UT Austin Essay

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Personal Essay

As a person who dreams of becoming a movie director in Japan and changing the Japanese movie history, I cannot help but notice that Japanese films gain little attention from all over the world now. The general opinion about this problem is that Japanese film industry has minuscule budget, which keeps us from making movies with special effects and explosive elements. In my view, however, the main problems lie elsewhere.

First and foremost, the Japanese movie industry needs a big revolution to expand their target to the world. Although Japanese animation and comic industry are greatly successful, the movie industry is severely closed in Japan, focusing extremely on domestic audiences. Even worse, its target is getting narrower to women and couples intending to get the stable box office. To break this pattern, we need to take bold action aiming for a global audience. However, to carry out this expansion successfully, Japanese producers need to focus on fundamental film elements that they are currently missing: casting insight and cultural reflection.

In my opinion, Japanese production teams underestimate the importance of casting. Currently, they pick actors based mainly on their appearance ignoring their actual ability to act. In fact, it is not surprising for Japanese filmmakers to choose an attractive model or singer without acting experience for the main character of films and TV shows. They do this to draw attention from their supporters. In doing so, they overlook the fact that casting can change our perspective of the story. American TV shows are great examples of assigning right actors with ample experience to each character. Taking *The Office*, the American TV show, for instance, casting directors selected professional actors considering how they would

fit in with each character. Although this TV show consisted of a lot of unknown actors without viewership platforms, it achieved great success because of its unprecedented style and each actor's unique performance. This heightened insight of casting is the reason talented people are often discovered out of nowhere in the United States, whereas that hardly happens in Japan. Japanese directors lack this vision of selecting the right person for the movies.

Unfortunately, the issue of casting alone is not enough to improve the Japanese industry. The important point that Japanese film directors miss is cultural reflection. In order to attract people all over the world, we need to show the uniqueness of our culture. Americans are enjoying their freedom, racial diversity, and the great variety of history. Chinese movies entertain us with Kung Fu, which has long and profound history. Japanese films, however, focus less on reflecting our cultural uniqueness since we lost Akira Kurosawa, the greatest director in Japanese movie history who faithfully expressed many of Japanese Samurai culture through films like *Rashomon* and *The Seven Samurai.* Current movie directors rarely make films that reflect Samurai culture that Japanese should be proud of. More ironically, American producers started making these movies in place of Japanese directors such as *The Last Samurai* and *47 Ronin*. In my opinion, cultural stories should be produced by those of the culture, because culture holds invisible things like values, spirit, and tradition that are best conveyed by those within that culture.

It goes without saying that Japanese movies have the potential to entertain global audiences because they already showed their creativity through comic books and animations. However, its closed movie industry loses the quality of Japanese movies these days. To overcome this trend, we need to establish a new system that proudly present our films to the world. Casting insights and cultural reflection are the top priorities to make this attempt successful.