

## INTRODUCTION

People are products of their environments. The immediate environment of an individual is his or her maternal communal society. Societies create villages, which then form cities; comprised cities form states and states consist of nations. Different nations are plotted geographically all around the world. Each nation contains its respective customs and culture. Traditional customs are habitual practices passed down by generations. Culture is the ideological and philosophical belief of a society; in combination with its customary practices. Culture brings reason and action to customs. I see culture as a mind; a mindful presence that progresses symbiotically with its people. Culture influences people, and people influence culture. The development and improvement of culture is gifted to each new mind of its generation. Each new generation benefits from the lessons learned from the previous. Thus, individual cultures change from generation to generation. Cultural ideological shifts are visible throughout time. Why do culture's conception of the doctrine of existence shift with time? What are common influences for a cultural shift? Do cultures influence cultures, or does the human ego prevent influence of one culture to another? In stride to answer these questions, this essay will consider the Japanese culture from the Edo period to the present; analyze the culture's ideological shift of loyalty, and the influence of which western American culture has had on present day Japan.

To demonstrate the ideological shift of Japanese culture, this paper will analyze four films of Japanese cinema and reference historical perspectives of the Edo period. Japanese cinema is rich in culture. Many films mirror the traditional folklore stories that have been passed down from generation to generation by storytelling and manuscript. The four films that will be discussed are: *The Hidden Blade*, *The Hidden Fortress*, *Kamikaze Girls* and *Tampopo*. Loyalty is a concept, a principal and an action. People can be loyal or disloyal to an array of ideas,

foundations, or people. Through viewing these five films it is understood that, traditionally Japanese culture held high importance for the loyalty of truth and honor.

## **Thesis**

With analysis from the four films mentioned above and historical reference of the Edo period, this essay will demonstrate Japan's cultural ideological shift of loyalty for truth and honor.

## **Loyalty to Truth**

The greatest Japanese film director of all time, Akira Kurosawa, confesses his own loyalty to truth in his novel, *Something like an Autobiography*. Kurosawa states that his whole life he has been an honest person. Since he was a young boy he valued honesty and did not dodge his responsibility of truth (Kurosawa, p.54). A humanist is someone who has a strong concern for human welfare, values, and dignity. Kurosawa is exactly this. His complex understanding of human nature is presented in his films. Kurosawa had a personal experience finding political truth. Towards the end of his painting career he was involved with the proletarian artist's league, which was a "leftist tendency" movement (Kurosawa, p.77). It seems Kurosawa was in a moral battle with himself towards the end of his affiliation with the underground proletarian communistic society. Which group is the one to follow and support? This question is frequently present amongst imperialism and clashing political forces. When governments and dictatorships are untruthful, what are the people to do? The *Hidden Blade* tells the story of a dishonest dynasty.

The hidden blade is a film that takes place in the late Edo period of Japan. This film incorporates conflict within a dynasty. Predicaments of loyalty and truth are raised in the plot of

the *Hidden Blade*. The protagonist of the film is Munezo Katigiri. Katagiri's character is another example of a good-natured man whom is in search of noble truth. The illicit and improper political actions of Chief Retainer Hori may be symbolic to the falling of the Tokugawa Dynasty. The illegitimate conduct of Hori can demonstrate the chaotic, circle of revenge and vengeance. Hori's situation also takes rise to the logical question- is the moral compass of one man capable of ruling the masses? It seems to me, that in the late Edo period Japanese Culture started to question the ruler ship of the dynasty. What allows the masses to be tricked and lied to?

The film, *Hidden fortress* hints that the search for noble truth can be jaded by greed. The two greedy peasants Matashichi and Tahei were characterized as silly, foolish and incompetent. The peasant's incompetence is mainly due to greed. General Rokurota is able to use the peasant's greed as a tool to control them. Their greed is blinding them from the truth. To me, this infers that the masses are greedy; and due to this present greed, the masses will easily fall to rhetoric delivered by its various leaders. Just as Matashichi and Tahei are bossed around and tricked by General Rokurota, the peasants of Japan at one time were ruled by small groups of people whom controlled them and sometimes deceived them. From the film there seemed to be three socio-economic tiers amongst Japan's countryside during the late Edo period. There were peasants, warriors and royalty. The majority of the populous was peasants, less warriors and a handful of royalty. And royalty ruled. I think the Japanese folklore message in *Hidden Fortress* is: to be aware of your ruler's integrity, and do not let greed blind the truth. Let us be loyal to truth. The main goal of a society is to unite and function together. In the film *Kamikaze Girls*, there is a conflicting message of unity.

## Loyalty to Unity

*Kamikaze Girls* emulates the ideology of individualism versus unity. This film is different from *Hidden Fortress* and *The Hidden Blade*, for *Kamikaze Girls* contains much influence from America. One proof of Northern American influence is the music. The music in the film has a lot of electric metal guitar. The progressions of the melodies are influenced by American rock. The western influenced ideology present in the film, is that individuals can fend for themselves and that an individual does not need to be dependent to the comforts and relations of society. Momoko is the protagonist of *Kamikaze Girls*; she claims that she does need relationships with people in society. She has found her passion in life, clothes. She has found her niche in loving clothes and wearing them. At times Momoko can seem very self absorbed and self centered. The American ego is, naturally self-centered; partly due to only having two border countries thousands of miles away from one another. North America's philosophy of success is very focused on the individual.

In the United States, the people are expected to leave home and become successful outside of the help from their family or unit. The individual is expected to be self reliant and self-sufficient. Western ideology does not emphasize focus on the village approach. It more focuses on the success of the individual. The other two films discussed above were produced fifty years before *Kamikaze Girls*. *Hidden Blade* and *Hidden Fortress* portray the importance of community and unity; that the whole is more important than the part. Traditionally, it seems to me that Japanese culture has focused very much of the progress of society as a whole, rather than the single success of one person. The heroes in Japanese film are those who have created unity and collaboration amongst the people. For example, in *Tampopo*, the noodle restaurant was created with the village approach. Multiple people contributed time and love in order to serve

quality noodles to many more. Momoko believes in the opposite. She portrays the American ideology for the importance of the success of the individual rather than the community. The antagonist of the film, Ichigo, is different from Momoko, in that she confides in a gang for comfort. The irony in the film is that Ichigo loses loyalty for the gang. She confesses to the gang that they are all posing losers and that she does not need them anymore. She references Momoko's independence, and says she wants to be more like her. The double irony of the film is that after Ichigo leaves the gang she joins Momoko in friendship; making a support group made up of the two. The message is that, we the people always rely on each other and that it is nice to have a loyal friend. Together they will be successful. Together they will support each other. They are very different from one another and will influence each other for the better. People love; love attracts people, and people come together. This is the law of attraction. That is why there are societies, cities, bands, mini-vans and fruit stands. The farmers grow the food for the towns' people, and the towns' people make money for the farmers. The community collaborates and benefits as a whole from each individual's skill. Every person is of equal importance. I think that the people of Japanese culture are being pressured by American's to become successful by "getting rich".

### **Comparison of Loyalty Over Time**

Throughout history Japanese culture has been searching for noble truth. I believe the search for noble truth has not shifted culturally in Japan, but maybe simply has diminished. Now that the country has a face of democracy, maybe the people have become more relaxed, and have forgotten those who struggled for noble truth in the past. The people of Japan endured hundreds of years of dictatorship from dynasty. I feel that the purpose for the production of *Hidden Fortress* and *Hidden Blade* is to remind Japanese culture to question the direction of leadership

and government; to not hold everything that the leader says as absolute truth. This message is hidden within *Kamikaze Girls*. Ichigo's gang was loyally following a leader that she had completely made up. The face of the made up leader was a puppet for Ichigo to control and manipulate the gang as she herself wanted to. I think the made up leader metaphorically represents democracy, while Ichigo represents the dictator and the gang represents the masses.

### **COLCLUSION**

To not follow blindly, and to work to together to find noble truth, are the two biggest lessons I've learned from Japanese cinema, to care for each other, and to collaborate together to achieve happiness and comfort. Nearly every human action is committed in effort for happiness. Things we love bring us happiness. What is true happiness? The people of the world need to connect with their inner selves to answer this question, and not allow material obsessions to control actions. Each person should act with love and compassion for one another. It is predicted that the rest of the world will follow the foreseeable hyperinflation of the United States. Hyperinflation induces economic depression. In the next decade it is possible that the world experiences economic depression. To survive a world-depression the people need to stay true to each other, and unite with love and compassion.

## **Works Cited**