

Wajahat Khan  
Lida Wu  
R1b Films  
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### Crafting till perfection

The official trailer for Jiro Dreams of Sushi highlights everything about people's depiction of the Japanese culture and craft. The trailer has the orchestra music playing with Jiro making his sushi, emphasizing that the audience will perceive that this sushi is at its perfection. In every shot, you have Jiro looking at sushi and observing that the sushi is at its finest, from him looking over his apprentice shoulders to looking at his customers' food. In this video that is uploaded to YouTube, you can see comments such as "This man epitomizes the true meaning of Japanese devotion" and "10 years before they let the apprentice make the egg! Not even sushi, just the egg making in the kitchen. Wow! Love love love Japanese culture for their discipline and consistency". The idea of Japanese craft started in 1927 by Takamura Toyochika, who made it mainstream in the Japanese culture and somewhat world wide. The idea was that one person would spend their life dedicated to something they are passionate about and perfecting their craft. Similarly, in the documentary, we have Jiro, who has spent his entire life perfecting the art of making sushi. Director David Gelb has exaggerated the Japanese craft and devotions throughout the documentary to where people perceive them are stereotypes.

The very first thing that exaggerates the Japanese devotion is the plot of the documentary. It continually reminds us that Jiro has been working for his entire life to perfect his craft for his sushi restaurant. The idea of Japanese culture working for their whole life to perfect their art is a stereotype derived from the idea that "crafts must exist in everyday life" (12). In the 1930's the Japanese craft meant something that you do

everyday to help perfect your craft but not to where you are spending your entire life. Throughout the documentary, they kept referencing Jiro's age repeatedly to determine how much time he has spent. Jiro even says, "Even at my age, in my work, I haven't reached perfection," meaning that he is still trying to perfect his craft after all the years he has spent. In "Japan, people believe they have a wide range of choices; they live their lives and are socialized to perceive that their choices define their public selves" (Final days,4). Many different references are made about Jiro being praised for his hard work with dedicating his life for sushi. One example is when Jiro's older son goes shopping at the market where the old dealer says that he will be retiring soon and that he admires Jiro for the hard work he has put in. There is a big concern about what will happen after Jiro passes away and how his son will live up to his dad's reputation.

Jiro's son and apprentice will inevitably have to take over his restaurant with Jiro's current age. Like Jiro, the apprentices have spent more than ten years working for him to show their dedication to how much they also want to perfect the recipe of sushi. When interviewed about why they do at the sushi bar, they respond because "this place has the best sushi....and are following our dream of making the best sushi". Their dedication has been exaggerated to the point where they point out that it took them ten years so that Jiro would allow them to make eggs and not even the sushi. The idea that it took them ten years to make eggs sells on the purpose that they are dedicated. However, his son's expectations are higher when he says, "My son must do this for the rest of his" the son does want to do it for the rest of his life and learns to make the sushi. This idea of Jiro's oldest son takes over his restaurant rather than his younger brother

Jiro considers talented. Still, the older son has to take the restaurant because he is older.

Throughout the documentary, we hear the orchestrated music with scenes of Jiro making sushi. In a way, Jiro is the conductor, and the sushi is the symphony. This orchestrated structure showcases Jiro's philosophy that making sushi is a piece of "art." By "art," a reference of it being perfection instilled into making every single sushi made by him, enforcing the idea of Japanese craft. With the music, we get to see aerial shots of where the sushi is presented on a polished black surface that mirrors the image and gives a reflection to sushi in the third dimension as if he were offering a piece of "art" to his customers. When Jiro delivers the food, you get close shots of Jiro's hand squeezing and shaping the sushi in a perfect image, with a shot of him brushing the sushi delicately. This creates the sensation of "food porn" where the chef presents the food in a caring and loving way, and the food is the most desirable appearance to it. After presenting the food, Jiro observes his customers eat them to see their facial expressions and feel about the sushi.

The scene with customers eating at his sushi restaurant expresses their gratitude and admiration for how Jiro serves them the sushi. For example, one of the females points out that her sushi is "smaller" than the male ones, and Jiro points out that this way, both men and females finish simultaneously. They are in an "aw" state from how observant Jiro is to them. They perceive him as a "god" when he shifts the sushi to the left side for the people that eat with their left hand. This little scene segment showcases that he is perfecting his craft to make sure that he is serving every individual correctly. The bar customers are more interested in how much effort Jiro puts rather than how the

sushi tastes; they all refer to him as hardworking. They mention that the sushi is good, but they are more observant of how he prepares the sushi.

Work cited(progress):

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Zw7Oyw-E7jcC&oi=fnd&pg=PP13&dq=stereotypes+of+Japanese+culture+scholar+sources&ots=KjRVZWNmp&sig=BgAjCAmrquInS0Kt43EzcGe8iAw#v=onepage&q&f=false>

ILM R1B: "Taste: The Senses on Screen"

Fall 2020

Peer Review Sheet (note additional questions on the back of this sheet)

Name of reviewer: Elisabeth Wing

Name of essay writer: Wajahat Khan

1. What is the paper arguing? Rewrite the thesis statement in your own words.

This paper argues that *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* exaggerates perfection in Japanese craft, which embodies the broader shift in Japanese culture of devotion to one's trade.

2. Is the thesis both specific and debatable? If so, explain why you think so. If not, explain which of these criteria it fails to meet.

I think the thesis is specific because it pinpoints a particular element of the documentary and uses that as the core of the argument. However, because this uses *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* as its main media text, I don't think it is that debatable. I believe most viewers would agree that the documentary exaggerates and romanticizes the element of perfection in the art of sushi. I think that it would be more debatable if it were a more polarizing statement, perhaps about how it relates to tradition or Japanese culture as a whole.

3. How does the argument unfold over the course of the paper? Note any paragraphs or passages that are unclear or stray from the argument.

The first few paragraphs point out specific parts of the film that are relevant to the argument, but I think that the evidence is too plot-based. I think that making the plot summary more brief and leaning more into the presentation of the sushi (like props, lighting, and camera

angles) would make a more convincing argument that is rooted in the film elements. I liked the discussion of the orchestral music, but I think that it could be more thorough and compelling. I would also consider what other elements such as narration and slow motion/overlays contribute to the exaggeration of Japanese perfection/craft.

4. What evidence does the paper use to make its argument? How does the author introduce and analyze each quote? How do the sources relate to the argument? Give specific examples of where there could be more context or analysis.

This paper uses several elements from the film to make its argument, and introduces some quotes from the documentary itself. For the quotes from the documentary, I might recommend using them sparingly in order to avoid excessive summary of the plot. Instead, for example, quotes could be used as evidence for narration (if that's something you choose to include). I think the evidence as the paper is right now has a lot to do with the plot, so I think trimming that down to make room for more discussion of elements and other sources would be helpful. Also, I know that the Works Cited is still a work in process, but I would recommend using the quote sandwich for any quotes introduced from these sources.

5. Identify and assess the way(s) that this author offers a "so what." How does the thesis balance specificity with broader stakes?

The "so what" for this paper would be that this documentary reflects a larger cultural phenomenon in Japan of perfection and dedication to a trade. I think that this could be a bit more specific, for example the "so what" could discuss the elements of tradition or perhaps work ethic in Japan and how that contributes to this phenomenon. I think that the way it is right now is at risk of being a bit broad, so making the "so what" zoom in a bit and making it more specific to Japanese culture is just one way of mitigating that.

6. Other comments that did not fit into previous questions:

I think that there could be more expansion on the idea of the (American) director being in charge of the depiction in the documentary (mentioned at the end of the introduction). This could be an interesting idea, like why Japanese craft is depicted this way by an American director. Who is the intended audience? Would a Japanese director have done it in the same way? Just a Thought.

Revision plan:

The first thing is I need more examples and articles to make stronger arguments, currently my examples and essays are all over the place. This is what I am struggling with coming with other examples to support my thesis. I probably think of the idea of explaining Japan culture and the stereotypes that have stemmed from it. Currently my essay is basically plot with little to no analysis. There are many examples but the examples really wouldn't fit together for what I am trying to argue, rather I should change my thesis to just "sushi" impact and how westerners perceive the Japanese food rather than culture because "culture" can make this essay too broad.

The second thing is I probably have to change and redirect the thesis a bit as isa has pointed out. "I think the thesis is specific because it pinpoints a particular element of the documentary and uses that as the core of the argument. However, because this uses *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* as its main media text, I don't think it is that debatable. I believe most viewers would agree that the documentary exaggerates and romanticizes the element of perfection in the art of sushi. I think that it would be more debatable if it were a more polarizing statement, perhaps about how it relates to tradition or Japanese culture as a whole." . I did think about changing my thesis as to how westerners have a certain "picture" of the Japanese culture as a whole but I feel like then the question would be too broad. Maybe switch the question to just "sushi" and the effects that it has brought.

Props the water fountain, at 0:46 and the Japanese writing on a big white piece of paper at :47 with narration.

- Music, to show Jiro story as chef, with pictures taken of him growing up and revising his medals at 1:47
- Music playing while he is flipping rice.
- 2:09 close up shots of his face and then panels down to his hands perfecting the piece of sushi, slowly painting it and placing it on the black dish
- Jiro says at 2:38, “You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill” and that is the key to success and is the “key to being regarded honorably”
- Interestingly the setting of the shop first is shown to be in train station or sub but in the next shot we see in on the street. Never mind.
- The scene where his son at his restaurant makes the sushi, They don’t show no close up shots.
- Pan shots of beautiful lake, never talked about, pan of the city
- Depiction of an empty buddist temple. Walked up to a shrine of his parents, said “I don’t why I have come here”
- Last bit we get to see his oldest son make the sushi and the music and close ups shots similar to that of Jiro to show that they themselves have mastered the cooking. A shot of Jiro walking in a crowd of people vs his son shot in on his bicycle.

Sources:

Article of life thingy



- Hooks

Ideology and branding of Sensuality in Japanese Gastronomy, chefs make their food on videos to make it look more exotic. And beat other competition