

Ethan Holen

HIST-120

### Writing about Heian Japan

In this essay I would like to examine the development of the character Princess in the tale of princess Kaguya. As she grows and is shaped by those around her over the course of the story.

In the movie the tale of princess Kaguya, the main character "Princess" is found in a bamboo forest. The man who finds her is a poor woodcutter. She is found as a tiny princess but when she is taken home to the woodcutter's wife she transforms into a crying baby. As she grows up in the woodcutting settlement the other children begin to notice that she is a bit odd. She can sometimes be seen growing in front of her peers and seems to grow and develop at an unusually fast rate. Because of this they give her the nickname little bamboo (because she shoots up like a bamboo). As time goes on, she makes good friends with most of the children in the town.

Unfortunately, she is forced to leave the town after her father finds gold and some beautiful robes inside of a bamboo shoot in the forest. Taking this as a sign from the gods that whoever sent his daughter to him wants her to be brought up as royalty, he chooses to take her into the city and buy a mansion for her. While she is initially delighted by their move into the city, she is brought a tutor who is meant to teach her the ways of being a court lady. This does not go well, and she is extremely against being forced to endure the training. Desiring to return to the woodcutting village instead. Although when her father attends the sessions with her, she preforms exceptionally well. This natural talent, it seems, is yet another gift from the gods bestowed upon her.

The next great change in her life occurs at her coming-of-age ceremony in which she is given a new name. The man in charge of this, in seeing her great beauty decides on the name Princess Kaguya (the shining princess). After this event many people are invited to the celebration of her naming. Coming to see her great beauty some of the men are disappointed that they are unable to see her and begin to mock her father about allowing a common girl to become a princess. In response to this Kaguya runs away from the city, back to the village she came from but finds it deserted. An old man tells her that they will be coming back in 10 years because they want to wait for the forest to regrow, so they are able to cut it down again. Hearing this she returns without hope to the city where she resigns herself to becoming a lady.

Hearing of her great beauty, from the man who named her, many of the noblemen come to her house as suitors asking for her hand in marriage. They each confess their love for her, comparing her to some beautiful or rare object. Hearing this while being hidden behind a curtain she tells them that if they would have her hand in marriage they should bring these beautiful objects to her in order that they might prove their love. The men, being unable to attain the mythical gifts leave in shame. Following this victory for her (as she does not wish to be married) she asks to go see the cherry blossoms bloom. While dancing under the cherry blossom trees in joy she trips over a small child. The mother quickly moves the child out of the way and apologizes to her profusely bringing her back to reality and reminding her of her position in the society. Saddened she returns to her mansion. On the return journey she sees one of her old playmates from the village stealing a chicken. He recognizes her but in doing so is caught and beaten by the man he stole from.

After she returns home a few of her suitors return claiming to be in possession of the precious items they compared her to. Though in the end she finds them all to be counterfeit and

dismisses them in turn. After spurning all of them the emperor himself gains an interest in her. After she refuses his court summons, he visits her home attempting to force himself upon her. She is able to get away and convinces him to leave. After this encounter she confesses to her parents that during the struggle she remembered where she came from, the Moon. During her struggle she had called out and the moon had answered telling her that that was where she came from and that they would be coming back soon to get her. Hearing this her father begins to make preparations to defeat the mansion against the people of the moon wishing not to lose his daughter.

While her father prepares Princess Kaguya returns to the village she grew up in. Finding the same childhood friend who stole the chicken she professes her love for him which had been developing all these years. They fly together thorough the air before encountering the moon and falling out of the sky. After this Princess Kaguya disappears and the man she was with interprets it as a dream.

Returning to the mansion Princess Kaguya awaits the arrival of the people of the moon. When they arrive on a cloud in a large procession led by Buddha, her fathers men begin to shoot at them with arrows. Yet they all turn to flowers upon impact and are useless. Taking her away they offer her a cloak that will erase all of her memories from the earth. She has only a moment to say goodbye to her parents before she puts it on and is taken back to the moon. The final scene of the movie shows Princess Kaguya remembering the earth but only as a passing dream.

This story was interesting to me in that Princess, thought the book finds joy in the simple things in life. While her father seems to think that surrounding her with beautiful things will make her happier, the opposite is often true. Princess was truly happy when she was the poorest, she ever was at the beginning of her life. This story teaches that happiness is not something that

is dependent upon physical possessions and rather has more to do with the people surrounding us and how they affect our lives. The servants at the mansion only made princess miserable while the children of the village made her feel joy. The lesson to be learned from princess Kaguya is to not value material things over the people who we love.