it is not convenient in many ways to go see their grandparents often. In an opposite way, the daughter in law was very respectful of the elderly mother and father.

One specific scene in this movie is when they are sent to the resort by their children. When they get there, they have a difficult time adjusting because the resort has many young people and they are making lots of noise at night and having fun and being their age. Although the elders understand that they are young, it finally cliques that this was a resort intended for the younger generation and they could not relate as much because, simply put, they were not part of the younger generation anymore.

The second movie that took place around the same time as *Tokyo Story* was *Always: Sunset on Third Street*. Although this movie takes place around the same time period as Tokyo story the two differ very much when it comes to the theme of family. Always is more oriented on the modern family only, and leaving the traditional family structure out of the picture.

In the *Always, Sunset on Third Street, t*here are two main families. The first family that I want to analyze first is the Suzuki family, with the auto car repair shop. This family consists of the father, the owner of the tiny business alongside his wife, who stays at home and does all of the cooking and cleaning in the house. She also tends to whatever needs that the husband may need because the family business is located on the first floor. They also have a son, about 5 years old or maybe older who goes to school and his mother takes care of all of his needs as well.

The second family in *Always* is not a family at the beginning but rather will develop over time with Mr. Literature (named this in my essay for lack of not remembering his character’s name). Before the movie starts, he is living alone as a writer of a semi popular comic book type of thing but because that does not make much money, he has a store in front of his little house.

The first family develops over time. Roku comes from a different city to Tokyo in order to fulfill her apprenticeship with what she believes to be a big motor company. When she gets there, she is a bit surprised to learn that she will be living with the family and the business is a small one run straight out of their home and not in a big factory like she expected it. The Suzuki family becomes her host family during the duration of the apprenticeship. In the beginning she is treated kindly but to an extent because she is an employee or intern. There was no interaction that would be considered more than an employee. Throughout the year, she is treated more and more like family. One example is when the son of the Suzuki family is talking to Roku. Roku is teasing him and he is sharing secrets with her like they were actually brother and sister. Another example that could be seen in the movie is when the Suzuki mother was talking to her and she was going to give her a cream puff but they were going to wait until her son came home. When Roku got violently sick from the food poisoning, you could see that not only the mother but the other members of the family were very worried about her. One more example is during the Christmas season when she is rewarded tickets to go back home and visit her real family. Although they had no obligation to do so, they cared about her enough to go out of their way to do something kind and meaningful for her, which is to see her real family when she thought all along that her real family did not want her because she would not be a burden and they did not have to worry about clothing her or feeding her. The fact of the matter was that she had two families that really loved her: the biological family with her father and mother and her siblings, and her host family that grew to love her and what became as a professional relationship blossomed into something more.

The second family that was showcased in the movie is Mr. Literature (for lack of not remembering his real name) and Junnosuke. Junnosuke was abandoned by his mother and was taken to a family friend. That family friend did not have the time to care for the child so. Mr. Literature was not forced, but somewhat obligated by the family friend. Although they were complete strangers and were not related even in the slightest, he took him in and cared for him and grew to love him. This is seen when the time in the movie is almost Christmas time. Mr. Literature did not know what to get Junnosuke because he had never taken care of a child or knew what to do in this type of situation. He wanted to also go above and beyond anything that Junnosuke had ever imagined. He even brought someone to dress up like Santa Claus and deliver his gift. Although he was only getting one gift, it was a gift that showed how much he cared and how much he love him. This was also shown in one of the last scenes when the birth father of Junnosuke appears and takes him away. Although he does not externally show it, he is heartbroken to have to give Junnosuke to his father. Mr. Litterature let him go because the new father had the economic opportunity to give Junnosuke much more than he could ever give. The one thing that the birth father could not give him was love because he wasn't there for the majority of his life. In my opinion, it does not matter if they are biologically related or just a random person, it takes a real man to be a father and a dad to someone; to love and care for another human being. Although it took some time to develop, Mr. Literature proved to be a great father, even if he is not related.

The third movie that I decided to analyze was *Summer Wars. Summer Wars* was a bit different than the other movies that I chose because it was an animated film and it also took place many years afterwards than the movies that I have analyzed. In the 1970’s more and more women were not staying at home and tending every need. They were getting out there and furthering their education, getting jobs, contributing to the family salary and also having families later in life. The modern family structure was definitely seen more in this movie because of the storyline. The family came together for a family member for her birthday but when trouble struck, they were there to help out in whatever way necessary. When it was the grandmother’s birthday, everyone went out of their way to go and celebrate as a family. People were taking time from work to come, leaving their obligations aside and joining everyone in a joyous occasion. When they were all arriving, everyone was helping out and making sure that their grandmother was happy. Everyone was doing their chores and doing things to make sure that everything was going smoothly and that no chaos happened. This reminded me of my own family when everyone gets together. Because we live in different parts of the country and in the world, it is very difficult to get everyone together but it happened when one of my aunts was getting married. When everyone was there, everyone cooperated and made things less chaotic with so many people there. At that time, there were sixty members of my family and that number has increased since the last time. We had to make sure that everyone knew what we were doing so that there would be no confusion and everything would go smoothly, especially with that amount of people.

Another thing that I really liked about *Summer Wars* was the fact that everyone came together in the time of need. One of those times was when the virtual world was under attack and things that were affecting things on the screen were also affecting the real world. Everyone had a special tie or a special connection that would contribute to defeating the monster or virus that was controlling everything. Another thing that the family came together with was the passing of the grandmother. It was very important to show it because the grandmother was the person that brought everyone together for the celebration but it also brought them together for her funeral and her death. Although there was hurt and there was sadness because someone that was very well respected in their family and the community passed away, they had each other to support and to be there in a very painful time.

Throughout the research that I have accumulated for this paper, I have come to the conclusion that the movies do accurately portray the evolution of family structures over time. Even though there are several movies that will go against the family structure, the majority of them will follow it because it has to be accurate. If I had more time to work on this paper, I would have wanted to look at more films in different time periods as well and also branch out the film selections to ones that were not shown in class. Overall I am happy with the end results of my findings and I would like to see how the family structures change in the future, with more definitions of family developing more and more such as adoption, and insemination and sperm donors, just to name a few more different types of ways to have families. One thing I did take away from everything that it does not necessarily have to be blood related for you to love someone and have them as your family because as seen in more and more in the media, love is bigger than any biological bond that there can be.

Sources

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