

Make up and Costuming in Japanese Films

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Introduction

Exploring Make up and costuming significance in Japanese Cinema is a reflection of class, era and personality. Looking at the ways that these seemingly simple effects can transform a scene without any dialogue or enhance a scene with lots of drama is thrilling. Make up and costume influence, signify and develop character identities/personalities in Japanese cinema. It is necessary to understand the class system of Japan, specifically during the periods that the three films I have selected. Understanding this system will lend itself to assist in the introduction of clothing expectations for the varying classes represented in my film examples. Subsequently these choices are also affected by the gender of the wearer not just their social status.

Heian period clothing was luxurious and followed rigid rules of what was proper to where and by whom. Later on during the Medieval period of Japan, these rules were reigned back for sensible reasons and change in political climate. During this medieval period, villagers were allowed to leave their towns still but by the time the Tokugawa era began, villagers were no longer allowed to leave their land to found new homes. The hierarchy of classes until this point had been more about noble birth and standing. The films I chose are only between certain eras for the purpose of more focus: approximately between Azuchi Momoyama and Tokugawa/Edo. Hidden Fortress and Ugetsu both bear hallmarks of the Muromachi- Azuchi Momoyama (Medieval) period or feudal Japan which is full of turmoil following the Heian era's lavishness and indifference to actual government interests. We see strife in civil war, peasants being displaced by war, even

some retainers needing to escape certain death. It was custom to kill the entire family of a defeated Shogun/family during the civil war period of Japan's history. Red Beard is a great overview of the Tokugawa/Edo period issues at hand. We see the effects of a closed border and the rise of power of the shogun as well as the influence of the Dutch (medicine) whom still had the ability to interact with Japan during this "closed border" period.

There are many cultural essences from Japan that are relevant to my three movie selections which are easy to find in the films. The Japanese language is high context and non-verbal cues become incredibly important in day to day interactions, this is apparent in movies as well though they are meant to be entertainment. In a busy town center, it is easy to decipher who is from what social standing based on their mannerisms and often are literally judged by their clothing by the viewer of the film and the characters in the scene. Additionally these mannerisms are affected by "honne" (private feelings) and "tatemae" (public face) and are coupled with "haragei" which is the non verbal way of communicating I have introduced already. This haragei is largely present in all three films I selected in varying combinations of characters; wife and husband, peasant man to peasant man, boss and employee, etc. This is more important in Japan than what the average American assumes, it is more than a "keeping up appearances" cultural value. This is intended to lubricate the communication between people.

Naturally in Japanese society there are selected expectations for each gender including clothing and body language. As with most cultures it is easy to see the differences between a man and a woman with just a glance, no verbal communication necessary. In the Heian period, keeping appearances and dressing appropriately was of utmost importance as the focus was fully on developing the arts and engaging in them. Into Medieval Japan's eras these priorities changed as

the political climate tensed. Central power shifted to Shogun and their retainers rather than just with the Emperor, it became necessary for dress to reflect the day to day life of the typical Japanese person; shorter sleeves, less robes, accommodations for armor and more movement. Women also change as it was customary to wear many robes in the Heian court, their clothes began to reflect the more functional and simple dressing style of poorer women, A simple “underwear” type robe and with an additional top layer, their sashes even became smaller as movement was more necessary for all not just warriors and politicians.

Japanese Class System in Film

The Heian period in Japan was a time of opulence and focus on the court life. Poetry and arts were incredibly popular as Japan was borrowing much culture from China. The Japanese class system along with class specific costumes popped up in art as well as poetry. They are written about specifically in novels such as Tale of Genji and The Pillow Book. Later on in Medieval Japan some of this beauty remained despite the increased practicality in life and dress. Ugetsu has a great reminder of this beautiful time, as it is set not long after the Heian period has come to a close and Japan has entered a feudal period with many Generals or “Shogun” seeking to claim the land as their own. Lady Wakasa has incredibly expensive kimono on and stands out when she comes to the market to purchase vases. Her long hair and sunshade stand out but are not much of a distraction for many of the market goers. One of the ways to know her class level is also how many robes she is wearing, 5 layers, which is a remnant of the Heian 12 layer robes of court ladies. Peasants have a very particular look as well, though they are not as rich they have certain textures, cloths and patterns that are sensible for them to create or purchase for wearing. For example in Hidden Fortress we see that when Rokurota and Princess Yuki went into hiding they

selected easy to wear outfits that the poor wear, which had plenty of mobility. Generally these outfits were a disguise but it is obvious by the way that Rokurota handles interpersonal communication that he is not simply a wandering peasant or even a criminal. The original name of the movie was “Kakushi Toride No San Akunin” which means “Three Bad Men in a Hidden Fortress”. From Richie (2012) “there are three bad men, though we are shown only two- the thieving, lying peasants- until we realize that General Mifune...our hero is just as bad.” (P. 172) this temporary confusion is what I believe to be the outfits that all three men are wearing versus their outward behavior and their private intentions. Their clothes are more practical; the two peasants from Hidden Fortress are dress plainly but are easily fooled by Princess Yuki and Rokurota because they are all wearing approximately the same humble outfits. The peasants Tahei and Matashichi are clearly downtrodden and poor but they display all of their feelings on the outside. Tahei and Matashichi do not concern themselves with honne, tatemae or haragei. The style of plain or easy to dye colors on the robes that all the villagers wear makes an appearance in Red Beard as well. The poor patients in the clinic that Dr. Niide runs are all dressed quite commonly but once they become patients they accept the role of a patient and the patterned robe that comes with it. Yasumoto initially is confused that Dr. Niide would give patients such quality care and exceptional clothes and food (in comparison to their class level). This comparison is drawn out of how Dr. Niide asks all his doctors to wear a simple robe, the pomp of Yasumoto’s patterned robe and hakama are unnecessary for the job of a town doctor. Red Beard is set in the Tokugawa period of Japan’s history. During this time Japan had closed its borders to foreigners with the exception of the Dutch, which Yasumoto has studied medicine under. This Shogunate sanctioned closure was part of a freezing of the classes and mostly locked

down country that had to follow many different rules, meaning the Shogunate had great power and lived lavishly. Yasumoto's disappointment at being assigned to the clinic is quite obvious in his body language and verbal treatment of Dr. Niide and others on the doctor team. Interestingly enough, Japanese dress often came to imitate the clothing styles of the common people as their style was most sensible and versatile for active lifestyles.

Non-Verbal Body Language and Japanese Culture

Nonverbal Body language and culturally significant points are reinforced by mannerisms and makeup. The Japanese language is high context in conversation and also in society, often in films makeup is subtle enough to convey a bigger message: In *Ugetsu* Lady Wakasa looks like a beautiful vision of the perfect rich and refined wife but as soon as Genjuro realizes that she is just a spirit, her artfully applied eyebrows seem to transform with the darker lighting into demon's horns. The shadows cast over her pale face are ominous and the viewer is concerned that Genjuro will not make it. The refinement of Lady Wakasa even as she is revealed as a spirit is very elegant and a stark contrast to the way Ohama acts with her husband. She is not concerned about who sees her striking or yelling at her husband, clearly Ohama and Wakasa have different feeling about how freely to speak to their husband in public and in private. Akahige doctor's uniforms are another great example of this, Yasumoto refuses to change his patterned outfit for the plain clothes that the clinic's doctors wear. His outward stubbornness is reflected in his clothing but also his body language as he is not receptive to joining the other doctors as a comrade nor is he prepared to help Dr. Niide. In *Hidden Fortress*, Princess Yuki is

dressed like a lower class woman but also peculiar as she is dressed similar to a man. Later in the movie when she is able to come out of her disguise we see her completely transformed even in voice and temperament, she is refined and elegant wearing her many robes and lady like hairstyle. The way the princess carries herself in Hidden Fortress is very strong and we understand that her upbringing/situation was unusual even before it is literally spoke about by her retainers. Though her disguise was not too shocking to the regular population because women were actually allowed to become samurai or warriors during the period which the movie is set in, they simply took orders from a male samurai or leader of equal or higher status(which would be Rokurota). Princess Yuki seems to realize the gravity of her position as princess and remaining member of her family name as the crude and rough way she speaks to her escorts Rokurota, Tahei and Matashichi during their adventure disappears without a trace. This transformation visually and verbally compel Tahei and Matashichi to respect her and bow down. While on the adventure her style of dress and demeanor did not compel Tahei or Matashichi to grovel or respect her as a princess. Red Beard offers another glimpse of this servant and lord relationship in the way that the nurse acts with the Mantis, she is absolutely committed to her job and does not mind spending her young days locked away with the Mantis. Eventually Mantis' father is shamed for forcing such a young vibrant woman to care for his daughter when she should be out enjoying life. This is something the nurse would have never brought up to her boss and certainly would have dealt with her duty to take care of the Mantis. As a constant in all of these films are that the poor look nearly identical and are easy to spot in any scene. Finally I think the best example of this transformation is when Otoyo arrives at the clinic in the movie Red Beard and Yasumoto offers her new clothes but which she accepts out of respect but does

not wear because she does not feel like she deserves to wear new clothes. Later on as Otoyo grows

Gender Specifics and Expectations

There are differences and similarities between Japanese men and women's costume and expectations of visual aesthetics: In addition to nonverbal body language and mannerisms the make-up can also subtly convey interest or plot progressions. In Ugetsu, Lady Wakasa with her eyebrows looking like horns is a symbol of the wealthy but greed filled dream that Genjuro is living with his ghost wife as Wakasa herself is filled with greed, but for love. This transformation from gentle noble woman to vengeful spirit is shocking to the viewer and accompanied by the change in lighting, everything takes a more ominous turn. Mizoguchi as a director was aware of this as in Richie (2012) "he was both literary and painterly: he thought in terms of character rather than camera...composed his scenes in a pictorially pleasing manner." (p. 131-132) Wakasa elegant makeup compared with Miyagi is a stark but poetic contrast to the two women's statures in feudal Japan life. Miyagi is dark skinned, plain clothes and also has short hair which is most practical for her. Genjuro makes a decision to be spirited away by Lady Wakasa because of her wealth not just her beauty though her appearance is a contrast to what he is used to. Appearances were important in Heian times and this importance on aesthetics persisted into the feudal period of Japan. This type of character development is also seen in the General Hyoe Tadokoro when he is spared from his duel with Rokurota. Men would duel and the winner took the life of the loser. When we see him next his defeated look already speaks to the viewer and creates the idea that we are about to see him do something quite different. He is upset that he was done the honor of being killed after losing his duel. Akahige and his beard – also

general women with short hair compared to women with long hair. – Kitchen women in Akahige compared to the brothel owner who comes to take Otoyo back.

Conclusion

In summary clothing is an integral part of society and also film. Costuming and makeup is one of the ways that we come to understand the characters we see in the films beyond their characters script. There more so than in western films we see additional pathways in Japanese films to understanding Japanese culture and language. Through three eras; Heian, Feudal Japan and Tokugawa/Edo period. Heian period saw a renaissance of culture and arts that culminated in elegant court life with lasting effects on clothing styles. During Feudal times these styles began a transformation into more versatile and functional pieces. Though the class system froze into a hierarchy of warriors, peasants, artisans and merchants; it is still possible to discern between the four. Peasants ranked under warriors because they produced goods, instead of simply working with moving or selling the good of others. For the average Japanese person this affected not only their clothing but also their demeanor when speaking to another individual. A higher class person would also be susceptible to certain criteria for interpersonal communication as much as any other person in the hierarchy of classes. Makeup served as one of the first non-verbal cues along with clothes such as a married woman with blackened teeth and hair that reached past her feet or a common lady with darkened skin from working in the sun like Lady Wakasa and Miyagi. We also see Yasumoto and Dr. Niide, Yasumoto is concerned with working with Shogun and achieving a luxurious life (clean shaven with hakama and top knot) then we see Dr. Niide who embraces a European look by wearing a beard but is still dressing for his station as he helps common folk with their maladies instead of dressing for luxury and expecting it to come to him.

Hidden Fortress has quite a few topics that leap out at the viewer such as Princess Yuki's upbringing being treated like a son instead of a daughter but still understanding her place as the princess and now sole heir of her family's legacy. This duty comes out in full at the end of the movie when she discards the disguise of a common woman and puts on the many robes necessary for a higher class woman to assume her place. Her transformation is completed by her body language and also her way of speaking. As time passes on, we still see these elements in the Japanese culture and in its films today, drawing on the past as a template to improve the future.

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