

The Piano in the Ruins ——An Analysis of the Details and Character Creation in “Ryuichi Sakamoto: CODA”

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ABSTRACT. *In this paper, it is based on the film “Ryuichi Sakamoto: CODA”, dividing the chapters into the film’s narrative and arrangement, lens’ analysis and detail application, and the character creation. This paper aims to give an analysis of Stephen Nomura Schible’s style of detail presentation and character creation.*

KEYWORDS: *Film analysis; Stephen Nomura Schible; Ryuichi Sakamoto; Documentary*

1. Introduction

The documentary film, "Ryuichi Sakamoto: CODA", directed by Stephen Nomura Schible was released in Japan in November 2017 (IMDb, 2018)[1]. In the musical terminology, coda means a passage that stresses the termination effect in the last paragraph of a movement, and its Japanese translation was called "Final Movement". The documentary was mainly edited in the chronological order from 2012 to 2017, a span of five years, involving films he joined in the past several decades, such as "Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence", "The Last Emperor", "The Sheltering Sky", "The Revenant" as well as the precious clips of YMO activities 40 years ago (IMDb, 2018)[1].

Based on the efforts made by Ryuichi Sakamoto in anti-nuclearism, pursuit in the naturality of music as well as the love of music that he can't give up, dividing the chapters according to his several important performances, taking the form of interviews, records and material collages, the documentary presented the music career of Ryuichi Sakamoto and his current state of life.

2. Narrative structure and plot arrangement

There was a typical feature in the film that it followed a multi-line structure (Bernard, 2007)[2], including professor Ryuichi Sakamoto’s visit to the Fukushima nuclear power plant after the Great East Japan Earthquake, the recuperation process at home in the wake of being told he had cancer, the performances from the 1990s to

the past two years as well as the film scores he attended in the last 40 years. The historical materials were presented in chronological order from 1972 to 2017. The interview at home was taken as the main line, connecting other clues. Since it was not imposed on the film by the postproduction, the film appeared natural and integrated. Secondly, the actual sound of the part of the interviews, as a transition factor, played a role in connecting the pictures, which made the film more compact and concise. However, this also highlighted the abruptness of this film that there was no transition during collaging the film materials, which was a double-edged sword (Zhu, 1991)[3].

The overall plot arrangement was very compact, and utilized a lot of clues foreshadowing and flashback techniques during the process, effectively taking advantage of the elaboration of attention, memory and imagination in "The Photoplay: A Psychological Study" by Hugo Munsterberg (2001)[4]:

Various hidden clues were reasonably well-placed and were the highlight of this film. The beginning seemed to get the audience confused--in the deserted ruins, all of sudden, the lens switched to a piano on the broken stage, and Ryuichi Sakamoto was playing it. The picture was ridiculous: a world-renowned master of music was playing a piano out of tune in a dilapidated surrounding. Then in the process of playing the film, the story of this piano was slowly uncovered. The ruins were in a high school near the Fukushima nuclear power plant, and the piano was the one that had experienced a tsunami and was already drowning. "I feel this is the corpse of the piano" he said. Till the latter part of the film, we got a clear understanding of what Mr. Sakamoto's thought towards this: after the industrial revolution, we distorted all forms of nature as we wished. It took months and years to make those logs into a piano by utilizing the mechanical pressure. However, after a period of time, we would say that the piano was loose; the sound was out of tune and the piano needed to be adjusted. But the truth was that nature was struggling to return to the past. The sound out of tune was the one of nature's resilience.

Then the lens turned to the hands playing the piano and the keys of black and white. Zooming out, there appeared his black sweater and white hair, which was symphony of blacks and whites and the resonance between the person who survived the cancer and the piano that experienced tsunami. Further, rows of spectators under the stage entered the lens. He gave the complete self of the present to the people, with that loneliness, and the resonance among loneliness. It was the piano in the ruins that was the clue throughout the themes of this documentary: anti-nuclear energy development, reverence for original music of the nature, unyieldingness during the anti-cancer period, and love for music.

Another example was that the camera shot the scene that he was out of the house for first time when he was interviewed. He walked on the streets of New York. There happened to be a fire truck coming at the crossroads. Its warning sound and whistle sounded very abruptly, but in the next second, the lens switched to the scene where the professor worked in the recording studio. As the audience got confused, he unlocked the memories of 911 period. This kind of foreshadowing was probably a typical shot in film psychology.

3. Lens content analysis and detail application

3.1 Lens content analysis

The use of zoom shots was ritualistic. For example, the place where the zoom shots were used in the film would leave a deep impression on the audience: when the protagonist listened to the wind, the rustle of leaves, and the sound of birds in the woods, the telescopic lens advanced and pushed the close-up of the professor's ear before audience's eyes to highlight his value of listening to the nature. When he walked barefoot along the beach after the tsunami, with all the sounds of the waves, the wind, the footsteps rubbing the sand and the infinitely magnifying "drop" sound of the radiation detecting instrument in his hand, the lens zoomed in his foot and face wrapped in the radiation proof clothes, which was foreshadowing for his later speaking for anti-nuclearism. In reviewing the film, *The Sheltering Star*, he was reading the novel "because we don't know when we gonna die..." The lens advanced, and the music that he composed was gradually strengthened, seeming to tell his understanding of the relationship between film scores and film. At the end of the movie, a live clip of the 2017 *Solaris* private show was played. There appeared the narrow and dim room and gradually blurred shadow. The telescopic lens shot from the near to the distant, which was utilized only once in the film. The camera told the audience that it was tears that blur our eyes.

The three images with back to camera in the film were extremely tensioned (Giannetti, 2016)[5]. When he learned he was suffering from nasopharyngeal cancer, he stopped all his work, and recovered at home. It was the first time that the character turned his back to camera. First spreading on the sofa, then walking to the window, this back blended with the cool colors outside the window--lonely and lonely (Giannetti, 2016). It was also the only time that there was no piano playing when filming in his house. When he went to the woods to gather the sounds, he seemed to be immersed in listening to the sounds of the nature, and this scene was full of hidden and mysterious atmosphere (Giannetti, 2016), which was the second time when the back image appeared. The back image appeared for the third time when he watched the film *Solaris*. He had different whimsies when the rain fell on people's clothes, in the grass, on the wooden table, and in the ceramic tea set. He simply put the plastic bucket on his head and walked into the rain. The rain slammed on him, but he didn't care. He was just like a child when chasing the sound, so that he was completely opposite to the camera with his back, as if there was no camera, no audience. He was in his own world. The three images with back to camera represented completely different emotions and meanings, but they were full of tension.

3.2 Detail application

Film clips of *Solaris* have appeared many times throughout the documentary, with multiple clues buried. The first time the clue appeared was when he watched the movie at home. The plot happened to be the scene that the hero and heroine were

in weightlessness in the room and began to float in the air. At this time, in their room, if audience carefully observed, they were able to find that the paintings of the old Peter Bruegel series were just hanged, and the lens gave a close-up to "The Hunters in the Snow". Later, a similar world of snow and ice appeared as he looked out the window, which was also one of the inspirations for Ryuichi Sakamoto to score for the film "The Revenant" with Main Theme. Another time, the analysis of rain sound mentioned in the previous paragraph made him want to try the sounds of all kinds of utensils hit by the rain, leading him to want to make an album about his understanding of nature.

Sound, as another means of spatial modeling, is not only necessary for the film production, but also irreplaceable by visual images in some cases (Ren and Zhong, 1998)[6]. The protagonist of the film was a master of the film score, so the hard work and details behind were incisively and vividly displayed: from sound collecting, recording to the music composition, the film was arranged reasonably by changing the music soundtrack as a node, converting scenes and promoting the development of the plot (Wang and Liu, 2004)[7].

Actually, music and effect sound is an effective means to form spatial images in the human brain. As far as music is concerned, its expressiveness is almost infinite. It can express the emotion, present the artistic conception, or display a certain scene (Wang and Liu, 2004). For example, when we heard "Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence", we would feel a kind of sadness and bitterness from the music, which is the example of expressing emotion. We can also experience the negation and reflection of Japan's post-war thoughts, which eulogize fraternity, justice and freedom. That is the example of presenting the artistic conception. We can also think through this piece of music that when the motherland was trapped in the evil, as an individual, what kind of moral sense people should have.

The effect sound is more vivid than the music, and its spatial modeling is more specific, more real and easier to grasp than the music. Both the roar and explosions of the aircraft in the background when Ryuichi Sakamoto narrating the 911 events, and the sound of the piano when he walked in the radiation area, were all expressions of the effect sound. From the above examples, it can be seen that the sound not only has the ability to create the image of the picture. If the specific sound is added or given to a certain picture, the original meaning and the connotation of the picture can be not only enriched and vivid, but also may be changed and modified (Wang and Liu, 2004). Ryuichi Sakamoto has devoted most of his life to music, which is the new peak of the film music. The music of this film is the essence of his works and the textbook of the film score industry.

Just as the film score is to render the atmosphere, enhance the expression of the story or the scene, and resonate with people's hearts, the most excellent thing about this documentary film was that it conveyed the atmosphere of the time. One of the tips was the volume of the music. For example, Ryuichi Sakamoto and two musicians went to the stadium for temporary evacuation in the disaster area to perform for the affected people. When the music of "Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence" was played, most people began to shed tears. In three clips of his

important performances, the volume of the music was the largest in comparison to that of the interview or the historical data clips of the work, which was also an important reason for highlighting the characters and manufacturing the atmosphere.

4. Analysis of character creation

The film was centered on the characters, and it must have a certain research on the creation of the characters. They are as follows:

Starting with the details, characters were set off with events, external surroundings, and so on (McKee, 1997)[8]. He has a great persistence in the sound itself, and his love for music has reached a level where he can't give up. In order to find the natural "sound", he went to Africa, the Arctic Circle and other places around the world to personally record. In an extremely cold place, he walked to the edge of the high ice wall, took out two small bells and gently touched it, and immediately there was a crisp and restful sound. He showed a surprised expression and grinned like a child: "This is really amazing! This sound is a mixture of water, clouds and nature." Then he squatted on the ice, and threw the recording tool tied with a rope into the cracked ice until it was into the water. He had a small icedrop on his nose. He looked up at the camera and said, "I'm fishing the sound."

It is through the core theme: the contrast between nature and man-made objects, to highlight the process of the character's progress. Ryuichi Sakamoto definitely is in possession of some qualities that others don't have. These qualities can be reflected in his pursuit of music and then integrated into his music. Even in today's world of amusing ourselves to death, taking pleasure in ugliness and being rampant with impetuosity and desire, there is such an old man who is able to listen to the sound (social voice, natural sound) and create music with pure feelings.

The proposition has been finalized since then: how to make it possible that the music as an artifact becomes eternal? It could not only describe the richness of each real moment, but also intone the predestined imperfection; it is able to not only fill the fragmentary position, but also say nothing about it; it could use whole rest but seem to never end. He picked up his camera after the 911 incidents. The building burning in the smoke was in sharp contrast to the free-flying birds, which was the image friction between manpower and nature. A few days later, when he passed through Union Square, he heard someone playing Yesterday, suddenly realizing that music had been absent from his life for a whole week, which did not make him feel unusual. While in the wake of the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant, he walked along the beach. The pounding waves, the sound of the wind, the rustle of grains of sand also stand contrasted with the noise of drops from the radiation detecting instrument, which was the auditory collision between man and nature. The one-way nature of life has appeared in front of him again and again, which made him head towards those voices from the agonal and the eternal. He also put on radiation proof clothes to the Fukushima isolation area to see the empty city where the radiation was settled. He stood in the forefront of the anti-nuclear parade and brought the "Mr. Lawrence Merry Christmas" to the victims. "Everyone is cold.

Come to listen to the music." He opposed the use of nuclear energy, opposed the war, and shouted the slogan "Love can conquer hate" around the world.

Seemingly, it was a documentary shot in five years, but in fact it had a long span, which was a review of his life of previous 40 years. This documentary was not a straightforward story, but brought the audience directly to the Ryuichi Sakamoto's life scene: with his interviews and self-reports, precious historical materials, film clips and his wonderful soundtrack. As a result, it showed us an artist's three-dimensional life: from the YMO genius boy who painted the exaggerated dark eye shadow, to the enlightened middle-aged man endowed by Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, and then to the man with silver-haired who was re-opening to Bach, from the avant-garde rebellious electronic music, to the attention to voices of silence that were destroyed or suppressed in the world, to the obsession with the pure "quality" sound when he prepared the inclusive "Async" album.

The parallel intertwining of the life trajectories and the music trajectories is a discovery of the "naturalness" and Ryuichi Sakamoto, as a composer, social activist, and experimental sound artist. This discovery symbolically condensed the image that frequently appeared in the film--he bent slightly in front of the piano, and nod in an obeisant way, like a humble listener and interlocutor. His life trajectory, artistic consciousness and musical performances, experience or action, are diving in time and growing on the ground in constant imitation and dialogue with the world. In the end, all this becomes the identity of Sakamoto's ego, and becomes all the strength that an artist could contain.

5. Conclusion

This documentary was collecting materials from the real life, explaining life in the form of life itself, expressing emotions and sublimating philosophy. "The problem appeared in the documentary was an existence, a process, and a snippet in real life, in order to reflect the reality of life, to give the audience a basis for evaluating life, a real life experience." This was the beauty of it.

The documentary "Ryuichi Sakamoto: CODA" combined Sakamoto's deep thinking and exploration of music culture and anti-war culture, with a multi-line structure throughout the film. The emphasis on non-fiction reflected the aesthetic core of "Beauty is Life". At the same time, the aesthetic and artistic expression of daily life had a new interpretation of "Beauty is Life". As a documentary of the character biography, the character creation was extremely strong, trying to establish a special harmonious relationship between the perceptual form, content meaning and aesthetic value, emphasizing the parallelism of consciousness and artistic feeling.

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