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JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI: A CIRCUIT OF SHOKUNIN

Abstract – *This paper looks at David Gelb’s 2011 documentary film, Jiro Dreams of Sushi from the perspective of the Shokunin concept. Referring to Hall’s circuit of culture, this paper focuses on two interrelated links within cultural studies, which are production and consumption. Shokunin is simply defined as mastery of one’s profession, and the film reflects this concept through the character, Jiro Ono, who dedicated his life to excelling in making sushi. The method used is qualitative and the data is drawn from the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scene as part of the film studies method applied. The findings show that in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro’s sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, shokunin, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work, and sacrifice.*

Keywords: shokunin, production, consumption, film studies, cultural studies t

I. INTRODUCTION

In the tradition of cultural studies research, the circuit of culture has become an inseparable part of the field. As a “model of central practices which produce culture,” (Chandler & Munday, 2011) as devised by Stuart Hall in 1997, the circuit represents interrelated links among representation, production, consumption, distribution, and regulation which later produce shared meanings. This article focuses on the application of cultural studies in film, particularly a 2011-American documentary about centuries-old Japanese food, sushi, titled Jiro Dreams of Sushi. The research aims to understand how, as seen from the lens of Hall’s circuit of culture, the culture shares its meanings through the concept of Japanese’

Shokunin. The article will focus on two interrelated links, which are production and consumption. Production here refers to “the production of meaning” (Arvind, 2019) in the context of sushi production, while consumption refers to how sushi is consumed. The production and consumption of meaning that relates to the concept of shokunin are supported by film studies through the element of cinematography and mise-en-scène. Cinematography is defined as camerawork that includes camera choice, placement, and movement. While mise-en-scène refers to everything that the audience sees inside the frame which includes color, props, costumes, sound, actors, acting, dialogue, etc. These two elements help support the revelation of meaning through visualization.

Shokunin is defined as “...craftsmen, who strive to perfect their craft – and their life – and thereby create art” (Dempsey, 2015). It is a mastery of one’s profession, and it is evident in the film that Jiro embodies this concept. Thus, although the film is produced in 2011, the concept of shokunin remains an important aspect in the lives of Japanese professionals. It also offers a valuable lesson about how and what it takes to excel in one’s work. This paper will fill the gap in the interdisciplinary studies that combine cultural studies and film studies on the specifically chosen film. To show that this film is worth analyzing, there are many articles both academic and popular, that discuss the film from various perspectives. This includes a thesis by Dempsey that talks about shokunin in the film as seen through the philosophical approach (Dempsey, 2015). Then, Condis discusses the film more popularly in an online monthly newspaper in which she claims that the film has a dream-like medium (Condis, 2019). Haas (2017) discusses the aspects of the ideology of the Japanese cuisine that includes sushi through the film Jiro Dreams of Sushi. Brown(2017) looks at the film from the gender perspective in which she argues that the gendering of the chef profession in Japan has a

long story that relates to the idea of “master” or craftsmen. Of all the papers written about the film and the concept, none discusses the film from the perspective of film studies, thus making this research one of its kind.

II. METHOD

The method used in this research is qualitative. Firstly, the researcher watches the film multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of it. Secondly, the researcher focuses on the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scène to find required data in regard to the topic discussed, i.e. the shokunin concept as seen from the consumption and production of the circuit of culture. After the data is collected, it is then processed to produce findings regarding the topic. Finally, a conclusion is drawn, and a future study suggestion is offered.

As an interdisciplinary article that combines cultural studies and film studies, a deep understanding of the two theories is required. The circuit of culture chosen is production and consumption. Production and consumption in this context do not refer to the production and the consumption of the film, but the production of sushi by the craftsman and how the consumers consume the sushi, which is the object in the film. Thus, the article looks at how the film helps produce the meaning of the production and consumption of sushi that pertains to the concept of shokunin. As for the film studies, the aspect of cinematography refers to the camera movement including where the camera is positioned and how it is moved. This camera placement and movement play an important role in providing meaning through visualization. For example, a close-up shot of sushi will provide a detailed texture of the food and at the same time gives a sense of closeness to the audience. Mise-en-scène refers to everything the audience sees in the frame, including dialogue, actions, sound, color, etc. This research particularly looks at the special effect such as slow-motion to emphasize certain scenes or fast forward to show the passing of time. Besides that, the dialogue and action of the characters are also significant in providing visualized meaning to the audience. Both the cultural studies and film studies theory is

applied to understand how the film reflects the shokunin concept.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jiro Dreams of Sushi is a documentary film that showcases a family of sushi makers in Tokyo. In particular, the film focuses on the patriarch of the family, an 85-year-old Jiro, who is probably the best sushi chef in the world. The film revolves around the everyday life of Jiro and his son in thriving and maintaining to be the best in the sushi world. Even though their restaurant is small, located in a subway station in Tokyo’s Ginza section, and only sits ten people, it has been awarded a three-star Michelin award, the highest accolade a restaurant can receive. The three-star Michelin restaurant equals “exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey” (Staff, 2020) which explains why it takes months of waiting period as the restaurant is so popular. The latest news on the restaurant informs that in 2020 the restaurant loses its Michelin star because they no longer accept public reservations. The pandemic is probably one of the factors in play. Nevertheless, to be awarded such a prestigious cuisine award is proof of excellence in food production technique and food taste. The path to excellence requires hard work, discipline, and repetition, and this is where the concept of shokunin comes in. Shokunin is defined as “craftsmen”, but in the sushi world, sushi chefs are also called shokunin, “...which skill comes through repetition of making and eating relatively standard forms of food using long-established techniques and ingredients” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). Dempsey argues that the character Jiro Ono as a sushi chef possesses certain traits that reflect the shokunin concept: passionate, persistent, disciplined, curious, imaginative, courageous, humble, and selfless (Dempsey, 2015). In the film opening, Jiro Ono (figure 1) expresses his life philosophy that accurately reflects a shokunin concept: “Once you decide on your occupation, you must immerse yourself in your work. You have to fall in love with your work. Never complain about your job. You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill. That’s the secret of success and is the key to being regarded

honorably” (Gelb, 2011). Ono’s dialogue as part of the mise-en-scène reflects the nature of a sushi chef that includes being disciplined, passionate, and persistent. The film, through visualization, supports emphasizes these traits to bring understanding to the audience about the concept of shokunin.



Figure 1 A close-up shot of Jiro Ono, the shokunin

To understand the shared meanings of the sushi culture through the concept of shokunin, it is imperative to look at the contribution of the film elements: cinematography and mise-en-scène. Visually, the film frames the consumption and production of sushi efficiently and directly through the two film elements. The film opens in a series of slow-motion shots showing a hand wearing a glove opening a door, then the shot changes into a shot of the gloves being taken off, and then shifts to a shot of a small sushi restaurant (figures 2 to 4).



Figure 2 A close-up shot of a hand opening a door



Figure 3 A close-up shot of a hand taking off the gloves



Figure 4 A shot of a small sushi restaurant

The first three shots above provide an important clue to the audience: the significant role of hands in producing sushi. The art of sushi making undoubtedly requires the finesse of the hands. The gloved hand symbolizes hard work as it refers to hands that work. Figure 4 shows the restaurant represents the “sushi world” where sushi chef produces and showcases their “art” for the customers to appreciate and consume. From the element of cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots. Close-up shots give more intimacy between the object and the audience because the expressions and emotions are visible when the object is people, and they give details in texture and often times raise appetite when the object is a thing such as food (see figure 5).



Figure 5 A close-up shot of a sushi

From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses slow-motion technique and time-lapse shot technique when it shows the production of sushi. The slow-motion technique is literally stretching the time to move slower, which can only happen in the film. “In this regard, stretching time may resemble psychological experiences of highly emotional moments in daily life, in which time seems to pass more slowly” (Arstila, 2012). Thus, this technique

aims to generate emotional feelings. In addition, “Any time a filmmaker uses slow-mo, they’re choosing to drive attention to small details. In doing so, those details achieve significance” (Risk, 2016). This is what the film wants to achieve through shooting the two important objects—Jiro Ono and the sushi—in close-up shots: to emphasize the details and their significance so the audience can see how they relate to the concept of shokunin. The second technique used is time-lapse shots that give an effect of shortening the time, and at the same time emphasize the long duration of sushi production from its preparation process to its serving on the table. The passing of time through the time-lapse shot technique gives the audience an understanding of the intricate and long process of sushi production that may only take seconds to consume when the sushi is ready. On the other hand, the slow-motion technique combined with close-up shots provides the audience with a closer look at the detailed process of sushi production.

In another scene, the film visualizes how Ono’s apprentices must massage an octopus for almost one hour (see figure 6) to ensure that it has a soft texture and to bring out the fragrance of the octopus.



Figure 6 A close-up shot of an apprentice’s hand massaging an octopus

Like the octopus’s massage, the apprentices also perform a similar thing when they prepare the rice. They perform the same tasks over and over for weeks before moving to the next step of making sushi. Before they reach the shokunin’s standard, they will keep doing the same duty. This master-apprentice hierarchy and repetitive procedure are something common in the tradition of shokunin. What is important to the shokunin is the quality of food that is served, and not the price, as Ono explicitly mentions: “Shokunin try to get the

highest quality fish and apply their technique to it. We don’t care about money” (Gelb, 2011). These visualizations through mise-en-scène and cinematography emphasize the persistent and disciplined nature of the shokunin. In other scenes, the long-tiring process of sushi making is visually described in a normal tempo accompanied with detail elaboration from the interviewees, for example, in the scene when Yoshikazu, Jiro Ono’s older son, has to prepare the seaweed wrappers for the sushi which informs the audience the meticulous process of smoking them sheet by sheet (see figure 7).



Figure 7 A shot of Yoshikazu smoking the seaweeds

The interview of Yoshikazu, while he is performing his duty, provides detailed information from his dialogue and from the visualization of what he is doing. The alternate shots of Yoshikazu’s face and what he does emphasize the delicacy of sushi preparation that is part of the shokunin tradition.

As a shokunin, Jiro is often framed through a medium close-up with his hands folded while scrutinizing every detail of his interns’ and son’s performance. The film also visually shows the long chain of production that begins at sea when the seamen catch the fish to be delivered to the then famous Tsukiji seafood market (as of 2018, the market is moved to Toyosu and named Toyosu Market), and how difficult and sometimes frustrating it is to find good ingredients for the sushi. These visual examples are ways for the film to connect sushi production with the spirit of shokunin. Shokunin emphasizes, among others, discipline and expertise through repetition. As evident in the example above, the film shows these traits through its repetitive shots of similar actions and explicitly through the interview of some of the characters. For example, Yoshikazu informs the audience that Jiro never skips work unless

he is sick, during a national holiday, or goes to a funeral. Jiro himself clearly states that he never feels satisfied with his skills and even in his eighties, is still looking for perfection. He is ninety-four today and he is still active in the restaurant watching over his son who will take over the business.

From some of the examples above, it is evident that in the context of production, making sushi is not merely a mechanical or technical process. Far from that, producing good sushi is a life mission, an ongoing and never-ending process of perfection. It requires sacrifice and good cooperation and commitment. In other words, producing good sushi is a way of life. The concept of *shokunin* influences these processes deeply. Indeed, not all sushi chef applies a similar concept in producing good sushi, but Jiro with his *shokunin* spirit has set a very high standard for other sushi chefs to reach. However, his success is not without sacrifice. Being a devoted *shokunin*, the film also tells about how Jiro admits that he is not a good father, to the point when his children do not recognize him as their father. Being a *shokunin*, Jiro almost never has a “normal” life, a life choice he takes to reach the highest standard as a sushi chef. Thus, producing good sushi for him is not a job, but a life, and his dedication has won him not only acknowledgment, awards, and prestige, but more importantly, he manages to influence others, especially his sons and interns, to commit to the life of a *shokunin*.

The second aspect is the consumption of sushi. While the audience thinks that consuming sushi is just like consuming any other food, Jiro as a *shokunin* delivers a different message on how eating sushi means more than just putting sushi in your mouth and swallow it. In a spirit of *shokunin*, Jiro explains that consuming sushi requires certain rules and rituals which also include discipline and harmony. “The customer is to eat the piece of sushi in one bite; biting it in half or leaving some is not acceptable, and it is to be eaten within seconds after the chef serves it in front of them” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). Even the process of reserving a table requires patience and a long wait, customers are required to reserve months before eating at Jiro’s restaurant (Sukiyabashi Jiro) at Ginza. The fact that the restaurant only sits ten people signifies that profit is not the main purpose of Ono.



Figure 8 Jiro Ono “performs” in front of his customers

What is more important is the satisfaction of the customer and their experience of eating sushi in a *shokunin*’s way. The film visualizes this through close-up shots of Jiro Ono performing his “art” (figure 8) in front of the customers and watching the customers enjoy the sushi he makes. Although the restaurant carries an exclusive atmosphere, Yoshikazu claims that “We are not trying to be exclusive or elite. The techniques we use are no big secret. It’s just about making an effort and repeating the same thing every day” (Gelb, 2011). His comment both confirms that profit is not the main thing, but customer satisfaction is, and the repetitive action is mentioned as a part of the *shokunin* concept. The small size of the restaurant supports the idea of *shokunin* because “The space for eating sushi matters not simply for the preparation and eating of the food because it is where the customers and *shokunin* form a gathering” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). It means that the smaller the space, the better it is to create intimacy between the sushi chef and the customers. For common customers, as the film tells, eating sushi at Jiro’s place is tenses, almost intimidating, which is a clear sign of how the aura of *shokunin* is evident in the restaurant. Being disciplined is not only from the *shokunin*’s side but also from the customers as they are demanded to follow the strict tradition of consuming sushi. One of the interviewees, a culinary expert, explains in detail how every time he eats at Jiro’s place, he never feels disappointed and often feels the tense atmosphere while eating. Jiro’s younger son, who owns a sushi restaurant elsewhere, explicitly mentions that some customers choose to visit his restaurant because the atmosphere is more relaxed compared to that of Jiro’s. As for the price, a minimum of around \$300 price tag

is worth the money and trip because the customers know that they are only served the best sushi by the best chef. Another proof of shokunin's concept of consumption is when the film visually described the serving and consumption of sushi as an orchestra concert, as one of the interviewees says that the meal is divided into "three movements": classic items such as tuna or kohada in the first movement; the second movement is the fresh catch of the day or the seasonal; and the last movement the traditional such as sea eel, kanpyo, and egg. Jiro meticulously keeps thinking about what sushi to be served, how and to whom they are served. For example, he usually measures up the customer's physical body to calculate how much rice he should prepare, or when he notices that a customer is left-handed, he will serve the customer in a way that will comfort the customer. Consequently, the consumers are not supposed to eat in a way they like, but they must follow the procedure. Jiro explains that a customer can pick the sushi with a chopstick or their hands, and that sushi must be eaten whole, not cut. These details reflect the value of shokunin in which the customers need to appreciate the beauty, the balance, and the harmonious ways of consuming sushi.

His fame as a shokunin sushi chef is internationally acknowledged and many important figures have dined at Jiro's place, for example, previous U.S. president Barack Obama has dined there together with the Japanese prime minister during one of his visits to Japan. It is understandable why the Japanese Prime Minister takes Obama there, not only to introduce him to the traditional Japanese food and delicious sushi but more importantly to introduce Obama to one important virtue of the Japanese people: their perseverance and commitment to reach perfection, which is indeed something to be proud of.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, it is clear that the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro's sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and

consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, shokunin, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work and sacrifice.

The concept of shokunin is visually supported by the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène. From the cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots of the main characters, the process of production, and the sushi. There are also many alternate shots between the characters and the activities they do to show the delicate process of producing sushi. The effect of close-up shots is a closer intimacy between the audience and the objects on film which provides the audience with a deeper understanding of sushi culture and shokunin concept. The close-up shots that are sometimes repetitive are also meant to emphasize the nature of the shokunin concept: repetition for perfection and strict discipline. From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses dialogue, slow-motion technique, and time-lapse shot technique to emphasize the concept of shokunin. The dialogue gives the audience first-hand information from the characters about the virtue of shokunin. The slow-motion technique is used to dramatize the production of sushi and to immerse the audience into the world of sushi and shokunin concept. The time-lapse shot technique is used to emphasize the long duration of sushi production that makes the audience appreciate the process of production and consumption of sushi. After watching the documentary, the audience is expected to have a completely different perspective on sushi, that it is not only about food, but it is about passion, a lifelong effort to perfection, hard work, and a way of life.

REFERENCES

2. Bukti surel dari reviewer dan masukan dari
reviewer (18 Apr 2022)

Information





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Dewi Novianti (dnovianti)

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Abstract – *This paper looks at David Gelb’s 2011 documentary film, Jiro Dreams of Sushi from the perspective of the Shokunin concept. Referring to Hall’s circuit of culture, this paper focuses on two interrelated links within cultural studies, which are production and consumption. Shokunin is simply defined as mastery of one’s profession, and the film reflects this concept through the character, Jiro Ono, who dedicated his life to excelling in making sushi. The method used is qualitative and the data is drawn from the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scène as part of the film studies method applied. The findings show that in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro’s sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, shokunin, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work, and sacrifice.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the tradition of cultural studies research, the circuit of culture has become an inseparable part of the field. As a “model of central practices which produce culture,” (Chandler & Munday, 2011) as devised by Stuart Hall in 1997, the circuit represents interrelated links among representation, production, consumption, distribution, and regulation which later produce shared meanings. This article focuses on the application of cultural studies in film, particularly a 2011-American documentary about centuries-old Japanese food, sushi, titled Jiro Dreams of Sushi. The research aims to understand how, as seen from the lens of Hall’s circuit of culture, the culture shares its

meanings through the concept of Japanese’ Shokunin. The article will focus on two interrelated links, which are production and consumption. Production here refers to “the production of meaning” (Arvind, 2019) in the context of sushi production, while consumption refers to how sushi is consumed. The production and consumption of meaning that relates to the concept of shokunin are supported by film studies through the element of cinematography and mise-en-scène. Cinematography is defined as camerawork that includes camera choice, placement, and movement. While mise-en-scène refers to everything that the audience sees inside the frame which includes color, props, costumes, sound, actors, acting, dialogue, etc. These two elements help support the revelation of meaning through visualization.

Shokunin is defined as “...craftsmen, who strive to perfect their craft – and their life – and thereby create art” (Dempsey, 2015). It is a mastery of one’s profession, and it is evident in the film that Jiro embodies this concept. Thus, although the film is produced in 2011, the concept of shokunin remains an important aspect in the lives of Japanese professionals. It also offers a valuable lesson about how and what it takes to excel in one’s work. This paper will fill the gap in the interdisciplinary studies that combine cultural studies and film studies on the specifically chosen film. To show that this film is worth analyzing, there are many articles both academic and popular, that discuss the film from various perspectives. This includes a thesis by Dempsey that talks about shokunin in the film as seen through the philosophical approach (Dempsey, 2015). Then, Condis discusses the film more popularly in an online monthly newspaper in which she claims that the film has a dream-like medium (Condis, 2019). Haas (2017) discusses the aspects of the ideology of the Japanese cuisine that includes sushi through the film Jiro Dreams of Sushi. Brown (2017) looks at the film from the gender perspective in which she argues that the

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The method used in this research is qualitative. Firstly, the researcher watches the film multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of it. Secondly, the researcher focuses on the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scène to find required data in regard to the topic discussed, i.e. the shokunin concept as seen from the consumption and production of the circuit of culture. After the data is collected, it is then processed to produce findings regarding the topic. Finally, a conclusion is drawn, and a future study suggestion is offered.

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III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jiro Dreams of Sushi is a documentary film that showcases a family of sushi makers in Tokyo. In particular, the film focuses on the patriarch of the family, an 85-year-old Jiro, who is probably the best sushi chef in the world. The film revolves around the everyday life of Jiro and his son in thriving and maintaining to be the best in the sushi world. Even though their restaurant is small, located in a subway station in Tokyo’s Ginza section, and only sits ten people, it has been awarded a three-star Michelin award, the highest accolade a restaurant can receive. The three-star Michelin restaurant equals “exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey” (Staff, 2020) which explains why it takes months of waiting period as the restaurant is so popular. The latest news on the restaurant informs that in 2020 the restaurant loses its Michelin star because they no longer accept public reservations. The pandemic is probably one of the factors in play. Nevertheless, to be awarded such a prestigious cuisine award is proof of excellence in food production technique and food taste. The path to excellence requires hard work, discipline, and repetition, and this is where the concept of shokunin comes in. Shokunin is defined as “craftsmen”, but in the sushi world, sushi chefs are also called shokunin, “...which skill comes through repetition of making and eating relatively standard forms of food using long-established techniques and ingredients” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). Dempsey argues that the character Jiro Ono as a sushi chef possesses certain traits that reflect the shokunin concept: passionate, persistent, disciplined, curious, imaginative, courageous, humble, and selfless (Dempsey, 2015). In the film opening, Jiro Ono (figure 1) expresses his life philosophy that accurately reflects a shokunin concept: “Once you decide on your occupation, you must immerse yourself in your work. You have to fall in love with your work. Never complain about your job. You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill. That’s the secret of success and is the key to being regarded

honorably” (Gelb, 2011). Ono’s dialogue as part of the mise-en-scène reflects the nature of a sushi chef that includes being disciplined, passionate, and persistent. The film, through visualization, supports emphasizes these traits to bring understanding to the audience about the concept of shokunin.



Figure 1 A close-up shot of Jiro Ono, the shokunin

To understand the shared meanings of the sushi culture through the concept of shokunin, it is imperative to look at the contribution of the film elements: cinematography and mise-en-scène. Visually, the film frames the consumption and production of sushi efficiently and directly through the two film elements. The film opens in a series of slow-motion shots showing a hand wearing a glove opening a door, then the shot changes into a shot of the gloves being taken off, and then shifts to a shot of a small sushi restaurant (figures 2 to 4).



Figure 2 A close-up shot of a hand opening a door



Figure 3 A close-up shot of a hand taking off the gloves



Figure 4 A shot of a small sushi restaurant

The first three shots above provide an important clue to the audience: the significant role of hands in producing sushi. The art of sushi making undoubtedly requires the finesse of the hands. The gloved hand symbolizes hard work as it refers to hands that work. Figure 4 shows the restaurant represents the “sushi world” where sushi chef produces and showcases their “art” for the customers to appreciate and consume. From the element of cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots. Close-up shots give more intimacy between the object and the audience because the expressions and emotions are visible when the object is people, and they give details in texture and often times raise appetite when the object is a thing such as food (see figure 5).



Figure 5 A close-up shot of a sushi

From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses slow-motion technique and time-lapse shot technique when it shows the production of sushi. The slow-motion technique is literally stretching the time to move slower, which can only happen in the film. “In this regard, stretching time may resemble psychological experiences of highly emotional moments in daily life, in which time seems to pass more slowly” (Arstila, 2012). Thus, this technique

aims to generate emotional feelings. In addition, “Any time a filmmaker uses slow-mo, they’re choosing to drive attention to small details. In doing so, those details achieve significance” (Risk, 2016). This is what the film wants to achieve through shooting the two important objects—Jiro Ono and the sushi—in close-up shots: to emphasize the details and their significance so the audience can see how they relate to the concept of shokunin. The second technique used is time-lapse shots that give an effect of shortening the time, and at the same time emphasize the long duration of sushi production from its preparation process to its serving on the table. The passing of time through the time-lapse shot technique gives the audience an understanding of the intricate and long process of sushi production that may only take seconds to consume when the sushi is ready. On the other hand, the slow-motion technique combined with close-up shots provides the audience with a closer look at the detailed process of sushi production.

In another scene, the film visualizes how Ono’s apprentices must massage an octopus for almost one hour (see figure 6) to ensure that it has a soft texture and to bring out the fragrance of the octopus.

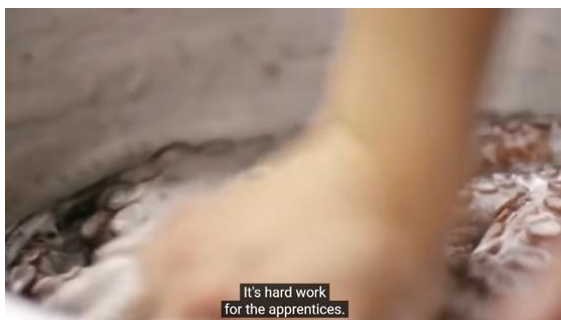


Figure 6 A close-up shot of an apprentice’s hand massaging an octopus

Like the octopus’s massage, the apprentices also perform a similar thing when they prepare the rice. They perform the same tasks over and over for weeks before moving to the next step of making sushi. Before they reach the shokunin’s standard, they will keep doing the same duty. This master-apprentice hierarchy and repetitive procedure are something common in the tradition of shokunin. What is important to the shokunin is the quality of food that is served, and not the price, as Ono explicitly mentions: “Shokunin try to get the

highest quality fish and apply their technique to it. We don’t care about money” (Gelb, 2011). These visualizations through mise-en-scène and cinematography emphasize the persistent and disciplined nature of the shokunin. In other scenes, the long-tiring process of sushi making is visually described in a normal tempo accompanied with detail elaboration from the interviewees, for example, in the scene when Yoshikazu, Jiro Ono’s older son, has to prepare the seaweed wrappers for the sushi which informs the audience the meticulous process of smoking them sheet by sheet (see figure 7).



Figure 7 A shot of Yoshikazu smoking the seaweeds

The interview of Yoshikazu, while he is performing his duty, provides detailed information from his dialogue and from the visualization of what he is doing. The alternate shots of Yoshikazu’s face and what he does emphasize the delicacy of sushi preparation that is part of the shokunin tradition.

As a shokunin, Jiro is often framed through a medium close-up with his hands folded while scrutinizing every detail of his interns’ and son’s performance. The film also visually shows the long chain of production that begins at sea when the seamen catch the fish to be delivered to the then famous Tsukiji seafood market (as of 2018, the market is moved to Toyosu and named Toyosu Market), and how difficult and sometimes frustrating it is to find good ingredients for the sushi. These visual examples are ways for the film to connect sushi production with the spirit of shokunin. Shokunin emphasizes, among others, discipline and expertise through repetition. As evident in the example above, the film shows these traits through its repetitive shots of similar actions and explicitly through the interview of some of the characters. For example, Yoshikazu informs the audience that Jiro never skips work unless

he is sick, during a national holiday, or goes to a funeral. Jiro himself clearly states that he never feels satisfied with his skills and even in his eighties, is still looking for perfection. He is ninety-four today and he is still active in the restaurant watching over his son who will take over the business.

From some of the examples above, it is evident that in the context of production, making sushi is not merely a mechanical or technical process. Far from that, producing good sushi is a life mission, an ongoing and never-ending process of perfection. It requires sacrifice and good cooperation and commitment. In other words, producing good sushi is a way of life. The concept of *shokunin* influences these processes deeply. Indeed, not all sushi chef applies a similar concept in producing good sushi, but Jiro with his *shokunin* spirit has set a very high standard for other sushi chefs to reach. However, his success is not without sacrifice. Being a devoted *shokunin*, the film also tells about how Jiro admits that he is not a good father, to the point when his children do not recognize him as their father. Being a *shokunin*, Jiro almost never has a “normal” life, a life choice he takes to reach the highest standard as a sushi chef. Thus, producing good sushi for him is not a job, but a life, and his dedication has won him not only acknowledgment, awards, and prestige, but more importantly, he manages to influence others, especially his sons and interns, to commit to the life of a *shokunin*.

The second aspect is the consumption of sushi. While the audience thinks that consuming sushi is just like consuming any other food, Jiro as a *shokunin* delivers a different message on how eating sushi means more than just putting sushi in your mouth and swallow it. In a spirit of *shokunin*, Jiro explains that consuming sushi requires certain rules and rituals which also include discipline and harmony. “The customer is to eat the piece of sushi in one bite; biting it in half or leaving some is not acceptable, and it is to be eaten within seconds after the chef serves it in front of them” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). Even the process of reserving a table requires patience and a long wait, customers are required to reserve months before eating at Jiro’s restaurant (Sukiyabashi Jiro) at Ginza. The fact that the

restaurant only sits ten people signifies that profit is not the main purpose of Ono.



Figure 8 Jiro Ono “performs” in front of his customers

What is more important is the satisfaction of the customer and their experience of eating sushi in a *shokunin*’s way. The film visualizes this through close-up shots of Jiro Ono performing his “art” (figure 8) in front of the customers and watching the customers enjoy the sushi he makes. Although the restaurant carries an exclusive atmosphere, Yoshikazu claims that “We are not trying to be exclusive or elite. The techniques we use are no big secret. It’s just about making an effort and repeating the same thing every day” (Gelb, 2011). His comment both confirms that profit is not the main thing, but customer satisfaction is, and the repetitive action is mentioned as a part of the *shokunin* concept. The small size of the restaurant supports the idea of *shokunin* because “The space for eating sushi matters not simply for the preparation and eating of the food because it is where the customers and *shokunin* form a gathering” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). It means that the smaller the space, the better it is to create intimacy between the sushi chef and the customers. For common customers, as the film tells, eating sushi at Jiro’s place is tensing, almost intimidating, which is a clear sign of how the aura of *shokunin* is evident in the restaurant. Being disciplined is not only from the *shokunin*’s side but also from the customers as they are demanded to follow the strict tradition of consuming sushi. One of the interviewees, a culinary expert, explains in detail how every time he eats at Jiro’s place, he never feels disappointed and often feels the tense atmosphere while eating. Jiro’s younger son, who owns a sushi restaurant elsewhere, explicitly mentions that some customers choose to visit his restaurant because the atmosphere is

more relaxed compared to that of Jiro's. As for the price, a minimum of around \$300 price tag is worth the money and trip because the customers know that they are only served the best sushi by the best chef. Another proof of shokunin's concept of consumption is when the film visually described the serving and consumption of sushi as an orchestra concert, as one of the interviewees says that the meal is divided into "three movements": classic items such as tuna or kohada in the first movement; the second movement is the fresh catch of the day or the seasonal; and the last movement the traditional such as sea eel, kanpyo, and egg. Jiro meticulously keeps thinking about what sushi to be served, how and to whom they are served. For example, he usually measures up the customer's physical body to calculate how much rice he should prepare, or when he notices that a customer is left-handed, he will serve the customer in a way that will comfort the customer. Consequently, the consumers are not supposed to eat in a way they like, but they must follow the procedure. Jiro explains that a customer can pick the sushi with a chopstick or their hands, and that sushi must be eaten whole, not cut. These details reflect the value of shokunin in which the customers need to appreciate the beauty, the balance, and the harmonious ways of consuming sushi.

His fame as a shokunin sushi chef is internationally acknowledged and many important figures have dined at Jiro's place, for example, previous U.S. president Barrack Obama has dined there together with the Japanese prime minister during one of his visits to Japan. It is understandable why the Japanese Prime Minister takes Obama there, not only to introduce him to the traditional Japanese food and delicious sushi but more importantly to introduce Obama to one important virtue of the Japanese people: their perseverance and commitment to reach perfection, which is indeed something to be proud of.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, it is clear that the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of

Jiro's sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, shokunin, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work and sacrifice.

The concept of shokunin is visually supported by the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène. From the cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots of the main characters, the process of production, and the sushi. There are also many alternate shots between the characters and the activities they do to show the delicate process of producing sushi. The effect of close-up shots is a closer intimacy between the audience and the objects on film which provides the audience with a deeper understanding of sushi culture and shokunin concept. The close-up shots that are sometimes repetitive emphasize the nature of the shokunin concept: repetition for perfection and strict discipline. From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses dialogue, slow-motion technique, and time-lapse shot technique to emphasize the concept of shokunin. The dialogue gives the audience first-hand information from the characters about the virtue of shokunin. The slow-motion technique is used to dramatize the production of sushi and to immerse the audience into the world of sushi and shokunin concept. The time-lapse shot technique is used to emphasize the long duration of sushi production that makes the audience appreciate the process of production and consumption of sushi. After watching the documentary, the audience is expected to have a completely different perspective on sushi both on its production and consumption. Sushi is not only food, but it is passion, a lifelong effort to perfection, hard work, and a way of life.

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3. Bukti draf revisi dikirimkan (22 Apr 2022)

1st Evaluation Format



Participants

Mr. Anton Sutandio (as282609)

Dewi Novianti (dnovianti)

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JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI: A CIRCUIT OF SHOKUNIN

Abstract – *This paper looks at David Gelb's 2011 documentary film, Jiro Dreams of Sushi from the perspective of the Shokunin concept. Referring to Hall's circuit of culture, this paper focuses on two interrelated links within cultural studies, which are production and consumption. Shokunin is simply defined as mastery of one's profession, and the film reflects this concept through the character, Jiro Ono, who dedicated his life to excelling in making sushi. The method used is qualitative and the data is drawn from the film's cinematography and mise-en-scene as part of the film studies method applied. The findings show that in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro's sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, shokunin, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work, and sacrifice.*

Keywords: shokunin, production, consumption, film studies, cultural studies

I. INTRODUCTION

In the tradition of cultural studies research, the circuit of culture has become an inseparable part of the field. As a “model of central practices which produce culture,” (Chandler & Munday, 2011) as devised by Stuart Hall in 1997, the circuit represents interrelated links among representation, production, consumption, distribution, and regulation which later produce shared meanings. This article focuses on the application of cultural studies in film, particularly a 2011-American documentary about centuries-old Japanese food, sushi, titled Jiro Dreams of Sushi. The research aims to understand how, as seen from the lens of Hall's circuit of culture, the culture shares its

meanings through the concept of Japanese' Shokunin. The article will focus on two interrelated links, which are production and consumption. Production here refers to “the production of meaning” (Arvind, 2019) in the context of sushi production, while consumption refers to how sushi is consumed. The production and consumption of meaning that relates to the concept of shokunin are supported by film studies through the element of cinematography and mise-en-scène. Cinematography is defined as camerawork that includes camera choice, placement, and movement. While mise-en-scène refers to everything that the audience sees inside the frame which includes color, props, costumes, sound, actors, acting, dialogue, etc. These two elements help support the revelation of meaning through visualization.

Shokunin is defined as “...craftsmen, who strive to perfect their craft – and their life – and thereby create art” (Dempsey, 2015). It is a mastery of one's profession, and it is evident in the film that Jiro embodies this concept. Thus, although the film is produced in 2011, the concept of shokunin remains an important aspect in the lives of Japanese professionals. It also offers a valuable lesson about how and what it takes to excel in one's work. This paper will fill the gap in the interdisciplinary studies that combine cultural studies and film studies on the specifically chosen film. To show that this film is worth analyzing, there are many articles both academic and popular, that discuss the film from various perspectives. This includes a thesis by Dempsey that talks about shokunin in the film as seen through the philosophical approach (Dempsey, 2015). Then, Condis discusses the film more popularly in an online monthly newspaper in which she claims that the film has a dream-like medium (Condis, 2019). Haas (2017) discusses the aspects of the ideology of the Japanese cuisine that includes sushi through the film Jiro Dreams of Sushi. Brown (2017) looks at the film from the gender perspective in which she argues that the

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gendering of the chef profession in Japan has a long story that relates to the idea of “master” or craftsmen. Of all the papers written about the film and the concept, none discusses the film from the perspective of film studies, thus making this research one of its kind.

II. METHOD

The method used in this research is qualitative. Firstly, the researcher watches the film multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of it. Secondly, the researcher focuses on the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scène to find required data in regard to the topic discussed, i.e. the shokunin concept as seen from the consumption and production of the circuit of culture. After the data is collected, it is then processed to produce findings regarding the topic. Finally, a conclusion is drawn, and a future study suggestion is offered.

As an interdisciplinary article that combines cultural studies and film studies, a deep understanding of the two theories is required. The circuit of culture chosen is production and consumption. Production and consumption in this context do not refer to the production and the consumption of the film, but the production of sushi by the craftsman and how the consumers consume the sushi, which is the object in the film. Thus, the article looks at how the film helps produce the meaning of the production and consumption of sushi that pertains to the concept of shokunin. As for the film studies, the aspect of cinematography refers to the camera movement including where the camera is positioned and how it is moved. This camera placement and movement play an important role in providing meaning through visualization. For example, a close-up shot of sushi will provide a detailed texture of the food and at the same time gives a sense of closeness to the audience. Mise-en-scène refers to everything the audience sees in the frame, including dialogue, actions, sound, color, etc. This research particularly looks at the special effect such as slow-motion to emphasize certain scenes or fast forward to show the passing of time. Besides that, the dialogue and action of the characters are also significant in providing visualized meaning to the audience. Both the cultural studies and film studies theory is

applied to understand how the film reflects the shokunin concept.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jiro Dreams of Sushi is a documentary film that showcases a family of sushi makers in Tokyo. In particular, the film focuses on the patriarch of the family, an 85-year-old Jiro, who is probably the best sushi chef in the world. The film revolves around the everyday life of Jiro and his son in thriving and maintaining to be the best in the sushi world. Even though their restaurant is small, located in a subway station in Tokyo’s Ginza section, and only sits ten people, it has been awarded a three-star Michelin award, the highest accolade a restaurant can receive. The three-star Michelin restaurant equals “exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey” (Staff, 2020) which explains why it takes months of waiting period as the restaurant is so popular. The latest news on the restaurant informs that in 2020 the restaurant loses its Michelin star because they no longer accept public reservations. The pandemic is probably one of the factors in play. Nevertheless, to be awarded such a prestigious cuisine award is proof of excellence in food production technique and food taste. The path to excellence requires hard work, discipline, and repetition, and this is where the concept of shokunin comes in. Shokunin is defined as “craftsmen”, but in the sushi world, sushi chefs are also called shokunin, “...which skill comes through repetition of making and eating relatively standard forms of food using long-established techniques and ingredients” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). Dempsey argues that the character Jiro Ono as a sushi chef possesses certain traits that reflect the shokunin concept: passionate, persistent, disciplined, curious, imaginative, courageous, humble, and selfless (Dempsey, 2015). In the film opening, Jiro Ono (figure 1) expresses his life philosophy that accurately reflects a shokunin concept: “Once you decide on your occupation, you must immerse yourself in your work. You have to fall in love with your work. Never complain about your job. You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill. That’s the secret of success and is the key to being regarded

honorably” (Gelb, 2011). Ono’s dialogue as part of the mise-en-scène reflects the nature of a sushi chef that includes being disciplined, passionate, and persistent. The film, through visualization, supports emphasizes these traits to bring understanding to the audience about the concept of shokunin.



Figure 1 A close-up shot of Jiro Ono, the shokunin

To understand the shared meanings of the sushi culture through the concept of shokunin, it is imperative to look at the contribution of the film elements: cinematography and mise-en-scène. Visually, the film frames the consumption and production of sushi efficiently and directly through the two film elements. The film opens in a series of slow-motion shots showing a hand wearing a glove opening a door, then the shot changes into a shot of the gloves being taken off, and then shifts to a shot of a small sushi restaurant (figures 2 to 4).



Figure 2 A close-up shot of a hand opening a door



Figure 3 A close-up shot of a hand taking off the gloves



Figure 4 A shot of a small sushi restaurant

The first three shots above provide an important clue to the audience: the significant role of hands in producing sushi. The art of sushi making undoubtedly requires the finesse of the hands. The gloved hand symbolizes hard work as it refers to hands that work. Figure 4 shows the restaurant represents the “sushi world” where sushi chef produces and showcases their “art” for the customers to appreciate and consume. From the element of cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots. Close-up shots give more intimacy between the object and the audience because the expressions and emotions are visible when the object is people, and they give details in texture and often times raise appetite when the object is a thing such as food (see figure 5).



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From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses slow-motion technique and time-lapse shot technique when it shows the production of sushi. The slow-motion technique is literally stretching the time to move slower, which can only happen in the film. “In this regard, stretching time may resemble psychological experiences of highly emotional moments in daily life, in which time seems to pass more slowly” (Arstila, 2012). Thus, this technique

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In another scene, the film visualizes how Ono’s apprentices must massage an octopus for almost one hour (see figure 6) to ensure that it has a soft texture and to bring out the fragrance of the octopus.



Figure 6 A close-up shot of an apprentice’s hand massaging an octopus

Like the octopus’s massage, the apprentices also perform a similar thing when they prepare the rice. They perform the same tasks over and over for weeks before moving to the next step of making sushi. Before they reach the shokunin’s standard, they will keep doing the same duty. This master-apprentice hierarchy and repetitive procedure are something common in the tradition of shokunin. What is important to the shokunin is the quality of food that is served, and not the price, as Ono explicitly mentions: “Shokunin try to get the

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As a shokunin, Jiro is often framed through a medium close-up with his hands folded while scrutinizing every detail of his interns’ and son’s performance. The film also visually shows the long chain of production that begins at sea when the seamen catch the fish to be delivered to the then famous Tsukiji seafood market (as of 2018, the market is moved to Toyosu and named Toyosu Market), and how difficult and sometimes frustrating it is to find good ingredients for the sushi. These visual examples are ways for the film to connect sushi production with the spirit of shokunin. Shokunin emphasizes, among others, discipline and expertise through repetition. As evident in the example above, the film shows these traits through its repetitive shots of similar actions and explicitly through the interview of some of the characters. For example, Yoshikazu informs the audience that Jiro never skips work unless

he is sick, during a national holiday, or goes to a funeral. Jiro himself clearly states that he never feels satisfied with his skills and even in his eighties, is still looking for perfection. He is ninety-four today and he is still active in the restaurant watching over his son who will take over the business.

From some of the examples above, it is evident that in the context of production, making sushi is not merely a mechanical or technical process. Far from that, producing good sushi is a life mission, an ongoing and never-ending process of perfection. It requires sacrifice and good cooperation and commitment. In other words, producing good sushi is a way of life. The concept of shokunin influences these processes deeply. Indeed, not all sushi chef applies a similar concept in producing good sushi, but Jiro with his shokunin spirit has set a very high standard for other sushi chefs to reach. However, his success is not without sacrifice. Being a devoted shokunin, the film also tells about how Jiro admits that he is not a good father, to the point when his children do not recognize him as their father. Being a shokunin, Jiro almost never has a “normal” life, a life choice he takes to reach the highest standard as a sushi chef. Thus, producing good sushi for him is not a job, but a life, and his dedication has won him not only acknowledgment, awards, and prestige, but more importantly, he manages to influence others, especially his sons and interns, to commit to the life of a shokunin.

The second aspect is the consumption of sushi. While the audience thinks that consuming sushi is just like consuming any other food, Jiro as a shokunin delivers a different message on how eating sushi means more than just putting sushi in your mouth and swallow it. In a spirit of shokunin, Jiro explains that consuming sushi requires certain rules and rituals which also include discipline and harmony. “The customer is to eat the piece of sushi in one bite; biting it in half or leaving some is not acceptable, and it is to be eaten within seconds after the chef serves it in front of them” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). Even the process of reserving a table requires patience and a long wait, customers are required to reserve months before eating at Jiro’s restaurant (Sukiyabashi Jiro) at Ginza. The fact that the

restaurant only sits ten people signifies that profit is not the main purpose of Ono.



Figure 8 Jiro Ono “performs” in front of his customers

What is more important is the satisfaction of the customer and their experience of eating sushi in a shokunin’s way. The film visualizes this through close-up shots of Jiro Ono performing his “art” (figure 8) in front of the customers and watching the customers enjoy the sushi he makes. Although the restaurant carries an exclusive atmosphere, Yoshikazu claims that “We are not trying to be exclusive or elite. The techniques we use are no big secret. It’s just about making an effort and repeating the same thing every day” (Gelb, 2011). His comment both confirms that profit is not the main thing, but customer satisfaction is, and the repetitive action is mentioned as a part of the shokunin concept. The small size of the restaurant supports the idea of shokunin because “The space for eating sushi matters not simply for the preparation and eating of the food because it is where the customers and shokunin form a gathering” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). It means that the smaller the space, the better it is to create intimacy between the sushi chef and the customers. For common customers, as the film tells, eating sushi at Jiro’s place is tensing, almost intimidating, which is a clear sign of how the aura of shokunin is evident in the restaurant. Being disciplined is not only from the shokunin’s side but also from the customers as they are demanded to follow the strict tradition of consuming sushi. One of the interviewees, a culinary expert, explains in detail how every time he eats at Jiro’s place, he never feels disappointed and often feels the tense atmosphere while eating. Jiro’s younger son, who owns a sushi restaurant elsewhere, explicitly mentions that some customers choose to visit his restaurant because the atmosphere is

more relaxed compared to that of Jiro's. As for the price, a minimum of around \$300 price tag is worth the money and trip because the customers know that they are only served the best sushi by the best chef. Another proof of shokunin's concept of consumption is when the film visually described the serving and consumption of sushi as an orchestra concert, as one of the interviewees says that the meal is divided into "three movements": classic items such as tuna or kohada in the first movement; the second movement is the fresh catch of the day or the seasonal; and the last movement the traditional such as sea eel, kanpyo, and egg. Jiro meticulously keeps thinking about what sushi to be served, how and to whom they are served. For example, he usually measures up the customer's physical body to calculate how much rice he should prepare, or when he notices that a customer is left-handed, he will serve the customer in a way that will comfort the customer. Consequently, the consumers are not supposed to eat in a way they like, but they must follow the procedure. Jiro explains that a customer can pick the sushi with a chopstick or their hands, and that sushi must be eaten whole, not cut. These details reflect the value of shokunin in which the customers need to appreciate the beauty, the balance, and the harmonious ways of consuming sushi.

His fame as a shokunin sushi chef is internationally acknowledged and many important figures have dined at Jiro's place, for example, previous U.S. president Barack Obama has dined there together with the Japanese prime minister during one of his visits to Japan. It is understandable why the Japanese Prime Minister takes Obama there, not only to introduce him to the traditional Japanese food and delicious sushi but more importantly to introduce Obama to one important virtue of the Japanese people: their perseverance and commitment to reach perfection, which is indeed something to be proud of.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, it is clear that the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of

Jiro's sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, shokunin, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work and sacrifice.

The concept of shokunin is visually supported by the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène. From the cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots of the main characters, the process of production, and the sushi. There are also many alternate shots between the characters and the activities they do to show the delicate process of producing sushi. The effect of close-up shots is a closer intimacy between the audience and the objects on film which provides the audience with a deeper understanding of sushi culture and shokunin concept. The close-up shots that are sometimes repetitive emphasize the nature of the shokunin concept: repetition for perfection and strict discipline. From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses dialogue, slow-motion technique, and time-lapse shot technique to emphasize the concept of shokunin. The dialogue gives the audience first-hand information from the characters about the virtue of shokunin. The slow-motion technique is used to dramatize the production of sushi and to immerse the audience into the world of sushi and shokunin concept. The time-lapse shot technique is used to emphasize the long duration of sushi production that makes the audience appreciate the process of production and consumption of sushi. After watching the documentary, the audience is expected to have a completely different perspective on sushi both on its production and consumption. Sushi is not only food, but it is passion, a lifelong effort to perfection, hard work, and a way of life.

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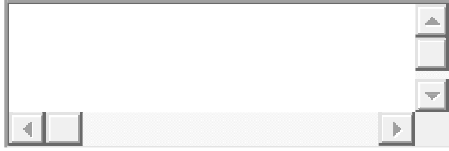
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JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI: A CIRCUIT OF SHOKUNIN

by Dewi Novianti

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JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI: A CIRCUIT OF SHOKUNIN

Abstract – This paper looks at David Gelb's 2011 documentary film, *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* from the perspective of the Shokunin concept. Referring to Hall's circuit of culture, this paper focuses on two interrelated links within cultural studies, which are production and consumption. Shokunin is simply defined as mastery of one's profession, and the film reflects this concept through the character, Jiro Ono, who dedicated his life to excelling in making sushi. The method used is qualitative and the data is drawn from the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène as part of the film studies method applied. The findings show that in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro's sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, shokunin, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work, and sacrifice.

Keywords: shokunin, production, consumption, film studies, cultural studies

I. INTRODUCTION

In the tradition of cultural studies research, the circuit of culture has become an inseparable part of the field. As a "model of central practices which produce culture," (Chandler & Munday, 2011) as devised by Stuart Hall in 1997, the circuit represents interrelated links among representation, production, consumption, distribution, and regulation which later produce shared meanings. This article focuses on the application of cultural studies in film, particularly a 2011-American documentary about centuries-old Japanese food, sushi, titled *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*. The research aims to understand how, as seen from the lens of Hall's circuit of culture, the culture shares its meanings through the concept of Japanese

Shokunin. The article will focus on two interrelated links, which are production and consumption. Production here refers to "the production of meaning" (Arvind, 2019) in the context of sushi production, while consumption refers to how sushi is consumed. The production and consumption of meaning that relates to the concept of shokunin are supported by film studies through the element of cinematography and mise-en-scène. Cinematography is defined as camerawork that includes camera choice, placement, and movement. While mise-en-scène refers to everything that the audience sees inside the frame which includes color, props, costumes, sound, actors, acting, dialogue, etc. These two elements help support the revelation of meaning through visualization.

Shokunin is defined as "...craftsmen, who strive to perfect their craft – and their life – and thereby create art" (Dempsey, 2015). It is a mastery of one's profession, and it is evident in the film that Jiro embodies this concept. Thus, although the film is produced in 2011, the concept of shokunin remains an important aspect in the lives of Japanese professionals. It also offers a valuable lesson about how and what it takes to excel in one's work. This paper will fill the gap in the interdisciplinary studies that combine cultural studies and film studies on the specifically chosen film. To show that this film is worth analyzing, there are many articles both academic and popular, that discuss the film from various perspectives. This includes a thesis by Dempsey that talks about shokunin in the film as seen through the philosophical approach (Dempsey, 2015). Then, Condis discusses the film more popularly in an online monthly newspaper in which she claims that the film has a dream-like medium (Condis, 2019). Haas (2017) discusses the aspects of the ideology of the Japanese cuisine that includes sushi through the film *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*. Brown(2017) looks at the film from the gender perspective in which she argues that the gendering of the chef profession in Japan has a

long story that relates to the idea of “master” or craftsmen. Of all the papers written about the film and the concept, none discusses the film from the perspective of film studies, thus making this research one of its kind.

II. METHOD

The method used in this research is qualitative. Firstly, the researcher watches the film multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of it. Secondly, the researcher focuses on the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scène to find required data in regard to the topic discussed, i.e. the shokunin concept as seen from the consumption and production of the circuit of culture. After the data is collected, it is then processed to produce findings regarding the topic. Finally, a conclusion is drawn, and a future study suggestion is offered.

As an interdisciplinary article that combines cultural studies and film studies, a deep understanding of the two theories is required. The circuit of culture chosen is production and consumption. Production and consumption in this context do not refer to the production and the consumption of the film, but the production of sushi by the craftsman and how the consumers consume the sushi, which is the object in the film. Thus, the article looks at how the film helps produce the meaning of the production and consumption of sushi that pertains to the concept of shokunin. As for the film studies, the aspect of cinematography refers to the camera movement including where the camera is positioned and how it is moved. This camera placement and movement play an important role in providing meaning through visualization. For example, a close-up shot of sushi will provide a detailed texture of the food and at the same time gives a sense of closeness to the audience. Mise-en-scène refers to everything the audience sees in the frame, including dialogue, actions, sound, color, etc. This research particularly looks at the special effect such as slow-motion to emphasize certain scenes or fast forward to show the passing of time. Besides that, the dialogue and action of the characters are also significant in providing visualized meaning to the audience. Both the cultural studies and film studies theory is

applied to understand how the film reflects the shokunin concept.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

¹ Jiro Dreams of Sushi is a documentary film that showcases a family of sushi makers in Tokyo. In particular, the film focuses on the patriarch of the family, an 85-year-old Jiro, who is probably the best sushi chef in the world. The film revolves around the everyday life of Jiro and his son in thriving and maintaining to be the best in the sushi world. Even though their restaurant is small, located in a subway station in Tokyo’s Ginza section, and only sits ten people, it has been awarded a three-star Michelin award, the highest accolade a restaurant can receive. The three-star Michelin restaurant equals “exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey” (Staff, 2020) which explains why it takes months of waiting period as the restaurant is so popular. The latest news on the restaurant informs that in 2020 the restaurant loses its Michelin star because they no longer accept public reservations. The pandemic is probably one of the factors in play. Nevertheless, to be awarded such a prestigious cuisine award is proof of excellence in food production technique and food taste. The path to excellence requires hard work, discipline, and repetition, and this is where the concept of shokunin comes in. Shokunin is defined as “craftsmen”, but in the sushi world, sushi chefs are also called shokunin, “...which skill comes through repetition of making and eating relatively standard forms of food using long-established techniques and ingredients” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). Dempsey argues that the character Jiro Ono as a sushi chef possesses certain traits that reflect the shokunin concept: passionate, persistent, disciplined, curious, imaginative, courageous, humble, and selfless (Dempsey, 2015). In the film opening, Jiro Ono (figure 1) expresses his life philosophy that accurately reflects a shokunin concept: “Once you decide on your occupation, you must immerse yourself in your work. You have to fall in love with your work. Never complain about your job. You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill. That’s the secret of success and is the key to being regarded

honorably” (Gelb, 2011). Ono’s dialogue as part of the mise-en-scène reflects the nature of a sushi chef that includes being disciplined, passionate, and persistent. The film, through visualization, supports emphasizes these traits to bring understanding to the audience about the concept of shokunin.



Figure 1 A close-up shot of Jiro Ono, the shokunin

To understand the shared meanings of the sushi culture through the concept of shokunin, it is imperative to look at the contribution of the film elements: cinematography and mise-en-scène. Visually, the film frames the consumption and production of sushi efficiently and directly through the two film elements. The film opens in a series of slow-motion shots showing a hand wearing a glove opening a door, then the shot changes into a shot of the gloves being taken off, and then shifts to a shot of a small sushi restaurant (figures 2 to 4).



Figure 2 A close-up shot of a hand opening a door



Figure 3 A close-up shot of a hand taking off the gloves



Figure 4 A shot of a small sushi restaurant

The first three shots above provide an important clue to the audience: the significant role of hands in producing sushi. The art of sushi making undoubtedly requires the finesse of the hands. The gloved hand symbolizes hard work as it refers to hands that work. Figure 4 shows the restaurant represents the “sushi world” where sushi chef produces and showcases their “art” for the customers to appreciate and consume. From the element of cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots. Close-up shots give more intimacy between the object and the audience because the expressions and emotions are visible when the object is people, and they give details in texture and often times raise appetite when the object is a thing such as food (see figure 5).



Figure 5 A close-up shot of a sushi

From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses slow-motion technique and time-lapse shot technique when it shows the production of sushi. The slow-motion technique is literally stretching the time to move slower, which can only happen in the film. “In this regard, stretching time may resemble psychological experiences of highly emotional moments in daily life, in which time seems to pass more slowly” (Arstila, 2012). Thus, this technique

aims to generate emotional feelings. In addition, “Any time a filmmaker uses slow-mo, they’re choosing to drive attention to small details. In doing so, those details achieve significance” (Risk, 2016). This is what the film wants to achieve through shooting the two important objects—Jiro Ono and the sushi—in close-up shots: to emphasize the details and their significance so the audience can see how they relate to the concept of shokunin. The second technique used is time-lapse shots that give an effect of shortening the time, and at the same time emphasize the long duration of sushi production from its preparation process to its serving on the table. The passing of time through the time-lapse shot technique gives the audience an understanding of the intricate and long process of sushi production that may only take seconds to consume when the sushi is ready. On the other hand, the slow-motion technique combined with close-up shots provides the audience with a closer look at the detailed process of sushi production.

In another scene, the film visualizes how Ono’s apprentices must massage an octopus for almost one hour (see figure 6) to ensure that it has a soft texture and to bring out the fragrance of the octopus.



Figure 6 A close-up shot of an apprentice’s hand massaging an octopus

Like the octopus’s massage, the apprentices also perform a similar thing when they prepare the rice. They perform the same tasks over and over for weeks before moving to the next step of making sushi. Before they reach the shokunin’s standard, they will keep doing the same duty. This master-apprentice hierarchy and repetitive procedure are something common in the tradition of shokunin. What is important to the shokunin is the quality of food that is served, and not the price, as Ono explicitly mentions: “Shokunin try to get the

highest quality fish and apply their technique to it. We don’t care about money” (Gelb, 2011). These visualizations through mise-en-scène and cinematography emphasize the persistent and disciplined nature of the shokunin. In other scenes, the long-tiring process of sushi making is visually described in a normal tempo accompanied with detail elaboration from the interviewees, for example, in the scene when Yoshikazu, Jiro Ono’s older son, has to prepare the seaweed wrappers for the sushi which informs the audience the meticulous process of smoking them sheet by sheet (see figure 7).



Figure 7 A shot of Yoshikazu smoking the seaweeds

The interview of Yoshikazu, while he is performing his duty, provides detailed information from his dialogue and from the visualization of what he is doing. The alternate shots of Yoshikazu’s face and what he does emphasize the delicacy of sushi preparation that is part of the shokunin tradition.

As a shokunin, Jiro is often framed through a medium close-up with his hands folded while scrutinizing every detail of his interns’ and son’s performance. The film also visually shows the long chain of production that begins at sea when the seamen catch the fish to be delivered to the then famous Tsukiji seafood market (as of 2018, the market is moved to Toyosu and named Toyosu Market), and how difficult and sometimes frustrating it is to find good ingredients for the sushi. These visual examples are ways for the film to connect sushi production with the spirit of shokunin. Shokunin emphasizes, among others, discipline and expertise through repetition. As evident in the example above, the film shows these traits through its repetitive shots of similar actions and explicitly through the interview of some of the characters. For example, Yoshikazu informs the audience that Jiro never skips work unless

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Figure 8 Jiro Ono “performs” in front of his customers

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In conclusion, in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, it is clear that the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro's sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and

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The concept of shokunin is visually supported by the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène. From the cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots of the main characters, the process of production, and the sushi. There are also many alternate shots between the characters and the activities they do to show the delicate process of producing sushi. The effect of close-up shots is a closer intimacy between the audience and the objects on film which provides the audience with a deeper understanding of sushi culture and shokunin concept. The close-up shots that are sometimes repetitive are also meant to emphasize the nature of the shokunin concept: repetition for perfection and strict discipline. From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses dialogue, slow-motion technique, and time-lapse shot technique to emphasize the concept of shokunin. The dialogue gives the audience first-hand information from the characters about the virtue of shokunin. The slow-motion technique is used to dramatize the production of sushi and to immerse the audience into the world of sushi and shokunin concept. The time-lapse shot technique is used to emphasize the long duration of sushi production that makes the audience appreciate the process of production and consumption of sushi. After watching the documentary, the audience is expected to have a completely different perspective on sushi, that it is not only about food, but it is about passion, a lifelong effort to perfection, hard work, and a way of life.

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JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI: A CIRCUIT OF SHOKUNIN

Abstract – *This paper looks at David Gelb’s 2011 documentary film, Jiro Dreams of Sushi from the perspective of the Shokunin concept. Referring to Hall’s circuit of culture, this paper focuses on two interrelated links within cultural studies: production and consumption. The production and consumption refer to the sushi culture. Shokunin is simply defined as mastery of one’s profession or craftsmen, and the film reflects this concept through the character, Jiro Ono, who dedicated his life to excelling in making sushi. The method used in this research is qualitative and the data is drawn from the film’s cinematography which refers to the camerawork, and mise-en-scène which refers to everything on the film frame, as part of the film studies method applied. The findings show that in terms of production and consumption of the sushi within the circuit of culture, the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro Ono’s sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, shokunin, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work, and sacrifice. These findings are supported by the visualization of the production and consumption through the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scène.*

Keywords: shokunin, production, consumption, film studies, cultural studies

I. INTRODUCTION

In the tradition of cultural studies research, the circuit of culture has become an inseparable part of the field. The circuit represents interrelated links among representation, production, consumption, distribution, and regulation which later produce shared meanings. Cultural studies itself is an “...‘inter-discipline’, interested in any cultural practices where contestation and negotiation

over meaning is at stake” (Ang, 2020). This article focuses on the application of cultural studies in film, particularly a 2011-American documentary about centuries-old Japanese food, sushi, titled *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, directed by David Gelb who recently also conceptualized the Netflix series, *Chef’s Table* (Leer, 2022). The research aims to understand how, as seen from the lens of Hall’s circuit of culture, the culture shares its meanings through the concept of Japanese’ *shokunin*. The article will focus on two interrelated links: production and consumption. Production here refers to “the production of meaning” (Arvind, 2019) in the context of sushi production, while consumption refers to how sushi is consumed. The production and consumption of meaning related to the *shokunin* concept are supported by film studies through the element of cinematography and mise-en-scène. Cinematography is defined as camerawork that includes camera choice, placement, and movement. While mise-en-scène refers to everything that the audience sees inside the frame, including color, props, costumes, sound, actors, acting, dialogue, etc. These two elements help support the revelation of meaning through visualization.

Shokunin is defined as “...craftsmen, who strive to perfect their craft – and their life – and thereby create art” (Dempsey, 2015). It is a mastery of one’s profession, and it is evident in the film that Jiro embodies this concept. Thus, although the film is produced in 2011, the concept of *shokunin* remains an important aspect in the lives of Japanese professionals. It also offers a valuable lesson about how and what it takes to excel in one’s work. This paper will fill the gap in the interdisciplinary studies that combine cultural studies and film studies on the specifically chosen film. One article that discusses the element of sushi consumption is done by Nakayama & Wan (2019), who conduct a cross-cultural analysis based on Yelp reviews on sushi consumption. The discussion of the film from the perspective of film studies and the two elements of cultural studies has

never been done before, thus making this research one of its kind.

Although originally came from China, sushi that was introduced to Japan in the 7th century (Kulawik & Dordevic, 2020) is undoubtedly one of the well-known cuisines in the world that most people know come from Japan. “Globally, sushi is considered as a healthy meal because it has low calories and it contains low amounts of fat and cholesterol” (Dordevic & Buchtova, 2020). Began as simple and quick-ready food, sushi gains its fame through “technology that has accelerated the globalization process, bringing together customer tastes and turning local to universal flavors” (Andriyani & Hidayat, 2021). The simplicity rests in the final product of traditional sushi that contains two major elements: fish and rice. Baumert & Fukuda (2021) states that “It is customary in Japan, among chefs and families alike, to say that fresh fish will be ‘first eaten raw, and then grilled, and finally stewed’, in a slow transition that distances it from its original state because of the impossibility of conserving the flavor of raw fish products due to natural decomposition.” It means eating the fish raw is the best way to fully absorb all its flavors. Much research has been done showing recommendations and the advantage of consuming fish which is known for its nutritional values, “...being an important source of proteins, essential fatty acids, minerals and micronutrients” (Neus et al., 2021). Although it is also found that there are risks of eating raw fish, especially for those who never have had one before, such as the disease called “tingling throat syndrome” that causes by a moving worm inside one’s lungs after consuming raw fish (Eskild & Aarhus, 2019). *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* depicts another perspective of the sushi world: the complexity and long tradition of sushi production and consumption.

II. METHOD

The method used in this research is qualitative. Firstly, the researcher watches the film multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of it. Secondly, the researcher focuses on the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scène to find required data regarding the

topic discussed, i.e. the *shokunin* concept as seen from the consumption and production of the circuit of culture. After the data is collected, it is then processed to produce findings regarding the topic. Finally, a conclusion is drawn, and a future study suggestion is offered.

As an interdisciplinary article that combines cultural studies and film studies, a deep understanding of the two theories is required. The circuit of culture chosen is production and consumption. Production and consumption in this context do not refer to the production and the consumption of the film, but the production of sushi by the craftsman and how the consumers consume the sushi, which is the object in the film. Thus, the article looks at how the film helps produce the meaning of the production and consumption of sushi that pertains to the concept of *shokunin*. As for the film studies, the aspect of cinematography refers to the camera movement including where the camera is positioned and how it is moved. This camera placement and movement play an important role in providing meaning through visualization. For example, a close-up shot of sushi will provide a detailed texture of the food and at the same time gives a sense of closeness to the audience. Mise-en-scène refers to everything the audience sees in the frame, including dialogue, actions, sound, color, etc. This research particularly looks at the special effect such as slow-motion to emphasize certain scenes or fast forward to show the passing of time. Besides that, the dialogue and action of the characters are also significant in providing visualized meaning to the audience. Both the cultural studies and film studies theory is applied to understand how the film reflects the *shokunin* concept.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jiro Dreams of Sushi is a documentary film that showcases a family of sushi makers in Tokyo. In particular, the film focuses on the patriarch of the family, an 85-year-old Jiro, who is one of the best sushi chefs in the world. The film revolves around the everyday life of Jiro and his son in excelling the sushi world. Even though their restaurant is small, located in a subway station in Tokyo’s Ginza section, and

only sits ten people, it has been awarded a three-star Michelin award, the highest accolade a restaurant can receive. The three-star Michelin restaurant equals exceptional cuisine and premium price which explains why it takes months the waiting period as the restaurant is so popular. A Michelin-star restaurant is assessed based on meal experience, brand credibility, trust, and service quality among others (Kiatkawsin & Sutherland, 2020). The latest news on the restaurant informs that in 2020 the restaurant loses its Michelin star because they no longer accept public reservations. The pandemic is probably one of the factors in play. Nevertheless, to be awarded such a prestigious cuisine award is proof of excellence in food production technique and food taste. The path to excellence requires hard work, discipline, and repetition, and this is where the concept of *shokunin* comes in. *Shokunin* is defined as “craftsmen”, but in the sushi world, sushi chefs are also called *shokunin*, “...which skill comes through repetition of making and eating relatively standard forms of food using long-established techniques and ingredients” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). In another definition, the term *shokunin* also refers to “...the professional cook of Japanese cuisine” (St. Maurice, 2018). Dempsey argues that the character Jiro Ono as a sushi chef possesses certain traits that reflect the *shokunin* concept: passionate, persistent, disciplined, curious, imaginative, courageous, humble, and selfless (Dempsey, 2015). In other words, “...the sushi chef presents himself as a master, preserving the elite statuses of both the chef and the cuisine” (Clark, 2017). In the film opening, Jiro Ono (figure 1) expresses his life philosophy that accurately reflects a *shokunin* concept: “Once you decide on your occupation, you must immerse yourself in your work. You have to fall in love with your work. Never complain about your job. You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill. That’s the secret of success and is the key to being regarded honorably” (Gelb, 2011). Ono’s dialogue as part of the mise-en-scène reflects the nature of a sushi chef includes being disciplined, passionate, and persistent. The film, through visualization, supports emphasizes these traits to bring understanding to the audience about the concept of *shokunin*.



Figure 1 A close-up shot of Jiro Ono, the *shokunin*

To understand the shared meanings of the sushi culture through the concept of *shokunin*, it is imperative to look at the contribution of the film elements: cinematography and mise-en-scène. Visually, the film frames the consumption and production of sushi efficiently and directly through the two film elements. The film opens in a series of slow-motion shots showing a hand wearing a glove opening a door, then the shot changes into a shot of the gloves being taken off, and then shifts to a shot of a small sushi restaurant (figures 2 to 4).



Figure 2 A close-up shot of a hand opening a door



Figure 3 A close-up shot of a hand taking off the gloves



Figure 4 A shot of a small sushi restaurant

The first three shots above provide an important clue to the audience: the significant role of hands in producing sushi. The art of sushi making undoubtedly requires the finesse of the hands. The gloved hand symbolizes hard work as it refers to hands that work. Figure 4 shows the restaurant represents the “sushi world” where sushi chef produces and showcases their “art” for the customers to appreciate and consume. From the element of cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots. Close-up shots give more intimacy between the object and the audience because the expressions and emotions are visible when the object is people, and they give details in texture and often raise appetite when the object is a thing such as food (see figure 5). Close-up shots also psychologically increase viewer cognitive empathy (Lankhuizen et al., 2020). In this way, the film manages to draw the audience to feel involved in the sushi production.



Figure 5 A close-up shot of a sushi

From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses slow-motion technique and time-lapse shot technique when it shows the production of sushi. The slow-motion technique is stretching the time to move slower, which can only happen in the film. This technique aims to generate emotional feelings. This is what the film wants to achieve through shooting the two important

objects—Jiro Ono and the sushi—in close-up shots: to emphasize the details and their significance so the audience can see how they relate to the concept of *shokunin*. The second technique used is time-lapse shots that give an effect of shortening the time, and at the same time emphasize the long duration of sushi production from its preparation process to its serving on the table. The passing of time through the time-lapse shot technique gives the audience an understanding of the intricate and long process of sushi production that may only take seconds to consume when the sushi is ready. On the other hand, the slow-motion technique combined with close-up shots provides the audience with a closer look at the detailed process of sushi production.

In another scene, the film visualizes how Ono’s apprentices must massage an octopus for almost one hour (see figure 6) to ensure that it has a soft texture and to bring out the fragrance of the octopus.



Figure 6 A close-up shot of an apprentice’s hand massaging an octopus

Like the octopus’s massage, the apprentices also perform a similar thing when they prepare the rice. They perform the same tasks over and over for weeks before moving to the next step of making sushi. Before they reach the *shokunin*’s standard, they will keep doing the same duty. This master-apprentice hierarchy and repetitive procedure are something common in the tradition of *shokunin*. What is important to the *shokunin* is the quality of food that is served, and not the price, as Ono explicitly mentions: “*Shokunin* try to get the highest quality fish and apply their technique to it. We don’t care about money” (Gelb, 2011). These visualizations through mise-en-scène and cinematography emphasize the persistent and disciplined nature of the *shokunin*. In other scenes, the long-tiring process of sushi making

is visually described in a normal tempo accompanied with detail elaboration from the interviewees, for example, in the scene when Yoshikazu, Jiro Ono's older son, has to prepare the seaweed wrappers for the sushi which informs the audience the meticulous process of smoking them sheet by sheet (see figure 7).



Figure 7 A shot of Yoshikazu smoking the seaweeds

The interview of Yoshikazu, while he is performing his duty, provides detailed information from his dialogue and from the visualization of what he is doing. The alternate shots of Yoshikazu's face and what he does emphasize the delicacy of sushi preparation that is part of the *shokunin* tradition.

As a *shokunin*, Jiro is often framed through a medium close-up with his hands folded while scrutinizing every detail of his interns' and son's performance. The film also visually shows the long chain of production that begins at sea when the seamen catch the fish to be delivered to the then famous Tsukiji seafood market (as of 2018, the market is moved to Toyosu and named Toyosu Market), and how difficult and sometimes frustrating it is to find good ingredients for the sushi. These visual examples are ways for the film to connect sushi production with the spirit of *shokunin*. *Shokunin* emphasizes, among others, discipline and expertise through repetition. As evident in the example above, the film shows these traits through its repetitive shots of similar actions and explicitly through the interview of some of the characters. For example, Yoshikazu informs the audience that Jiro never skips work unless he is sick, during a national holiday, or goes to a funeral. Jiro himself clearly states that he never feels satisfied with his skills and even in his eighties, is still looking for perfection. He is ninety-four today and he is still active in the

restaurant watching over his son who will take over the business.

From some of the examples above, it is evident that in the context of production, making sushi is not merely a mechanical or technical process. Far from that, producing good sushi is a life mission, an ongoing and never-ending process of perfection. It requires sacrifice and good cooperation and commitment. In other words, producing good sushi is a way of life. The concept of *shokunin* influences these processes deeply. Indeed, not all sushi chef applies a similar concept in producing good sushi, but Jiro with his *shokunin* spirit has set a very high standard for other sushi chefs to reach. However, his success is not without sacrifice. Being a devoted *shokunin*, the film also tells about how Jiro admits that he is not a good father, to the point when his children do not recognize him as their father. Being a *shokunin*, Jiro rarely has a "normal" life, a life choice he takes to reach the highest standard as a sushi chef. Thus, producing good sushi for him is not a job, but a life, and his dedication has won him not only acknowledgment, awards, and prestige, but more importantly, he manages to influence others, especially his sons and interns, to commit to the life of a *shokunin*.

The second aspect is the consumption of sushi. While the audience thinks that consuming sushi is just like consuming any other food, Jiro as a *shokunin* delivers a different message on how eating sushi means more than just putting sushi in your mouth and swallowing it. In the spirit of *shokunin*, Jiro explains that consuming sushi requires certain rules and rituals which also include discipline and harmony. "The customer is to eat the piece of sushi in one bite; biting it in half or leaving some is not acceptable, and it is to be eaten within seconds after the chef serves it in front of them" (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). Even the process of reserving a table requires patience and a long wait, customers are required to reserve months before eating at Jiro's restaurant (Sukiyabashi Jiro) at Ginza. The fact that the restaurant only sits ten people signifies that profit is not the main purpose of Ono.



Figure 8 Jiro Ono “performs” in front of his customers

What is more important is the satisfaction of the customer and their experience of eating sushi in a *shokunin*'s way. The film visualizes this through close-up shots of Jiro Ono performing his “art” (figure 8) in front of the customers and watching the customers enjoy the sushi he makes. Although the restaurant carries an exclusive atmosphere, Yoshikazu claims that “We are not trying to be exclusive or elite. The techniques we use are no big secret. It’s just about making an effort and repeating the same thing every day” (Gelb, 2011). His comment both confirms that profit is not the main thing, but customer satisfaction is, and the repetitive action is mentioned as a part of the *shokunin* concept. The small size of the restaurant supports the idea of *shokunin* because “The space for eating sushi matters not simply for the preparation and eating of the food because it is where the customers and *shokunin* form a gathering” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). It means that the smaller the space, the better it is to create intimacy between the sushi chef and the customers. For common customers, as the film tells, eating sushi at Jiro’s place is tensing, almost intimidating, which is a clear sign of how the aura of *shokunin* is evident in the restaurant. Being disciplined is not only from the *shokunin*'s side but also from the customers as they are demanded to follow the strict tradition of consuming sushi. One of the interviewees, a culinary expert, explains in detail how every time he eats at Jiro’s place, he never feels disappointed and often feels the tense atmosphere while eating. Jiro’s younger son, who owns a sushi restaurant elsewhere, explicitly mentions that some customers choose to visit his restaurant because the atmosphere is more relaxed compared to that of Jiro’s. As for the price, a minimum of around \$300 price tag

is worth the money and trip because the customers know that they are only served the best sushi by the best chef. Another proof of *shokunin*'s concept of consumption is when the film visually described the serving and consumption of sushi as an orchestra concert, as one of the interviewees says that the meal is divided into “three movements”: classic items such as tuna or kohada in the first movement; the second movement is the fresh catch of the day or the seasonal; and the last movement the traditional such as sea eel, kanpyo, and egg. Jiro meticulously keeps thinking about what sushi to be served, and how and to whom they are served. For example, he usually measures up the customer’s physical body to calculate how much rice he should prepare, or when he notices that a customer is left-handed, he will serve the customer in a way that will comfort the customer. Consequently, the consumers are not supposed to eat in a way they like, but they must follow the procedure. Jiro explains that a customer can pick the sushi with a chopstick or their hands, and that sushi must be eaten whole, not cut. These details reflect the value of *shokunin* in which the customers need to appreciate the beauty, the balance, and the harmonious ways of consuming sushi.

His fame as a *shokunin* sushi chef is internationally acknowledged and many important figures have dined at Jiro’s place, for example, previous U.S. president Barack Obama has dined there together with the Japanese prime minister during one of his visits to Japan. It is understandable why the Japanese Prime Minister takes Obama there, not only to introduce him to the traditional Japanese food and delicious sushi but more importantly to introduce Obama to one important virtue of the Japanese people: their perseverance and commitment to reach perfection, which is indeed something to be proud of.

The film is closed by a close-up shot of Jiro Ono inside a fast-moving train (see figure 9). He is seen to be smiling and then the film ends. The final scene inside a moving train suggests the fast-moving and advancing Japan, while Jiro Ono symbolizes the old tradition. His sitting on the train at the end of the film suggests that he will keep on moving and not merely stay still in pursuing his dream: perfecting the sushi production as long as he can, while at the same time preparing his son to continue the tradition.



Figure 9 Jiro Ono inside the moving train in the end of the film

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, it is clear that the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro's sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, *shokunin*, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work and sacrifice.

The concept of *shokunin* is visually supported by the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène. From the cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots of the main characters, the process of production, and the sushi. There are also many alternate shots between the characters and the activities they do to show the delicate process of producing sushi. The effect of close-up shots is a closer intimacy between the audience and the objects on film which provides the audience with a deeper understanding of sushi culture and the *shokunin* concept. The close-up shots that are sometimes repetitive emphasize the nature of the *shokunin* concept: repetition for perfection and strict discipline. From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses dialogue, slow-motion technique, and time-lapse shot technique to emphasize the concept of *shokunin*. The dialogue gives the audience first-hand information from the characters about the virtue of *shokunin*. The slow-motion technique is used to dramatize the production of sushi and to immerse the audience into the world of sushi and the *shokunin* concept. The time-lapse shot technique is used

to emphasize the long duration of sushi production that makes the audience appreciate the process of production and consumption of sushi. After watching the documentary, the audience is expected to have a completely different perspective on sushi both on its production and consumption. Sushi is not only food, but it is a passion, a lifelong effort to perfection, hard work, and a way of life.

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JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI: A CIRCUIT OF SHOKUNIN

Abstract – *This paper looks at David Gelb’s 2011 documentary film, Jiro Dreams of Sushi from the perspective of the Shokunin concept. Referring to Hall’s circuit of culture, this paper focuses on two interrelated links within cultural studies: production and consumption. The production and consumption refer to the sushi culture. Shokunin is simply defined as mastery of one’s profession or craftsmen, and the film reflects this concept through the character, Jiro Ono, who dedicated his life to excelling in making sushi. The method used in this research is qualitative and the data is drawn from the film’s cinematography which refers to the camerawork, and mise-en-scène which refers to everything on the film frame, as part of the film studies method applied. The findings show that in terms of production and consumption of the sushi within the circuit of culture, the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro Ono’s sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, shokunin, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work, and sacrifice. These findings are supported by the visualization of the production and consumption through the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scène.*

Keywords: shokunin, production, consumption, film studies, cultural studies

I. INTRODUCTION

In the tradition of cultural studies research, the circuit of culture has become an inseparable part of the field. The circuit represents interrelated links among representation, production, consumption, distribution, and regulation which later produce shared meanings. Cultural studies itself is an “...‘inter-discipline’, interested in any cultural practices where contestation and negotiation

over meaning is at stake” (Ang, 2020). This article focuses on the application of cultural studies in film, particularly a 2011-American documentary about centuries-old Japanese food, sushi, titled *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, directed by David Gelb who recently also conceptualized the Netflix series, *Chef’s Table* (Leer, 2022). The research aims to understand how, as seen from the lens of Hall’s circuit of culture, the culture shares its meanings through the concept of Japanese’ *shokunin*. The article will focus on two interrelated links: production and consumption. Production here refers to “the production of meaning” (Arvind, 2019) in the context of sushi production, while consumption refers to how sushi is consumed. The production and consumption of meaning related to the *shokunin* concept are supported by film studies through the element of cinematography and mise-en-scène. Cinematography is defined as camerawork that includes camera choice, placement, and movement. While mise-en-scène refers to everything that the audience sees inside the frame, including color, props, costumes, sound, actors, acting, dialogue, etc. These two elements help support the revelation of meaning through visualization.

Shokunin is defined as “...craftsmen, who strive to perfect their craft – and their life – and thereby create art” (Dempsey, 2015). It is a mastery of one’s profession, and it is evident in the film that Jiro embodies this concept. Thus, although the film is produced in 2011, the concept of *shokunin* remains an important aspect in the lives of Japanese professionals. It also offers a valuable lesson about how and what it takes to excel in one’s work. This paper will fill the gap in the interdisciplinary studies that combine cultural studies and film studies on the specifically chosen film. One article that discusses the element of sushi consumption is done by Nakayama & Wan (2019), who conduct a cross-cultural analysis based on Yelp reviews on sushi consumption. The discussion of the film from the perspective of film studies and the two elements of cultural studies has

never been done before, thus making this research one of its kind.

Although originally came from China, sushi that was introduced to Japan in the 7th century (Kulawik & Dordevic, 2020) is undoubtedly one of the well-known cuisines in the world that most people know come from Japan. “Globally, sushi is considered as a healthy meal because it has low calories and it contains low amounts of fat and cholesterol” (Dordevic & Buchtova, 2020). Began as simple and quick-ready food, sushi gains its fame through “technology that has accelerated the globalization process, bringing together customer tastes and turning local to universal flavors” (Andriyani & Hidayat, 2021). The simplicity rests in the final product of traditional sushi that contains two major elements: fish and rice. Baumert & Fukuda (2021) states that “It is customary in Japan, among chefs and families alike, to say that fresh fish will be ‘first eaten raw, and then grilled, and finally stewed’, in a slow transition that distances it from its original state because of the impossibility of conserving the flavor of raw fish products due to natural decomposition.” It means eating the fish raw is the best way to fully absorb all its flavors. Much research has been done showing recommendations and the advantage of consuming fish which is known for its nutritional values, “...being an important source of proteins, essential fatty acids, minerals and micronutrients” (Neus et al., 2021). Although it is also found that there are risks of eating raw fish, especially for those who never have had one before, such as the disease called “tingling throat syndrome” that causes by a moving worm inside one’s lungs after consuming raw fish (Eskild & Aarhus, 2019). *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* depicts another perspective of the sushi world: the complexity and long tradition of sushi production and consumption.

II. METHOD

The method used in this research is qualitative. Firstly, the researcher watches the film multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of it. Secondly, the researcher focuses on the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scène to find required data regarding the

topic discussed, i.e. the *shokunin* concept as seen from the consumption and production of the circuit of culture. After the data is collected, it is then processed to produce findings regarding the topic. Finally, a conclusion is drawn, and a future study suggestion is offered.

As an interdisciplinary article that combines cultural studies and film studies, a deep understanding of the two theories is required. The circuit of culture chosen is production and consumption. Production and consumption in this context do not refer to the production and the consumption of the film, but the production of sushi by the craftsman and how the consumers consume the sushi, which is the object in the film. Thus, the article looks at how the film helps produce the meaning of the production and consumption of sushi that pertains to the concept of *shokunin*. As for the film studies, the aspect of cinematography refers to the camera movement including where the camera is positioned and how it is moved. This camera placement and movement play an important role in providing meaning through visualization. For example, a close-up shot of sushi will provide a detailed texture of the food and at the same time gives a sense of closeness to the audience. Mise-en-scène refers to everything the audience sees in the frame, including dialogue, actions, sound, color, etc. This research particularly looks at the special effect such as slow-motion to emphasize certain scenes or fast forward to show the passing of time. Besides that, the dialogue and action of the characters are also significant in providing visualized meaning to the audience. Both the cultural studies and film studies theory is applied to understand how the film reflects the *shokunin* concept.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jiro Dreams of Sushi is a documentary film that showcases a family of sushi makers in Tokyo. In particular, the film focuses on the patriarch of the family, an 85-year-old Jiro, who is one of the best sushi chefs in the world. The film revolves around the everyday life of Jiro and his son in excelling the sushi world. Even though their restaurant is small, located in a subway station in Tokyo’s Ginza section, and

only sits ten people, it has been awarded a three-star Michelin award, the highest accolade a restaurant can receive. The three-star Michelin restaurant equals exceptional cuisine and premium price which explains why it takes months the waiting period as the restaurant is so popular. A Michelin-star restaurant is assessed based on meal experience, brand credibility, trust, and service quality among others (Kiatkawsin & Sutherland, 2020). The latest news on the restaurant informs that in 2020 the restaurant loses its Michelin star because they no longer accept public reservations. The pandemic is probably one of the factors in play. Nevertheless, to be awarded such a prestigious cuisine award is proof of excellence in food production technique and food taste. The path to excellence requires hard work, discipline, and repetition, and this is where the concept of *shokunin* comes in. *Shokunin* is defined as “craftsmen”, but in the sushi world, sushi chefs are also called *shokunin*, “...which skill comes through repetition of making and eating relatively standard forms of food using long-established techniques and ingredients” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). In another definition, the term *shokunin* also refers to “...the professional cook of Japanese cuisine” (St. Maurice, 2018). Dempsey argues that the character Jiro Ono as a sushi chef possesses certain traits that reflect the *shokunin* concept: passionate, persistent, disciplined, curious, imaginative, courageous, humble, and selfless (Dempsey, 2015). In other words, “...the sushi chef presents himself as a master, preserving the elite statuses of both the chef and the cuisine” (Clark, 2017). In the film opening, Jiro Ono (figure 1) expresses his life philosophy that accurately reflects a *shokunin* concept: “Once you decide on your occupation, you must immerse yourself in your work. You have to fall in love with your work. Never complain about your job. You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill. That’s the secret of success and is the key to being regarded honorably” (Gelb, 2011). Ono’s dialogue as part of the mise-en-scène reflects the nature of a sushi chef includes being disciplined, passionate, and persistent. The film, through visualization, supports emphasizes these traits to bring understanding to the audience about the concept of *shokunin*.



Figure 1 A close-up shot of Jiro Ono, the *shokunin*

To understand the shared meanings of the sushi culture through the concept of *shokunin*, it is imperative to look at the contribution of the film elements: cinematography and mise-en-scène. Visually, the film frames the consumption and production of sushi efficiently and directly through the two film elements. The film opens in a series of slow-motion shots showing a hand wearing a glove opening a door, then the shot changes into a shot of the gloves being taken off, and then shifts to a shot of a small sushi restaurant (figures 2 to 4).



Figure 2 A close-up shot of a hand opening a door



Figure 3 A close-up shot of a hand taking off the gloves



Figure 4 A shot of a small sushi restaurant

The first three shots above provide an important clue to the audience: the significant role of hands in producing sushi. The art of sushi making undoubtedly requires the finesse of the hands. The gloved hand symbolizes hard work as it refers to hands that work. Figure 4 shows the restaurant represents the “sushi world” where sushi chef produces and showcases their “art” for the customers to appreciate and consume. From the element of cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots. Close-up shots give more intimacy between the object and the audience because the expressions and emotions are visible when the object is people, and they give details in texture and often raise appetite when the object is a thing such as food (see figure 5). Close-up shots also psychologically increase viewer cognitive empathy (Lankhuizen et al., 2020). In this way, the film manages to draw the audience to feel involved in the sushi production.



Figure 5 A close-up shot of a sushi

From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses slow-motion technique and time-lapse shot technique when it shows the production of sushi. The slow-motion technique is stretching the time to move slower, which can only happen in the film. This technique aims to generate emotional feelings. This is what the film wants to achieve through shooting the two important

objects—Jiro Ono and the sushi—in close-up shots: to emphasize the details and their significance so the audience can see how they relate to the concept of *shokunin*. The second technique used is time-lapse shots that give an effect of shortening the time, and at the same time emphasize the long duration of sushi production from its preparation process to its serving on the table. The passing of time through the time-lapse shot technique gives the audience an understanding of the intricate and long process of sushi production that may only take seconds to consume when the sushi is ready. On the other hand, the slow-motion technique combined with close-up shots provides the audience with a closer look at the detailed process of sushi production.

In another scene, the film visualizes how Ono’s apprentices must massage an octopus for almost one hour (see figure 6) to ensure that it has a soft texture and to bring out the fragrance of the octopus.



Figure 6 A close-up shot of an apprentice’s hand massaging an octopus

Like the octopus’s massage, the apprentices also perform a similar thing when they prepare the rice. They perform the same tasks over and over for weeks before moving to the next step of making sushi. Before they reach the *shokunin*’s standard, they will keep doing the same duty. This master-apprentice hierarchy and repetitive procedure are something common in the tradition of *shokunin*. What is important to the *shokunin* is the quality of food that is served, and not the price, as Ono explicitly mentions: “*Shokunin* try to get the highest quality fish and apply their technique to it. We don’t care about money” (Gelb, 2011). These visualizations through mise-en-scène and cinematography emphasize the persistent and disciplined nature of the *shokunin*. In other scenes, the long-tiring process of sushi making

is visually described in a normal tempo accompanied with detail elaboration from the interviewees, for example, in the scene when Yoshikazu, Jiro Ono's older son, has to prepare the seaweed wrappers for the sushi which informs the audience the meticulous process of smoking them sheet by sheet (see figure 7).



Figure 7 A shot of Yoshikazu smoking the seaweeds

The interview of Yoshikazu, while he is performing his duty, provides detailed information from his dialogue and from the visualization of what he is doing. The alternate shots of Yoshikazu's face and what he does emphasize the delicacy of sushi preparation that is part of the *shokunin* tradition.

As a *shokunin*, Jiro is often framed through a medium close-up with his hands folded while scrutinizing every detail of his interns' and son's performance. The film also visually shows the long chain of production that begins at sea when the seamen catch the fish to be delivered to the then famous Tsukiji seafood market (as of 2018, the market is moved to Toyosu and named Toyosu Market), and how difficult and sometimes frustrating it is to find good ingredients for the sushi. These visual examples are ways for the film to connect sushi production with the spirit of *shokunin*. *Shokunin* emphasizes, among others, discipline and expertise through repetition. As evident in the example above, the film shows these traits through its repetitive shots of similar actions and explicitly through the interview of some of the characters. For example, Yoshikazu informs the audience that Jiro never skips work unless he is sick, during a national holiday, or goes to a funeral. Jiro himself clearly states that he never feels satisfied with his skills and even in his eighties, is still looking for perfection. He is ninety-four today and he is still active in the

restaurant watching over his son who will take over the business.

From some of the examples above, it is evident that in the context of production, making sushi is not merely a mechanical or technical process. Far from that, producing good sushi is a life mission, an ongoing and never-ending process of perfection. It requires sacrifice and good cooperation and commitment. In other words, producing good sushi is a way of life. The concept of *shokunin* influences these processes deeply. Indeed, not all sushi chef applies a similar concept in producing good sushi, but Jiro with his *shokunin* spirit has set a very high standard for other sushi chefs to reach. However, his success is not without sacrifice. Being a devoted *shokunin*, the film also tells about how Jiro admits that he is not a good father, to the point when his children do not recognize him as their father. Being a *shokunin*, Jiro rarely has a "normal" life, a life choice he takes to reach the highest standard as a sushi chef. Thus, producing good sushi for him is not a job, but a life, and his dedication has won him not only acknowledgment, awards, and prestige, but more importantly, he manages to influence others, especially his sons and interns, to commit to the life of a *shokunin*.

The second aspect is the consumption of sushi. While the audience thinks that consuming sushi is just like consuming any other food, Jiro as a *shokunin* delivers a different message on how eating sushi means more than just putting sushi in your mouth and swallowing it. In the spirit of *shokunin*, Jiro explains that consuming sushi requires certain rules and rituals which also include discipline and harmony. "The customer is to eat the piece of sushi in one bite; biting it in half or leaving some is not acceptable, and it is to be eaten within seconds after the chef serves it in front of them" (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). Even the process of reserving a table requires patience and a long wait, customers are required to reserve months before eating at Jiro's restaurant (Sukiyabashi Jiro) at Ginza. The fact that the restaurant only sits ten people signifies that profit is not the main purpose of Ono.



Figure 8 Jiro Ono “performs” in front of his customers

What is more important is the satisfaction of the customer and their experience of eating sushi in a *shokunin*'s way. The film visualizes this through close-up shots of Jiro Ono performing his “art” (figure 8) in front of the customers and watching the customers enjoy the sushi he makes. Although the restaurant carries an exclusive atmosphere, Yoshikazu claims that “We are not trying to be exclusive or elite. The techniques we use are no big secret. It’s just about making an effort and repeating the same thing every day” (Gelb, 2011). His comment both confirms that profit is not the main thing, but customer satisfaction is, and the repetitive action is mentioned as a part of the *shokunin* concept. The small size of the restaurant supports the idea of *shokunin* because “The space for eating sushi matters not simply for the preparation and eating of the food because it is where the customers and *shokunin* form a gathering” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). It means that the smaller the space, the better it is to create intimacy between the sushi chef and the customers. For common customers, as the film tells, eating sushi at Jiro’s place is tenses, almost intimidating, which is a clear sign of how the aura of *shokunin* is evident in the restaurant. Being disciplined is not only from the *shokunin*'s side but also from the customers as they are demanded to follow the strict tradition of consuming sushi. One of the interviewees, a culinary expert, explains in detail how every time he eats at Jiro’s place, he never feels disappointed and often feels the tense atmosphere while eating. Jiro’s younger son, who owns a sushi restaurant elsewhere, explicitly mentions that some customers choose to visit his restaurant because the atmosphere is more relaxed compared to that of Jiro’s. As for the price, a minimum of around \$300 price tag

is worth the money and trip because the customers know that they are only served the best sushi by the best chef. Another proof of *shokunin*'s concept of consumption is when the film visually described the serving and consumption of sushi as an orchestra concert, as one of the interviewees says that the meal is divided into “three movements”: classic items such as tuna or kohada in the first movement; the second movement is the fresh catch of the day or the seasonal; and the last movement the traditional such as sea eel, kanpyo, and egg. Jiro meticulously keeps thinking about what sushi to be served, and how and to whom they are served. For example, he usually measures up the customer’s physical body to calculate how much rice he should prepare, or when he notices that a customer is left-handed, he will serve the customer in a way that will comfort the customer. Consequently, the consumers are not supposed to eat in a way they like, but they must follow the procedure. Jiro explains that a customer can pick the sushi with a chopstick or their hands, and that sushi must be eaten whole, not cut. These details reflect the value of *shokunin* in which the customers need to appreciate the beauty, the balance, and the harmonious ways of consuming sushi.

His fame as a *shokunin* sushi chef is internationally acknowledged and many important figures have dined at Jiro’s place, for example, previous U.S. president Barack Obama has dined there together with the Japanese prime minister during one of his visits to Japan. It is understandable why the Japanese Prime Minister takes Obama there, not only to introduce him to the traditional Japanese food and delicious sushi but more importantly to introduce Obama to one important virtue of the Japanese people: their perseverance and commitment to reach perfection, which is indeed something to be proud of.

The film is closed by a close-up shot of Jiro Ono inside a fast-moving train (see figure 9). He is seen to be smiling and then the film ends. The final scene inside a moving train suggests the fast-moving and advancing Japan, while Jiro Ono symbolizes the old tradition. His sitting on the train at the end of the film suggests that he will keep on moving and not merely stay still in pursuing his dream: perfecting the sushi production as long as he can, while at the same time preparing his son to continue the tradition.



Figure 9 Jiro Ono inside the moving train in the end of the film

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, it is clear that the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro's sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, *shokunin*, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work and sacrifice.

The concept of *shokunin* is visually supported by the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène. From the cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots of the main characters, the process of production, and the sushi. There are also many alternate shots between the characters and the activities they do to show the delicate process of producing sushi. The effect of close-up shots is a closer intimacy between the audience and the objects on film which provides the audience with a deeper understanding of sushi culture and the *shokunin* concept. The close-up shots that are sometimes repetitive emphasize the nature of the *shokunin* concept: repetition for perfection and strict discipline. From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses dialogue, slow-motion technique, and time-lapse shot technique to emphasize the concept of *shokunin*. The dialogue gives the audience first-hand information from the characters about the virtue of *shokunin*. The slow-motion technique is used to dramatize the production of sushi and to immerse the audience into the world of sushi and the *shokunin* concept. The time-lapse shot technique is used

to emphasize the long duration of sushi production that makes the audience appreciate the process of production and consumption of sushi. After watching the documentary, the audience is expected to have a completely different perspective on sushi both on its production and consumption. Sushi is not only food, but it is a passion, a lifelong effort to perfection, hard work, and a way of life.

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6. Bukti masukan untuk reviewer (6 Jun 2022)

8444 - Review: JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI: A CIRCUIT OF SHOKUNIN

Title: Title represents the content*

- Yes
- No

Title: Title has never been mentioned in other journals*

- Yes
- No

Title - Comment: * **The title is appropriate.**

Abstract - Provide research problem and objective*

- Yes
- No

Abstract - Provide applied research method*

- Yes
- No

Abstract - Provide the result of the research*

- Yes
- No

Abstract - Provide relevant keyword*

- Yes
- No

Abstract - Comment * **The abstract is appropriate.**

Introduction - Provide research problem*

- Yes
- No

Introduction - Provide writer's insight and plan to the problem-solving effort*

- Yes
- No

Introduction - Provide research objective*

- Yes
- No

Introduction - Provide theoretical studies to the problems examined and previous research*

- Yes
- No

Introduction - Provide expectations of the results and benefits of research*

- Yes
- No

Introduction - Comment* **The introduction did not clearly explain the research result's expectations and the research benefits.**

Method - Describe method clearly*

- Yes
- No

Method - Comment* **The method is precise.**

Result and Discussion - Data presentation and explanation valid and reasonable*

- Yes
- No

Result and Discussion - Tables and figures are useful in the explanation*

- Yes
- No

Result and Discussion - Discussion / analysis is relevant to research results*

- Yes

- No

Results and Discussion - Comment: *** The data is presented well, and the discussion is relevant to the research result.**

Conclusion - Summary main finding*

- Yes
- No

Conclusion - Research contribution*

- Yes
- No

Conclusion - Research implication*

- Yes
- No

Conclusion - Research limitation*

- Yes
- No

Conclusion - Future research*

- Yes
- No

Conclusion - Comment *** The conclusion did not mention research limitations and future research.**

Reference - Relevant references*

- Yes
- No

References - Comment *** The references are relevant.**

Overall - Contribution to body of knowledge*

- Very Good
- Good
- Average
- Poor

Overall - Originality*

Overall - Sistematic*

- Very Good
- Good
- Average
- Poor

Overall - Language*

- Very Good
- Good
- Average
- Poor

Overall - Writing acuracy*

- Very Good
- Good
- Average
- Poor

Decision -*

- Accepted
- Accepted with Minor Revision
- Accepted with Major Revision
- Rejected

Comment* **In general, this research is interesting, explaining how the production and consumption of Shushi by the shokunin turnaround. However, in the discussion and analysis section, the researcher's opinion regarding the relationship between producers and consumers**

has not been explained. This relationship needs to be explained to determine how this circuit has been maintained until now.

7. Bukti draft sudah direvisi (7 Feb 2023)

JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI: A CIRCUIT OF SHOKUNIN

Abstract – *This paper looks at David Gelb’s 2011 documentary, Jiro Dreams of Sushi, from the Shokunin concept’s perspective. Referring to Hall’s circuit of culture, this paper focuses on two interrelated links within cultural studies: production and consumption. Production and consumption refer to the sushi culture. Shokunin is defined as mastery of one’s profession or artisans. The film reflects this concept through the character, Jiro Ono, who dedicated his life to excelling in making sushi. The method used in this research is qualitative. The data is drawn from the film’s cinematography which refers to the camerawork, and mise-en-scène, which refers to everything on the film frame, as part of the film studies method applied. The findings show that in terms of production and consumption of sushi within the circuit of culture, the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro Ono’s sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, shokunin, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work, and sacrifice. These findings are supported by visualizing the production and consumption through the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scène.*

Keywords: shokunin, production, consumption, film studies, cultural studies

I. INTRODUCTION

In the tradition of cultural studies research, the circuit of culture has become an inseparable part of the field. The circuit represents corresponding links among representation, production, consumption, distribution, and regulation which later produce shared meanings. Cultural studies is an “...‘inter-discipline interested in cultural practices where contestation and negotiation

over meaning are at stake” (Ang, 2020). This article focuses on applying cultural studies in film, particularly a 2011-American documentary about centuries-old Japanese food, sushi, *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, directed by David Gelb, who recently also conceptualized the Netflix series, *Chef’s Table* (Leer, 2022). The research aims to understand how, as seen from the lens of Hall’s circuit of culture, the culture shares its meanings through Japanese *shokunin*. The article will focus on two interrelated links: production and consumption. The production here refers to “the production of meaning” (Arvind, 2019) in the context of sushi production, while consumption refers to how sushi is consumed. The production and consumption of meaning related to the *shokunin* concept are supported by film studies through the element of cinematography and mise-en-scène. Cinematography is defined as camerawork that includes camera choice, placement, and movement. While mise-en-scène refers to everything that the audience sees inside the frame, including color, props, costumes, sound, actors, acting, dialogue, etc. These two elements help support the revelation of meaning through visualization.

Shokunin is defined as “...craftsmen who strive to perfect their craft – and their life – and thereby create art” (Dempsey, 2015). It is a mastery of one’s profession, and it is evident in the film that Jiro embodies this concept. Thus, although the film was produced in 2011, the concept of *shokunin* remains an essential aspect of the lives of Japanese professionals. It also offers a valuable lesson about how and what it takes to excel in one’s work. This paper will fill the gap in the interdisciplinary studies that combine cultural studies and film studies on the specifically chosen film. One article that discusses the element of sushi consumption is done by Nakayama & Wan (2019), who conducted a cross-cultural analysis based on Yelp reviews on sushi consumption. The discussion of the film from the perspective of film studies and the two elements of cultural

studies has never been done before, thus making this research one of its kind.

Although it originally came from China, sushi was introduced to Japan in the 7th century (Kulawik & Dordevic, 2020) is undoubtedly one of the most famous cuisines in the world that most people know come from Japan. “Globally, sushi is considered a healthy meal because it has low calories and contains low amounts of fat and cholesterol” (Dordevic & Buchtova, 2020). Began as simple and quick-ready food, sushi gains its fame through “technology that has accelerated the globalization process, bringing together customer tastes and turning local to universal flavors” (Andriyani & Hidayat, 2021). The simplicity rests in the final product of traditional sushi which contains two major elements: fish and rice. Baumert & Fukuda (2021) states that “It is customary in Japan, among chefs and families alike, to say that fresh fish will be ‘first eaten raw, and then grilled, and finally stewed,’ in a slow transition that distances it from its original state because of the impossibility of conserving the flavor of raw fish products due to natural decomposition.” It means eating the fish raw is the best way to fully absorb all its flavors. Much research has been done showing recommendations and the advantage of consuming fish which is known for its nutritional values, “...being an important source of proteins, essential fatty acids, minerals and micronutrients” (Neus et al., 2021). Although it is also found that there are risks of eating raw fish, especially for those who never have had one before, such as the disease called “tingling throat syndrome” that causes by a moving worm inside one’s lungs after consuming raw fish (Eskild & Aarhus, 2019). *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* depicts another perspective of the sushi world: the complexity and long tradition of sushi production and consumption.

II. METHOD

The method used in this research is qualitative. Firstly, the researcher watches the film multiple times to gain a deeper understanding. Secondly, the researcher focuses on the film’s cinematography and mise-en-scène to find required data regarding the topic

discussed, i.e. the *shokunin* concept as seen from the consumption and production of the circuit of culture. After the data is collected, it is then processed to produce findings regarding the topic. Finally, a conclusion is drawn, and a future study suggestion is offered.

As an interdisciplinary article that combines cultural studies and film studies, a deep understanding of the two theories is required. The circuit of culture chosen is production and consumption. Production and consumption in this context do not refer to the production and the consumption of the film but the production of sushi by the craftsman and how the consumers consume the sushi, which is the object in the film. Thus, the article looks at how the film helps produce the meaning of the production and consumption of sushi that pertains to the concept of *shokunin*. As for film studies, the aspect of cinematography refers to the camera movement, including where the camera is positioned and how it is moved. This camera placement and movement play an important role in providing meaning through visualization. For example, a close-up shot of sushi will offer a detailed texture of the food and, at the same time, gives a sense of closeness to the audience. *Mise-en-scène* refers to everything the audience sees in the frame, including dialogue, actions, sound, color, etc. This research mainly looks at the special effect such as slow-motion to emphasize certain scenes or fast-forward to show the passing of time. Besides that, the dialogue and action of the characters are also significant in providing visualized meaning to the audience. The cultural studies and film studies theory are applied to understand how the film reflects the *shokunin* concept.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jiro Dreams of Sushi is a documentary film that showcases a family of sushi makers in Tokyo. In particular, the film focuses on the patriarch of the family, an 85-year-old Jiro, who is one of the best sushi chefs in the world. The film revolves around the everyday life of Jiro and his son in excelling in the sushi world. Even though the restaurant is small, located in a subway station in Tokyo’s Ginza section, and

only sits ten people, it has been awarded a three-star Michelin award, the highest accolade a restaurant can receive. The three-star Michelin restaurant equals exceptional cuisine and premium price, which explains why it takes months the waiting period as the restaurant is so popular. A Michelin-star restaurant is assessed based on meal experience, brand credibility, trust, and service quality (Kiatkawsin & Sutherland, 2020). The latest news on the restaurant informs that in 2020 the restaurant lost its Michelin star because they no longer accept public reservations. The pandemic is probably one of the factors in play.

Nevertheless, to be awarded such a prestigious cuisine award is proof of excellence in food production technique and taste. The path to greatness requires hard work, discipline, and repetition, and this is where the concept of *shokunin* comes in. *Shokunin* is defined as “craftsmen,” but in the sushi world, sushi chefs are also called *shokunin*, “...which skill comes through repetition of making and eating relatively standard forms of food using long-established techniques and ingredients” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). In another definition, *shokunin* also refers to “...the professional cook of Japanese cuisine” (St. Maurice, 2018). Dempsey argues that the character Jiro Ono a sushi chef possesses certain traits that reflect the *shokunin* concept: passionate, persistent, disciplined, curious, imaginative, courageous, humble, and selfless (Dempsey, 2015). In other words, “...the sushi chef presents himself as a master, preserving the elite statuses of both the chef and the cuisine” (Clark, 2017). In the film opening, Jiro Ono (figure 1) expresses his life philosophy that accurately reflects a *shokunin* concept: “Once you decide on your occupation, you must immerse yourself in your work. You have to fall in love with your work. Never complain about your job. You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill. That’s the secret of success and is the key to being regarded honorably” (Gelb, 2011). Ono’s dialogue as part of the mise-en-scène reflects the nature of a sushi chef includes being disciplined, passionate, and persistent. The film, through visualization, supports emphasizes these traits to bring understanding to the audience about the concept of *shokunin*.



Figure 1 A close-up shot of Jiro Ono, the *shokunin*

To understand the shared meanings of the sushi culture through the concept of *shokunin*, it is imperative to look at the contribution of the film elements: cinematography and mise-en-scène. Visually, the film frames the consumption and production of sushi efficiently and directly through the two film elements. The film opens in a series of slow-motion shots showing a hand wearing a glove opening a door, then the shot changes into a shot of the gloves being taken off, and then shifts to a shot of a small sushi restaurant (figures 2 to 4).



Figure 2 A close-up shot of a hand opening a door



Figure 3 A close-up shot of a hand taking off the gloves



Figure 4 A shot of a small sushi restaurant

The first three shots above provide an important clue to the audience: the significant role of hands in producing sushi. The art of sushi making undoubtedly requires the finesse of the hands. The gloved hand symbolizes hard work as it refers to hands that work. Figure 4 shows the restaurant represents the “sushi world” where sushi chef produces and showcases their “art” for the customers to appreciate and consume. From the element of cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots. Close-up shots give more intimacy between the object and the audience because the expressions and emotions are visible when the object is people, and they give details in texture and often raise appetite when the object is a thing such as food (see figure 5). Close-up shots also psychologically increase viewer cognitive empathy (Lankhuizen et al., 2020). In this way, the film manages to draw the audience to feel involved in the sushi production.



Figure 5 A close-up shot of a sushi

From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses slow-motion and time-lapse shots when it shows sushi production. The slow-motion technique stretches the time to move slower, which can only happen in the movie. This technique aims to generate emotional feelings. This is what the film wants to achieve by shooting the two important objects—Jiro Ono

and the sushi—in close-up shots: to emphasize the details and their significance so the audience can see how they relate to the concept of *shokunin*. The second technique used is time-lapse shots that shorten the time and, at the same time, emphasize the long duration of sushi production from its preparation process to its serving on the table. The passing of time through the time-lapse shot technique gives the audience an understanding of the intricate and lengthy process of sushi production that may only take seconds to consume when the sushi is ready. On the other hand, the slow-motion technique combined with close-up shots provides the audience with a closer look at the detailed process of sushi production.

In another scene, the film visualizes how Ono’s apprentices must massage an octopus for almost one hour (see figure 6) to ensure that it has a soft texture and to bring out the fragrance of the octopus.



Figure 6 A close-up shot of an apprentice’s hand massaging an octopus

Like the octopus’s massage, the apprentices also perform a similar thing when they prepare the rice. They perform the same tasks over and over for weeks before moving to the next step of making sushi. Before they reach the *shokunin*’s standard, they will keep doing the same duty. This master-apprentice hierarchy and repetitive procedure are something common in the tradition of *shokunin*. What is vital to the *shokunin* is the quality of food served, not the price, as Ono explicitly mentions: “*Shokunin* try to get the highest quality fish and apply their technique to it. We don’t care about money” (Gelb, 2011). These visualizations through mise-en-scène and cinematography emphasize the persistent and disciplined nature of the *shokunin*. In other scenes, the long-tiring process of sushi making is visually described in a normal tempo

accompanied with detail elaboration from the interviewees, for example, in the scene when Yoshikazu, Jiro Ono's older son, has to prepare the seaweed wrappers for the sushi which informs the audience the meticulous process of smoking them sheet by sheet (see figure 7).



Figure 7 A shot of Yoshikazu smoking the seaweeds

The interview of Yoshikazu, while he is performing his duty, provides detailed information from his dialogue and from the visualization of what he is doing. The alternate shots of Yoshikazu's face and what he does emphasize the delicacy of sushi preparation that is part of the *shokunin* tradition.

As a *shokunin*, Jiro is often framed through a medium close-up with his hands folded while scrutinizing every detail of his interns' and son's performance. The film also visually shows the long chain of production that begins at sea when the seamen catch the fish to be delivered to the then famous Tsukiji seafood market (as of 2018, the market is moved to Toyosu and named Toyosu Market), and how difficult and sometimes frustrating it is to find good ingredients for the sushi. These visual examples are ways for the film to connect sushi production with the spirit of *shokunin*. *Shokunin* emphasizes, among others, discipline and expertise through repetition. As evident in the example above, the film shows these traits through its repetitive shots of similar actions and explicitly through the interview of some of the characters. For example, Yoshikazu informs the audience that Jiro never skips work unless he is sick, during a national holiday, or goes to a funeral. Jiro himself clearly states that he never feels satisfied with his skills and even in his eighties, is still looking for perfection. He is ninety-four today and he is still active in the restaurant watching over his son, who will take over the business.

From some of the examples above, it is evident that making sushi is not merely a mechanical or technical process in the context of production. Far from that, producing good sushi is a life mission, an ongoing and never-ending process of perfection. It requires sacrifice and good cooperation, and commitment. In other words, producing good sushi is a way of life. The concept of *shokunin* influences these processes deeply. Indeed, not all sushi chef applies a similar concept in producing good sushi, but Jiro with his *shokunin* spirit has set a very high standard for other sushi chefs to reach. However, his success is not without sacrifice. Being a devoted *shokunin*, the film also tells about how Jiro admits that he is not a good father, to the point when his children do not recognize him as their father. Being a *shokunin*, Jiro rarely has a "normal" life, a life choice he takes to reach the highest standard as a sushi chef. Thus, producing good sushi for him is not a job, but a life, and his dedication has won him not only acknowledgment, awards, and prestige, but more importantly, he manages to influence others, especially his sons and interns, to commit to the life of a *shokunin*.

The second aspect is the consumption of sushi. While the audience thinks that consuming sushi is just like consuming any other food, Jiro as a *shokunin* delivers a different message on how eating sushi means more than just putting sushi in your mouth and swallowing it. In the spirit of *shokunin*, Jiro explains that consuming sushi requires certain rules and rituals which also include discipline and harmony. "The customer is to eat the piece of sushi in one bite; biting it in half or leaving some is not acceptable, and it is to be eaten within seconds after the chef serves it in front of them" (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). Even the process of reserving a table requires patience and a long wait, customers are required to reserve months before eating at Jiro's restaurant (Sukiyabashi Jiro) at Ginza. The fact that the restaurant only sits ten people signifies that profit is not the main purpose of Ono.



Figure 8 Jiro Ono “performs” in front of his customers

What is more important is the satisfaction of the customer and their experience of eating sushi in a *shokunin*'s way. The film visualizes this through close-up shots of Jiro Ono performing his “art” (figure 8) in front of the customers and watching the customers enjoy the sushi he makes. Although the restaurant carries an exclusive atmosphere, Yoshikazu claims that “We are not trying to be exclusive or elite. The techniques we use are no big secret. It’s just about making an effort and repeating the same thing every day” (Gelb, 2011). His comment both confirms that profit is not the main thing, but customer satisfaction is, and the repetitive action is mentioned as a part of the *shokunin* concept. The small size of the restaurant supports the idea of *shokunin* because “The space for eating sushi matters not simply for the preparation and eating of the food because it is where the customers and *shokunin* form a gathering” (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). It means that the smaller the space, the better it is to create intimacy between the sushi chef and the customers. For common customers, as the film tells, eating sushi at Jiro’s place is tensing, almost intimidating, which is a clear sign of how the aura of *shokunin* is evident in the restaurant. Being disciplined is not only from the *shokunin*'s side but also from the customers as they are demanded to follow the strict tradition of consuming sushi. One of the interviewees, a culinary expert, explains in detail how every time he eats at Jiro’s place, he never feels disappointed and often feels the tense atmosphere while eating. Jiro’s younger son, who owns a sushi restaurant elsewhere, explicitly mentions that some customers choose to visit his restaurant because the atmosphere is more relaxed compared to that of Jiro’s. As for the price, a minimum of around \$300 price tag is worth the money and trip because the



best sushi by the best chef. Another proof of *shokunin*'s concept of consumption is when the film visually described the serving and consumption of sushi as an orchestra concert, as one of the interviewees says that the meal is divided into “three movements”: classic items such as tuna or kohada in the first movement; the second movement is the fresh catch of the day or the seasonal; and the last movement the traditional such as sea eel, kanpyo, and egg. Jiro meticulously keeps thinking about what sushi to be served, and how and to whom they are served. For example, he usually measures up the customer’s physical body to calculate how much rice he should prepare, or when he notices that a customer is left-handed, he will serve the customer in a way that will comfort the customer. Consequently, the consumers are not supposed to eat in a way they like, but they must follow the procedure. Jiro explains that a customer can pick the sushi with a chopstick or their hands, and that sushi must be eaten whole, not cut. These details reflect the value of *shokunin* in which the customers need to appreciate the beauty, the balance, and the harmonious ways of consuming sushi.

His fame as a *shokunin* sushi chef is internationally acknowledged and many important figures have dined at Jiro’s place, for example, previous U.S. president Barack Obama has dined there together with the Japanese prime minister during one of his visits to Japan. It is understandable why the Japanese Prime Minister takes Obama there, not only to introduce him to the traditional Japanese food and delicious sushi but more importantly to introduce Obama to one important virtue of the Japanese people: their perseverance and commitment to reach perfection, which is indeed something to be proud of.

The film is closed by a close-up shot of Jiro Ono inside a fast-moving train (see figure 9). He is seen to be smiling, and then the film ends. The final scene inside a moving train suggests the fast-moving and advancing Japan, while Jiro Ono symbolizes the old tradition. His sitting on the train at the end of the film means that he will keep on moving and not merely stay still in pursuing his dream: perfecting the sushi production as long as he can while at the same time preparing his son to continue the tradition.

Figure 9 Jiro Ono inside the moving train in the end of the film

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, it is clear that the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro's sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, *shokunin*, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work and sacrifice.

The concept of *shokunin* is visually supported by the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène. From the cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots of the main characters, the process of production, and the sushi. There are also many alternate shots between the characters and the activities they do to show the delicate process of producing sushi. The effect of close-up shots is a closer intimacy between the audience and the objects on film which provides the audience with a deeper understanding of sushi culture and the *shokunin* concept. The close-up shots that are sometimes repetitive emphasize the nature of the *shokunin* concept: repetition for perfection and strict discipline. From the element of mise-en-scène, the film uses dialogue, slow-motion technique, and time-lapse shot technique to emphasize the concept of *shokunin*. The dialogue gives the audience first-hand information from the characters about the virtue of *shokunin*. The slow-motion technique is used to dramatize the production of sushi and to immerse the audience into the world of sushi and the *shokunin* concept. The time-lapse shot technique is used to emphasize the long duration of sushi production that makes the audience appreciates

the process of production and consumption of sushi. After watching the documentary, the audience is expected to have a completely different perspective on sushi production and consumption. Sushi is not only food but a passion, a lifelong effort to perfection, hard work, and a way of life.

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8. Bukti artikel telah diterima (16 Feb 2023)



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[Lingua Cultura] - Editor Decision - 8444

Dina Nurfitria <dnurfitria@binus.edu>
To: Anton Sutandio <anton.sutandio@gmail.com>
Cc: Lingua Cultura <linguacultura@binus.edu>

Thu, Feb 16, 2023 at 10:51 AM

Dear Mr./Ms. Anton Sutandio,

We have reached a decision regarding your submission to Lingua Cultura, "JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI: A CIRCUIT OF SHOKUNIN".

Our decision is to: Accept the submission. Since we have accreditation form from Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education, we have article processing charge to the authors Rp. 2.000.000, when the article is ready to be published. We will inform you about the payment soon.

This article will be published in July 2023 (Lingua Cultura 17.1). We will inform you for the further information. Thank you for your cooperation and contribution to our journal.

Thank you for your attention.

Regards,
Dina Nurfitria

Journal Publication Editor

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9. Bukti artikel telah terbit (25 Mei 2023)

JIRO DREAMS OF SUSHI: A CIRCUIT OF SHOKUNIN

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ABSTRACT

The research looked at David Gelb's 2011 documentary, Jiro Dreams of Sushi, from the shokunin concept's perspective. Referring to Hall's circuit of culture, the research focused on two interrelated links within cultural studies: production and consumption. Production and consumption referred to the sushi culture. Shokunin was defined as mastery of one's profession or artisans. The film reflected this concept through the character, Jiro Ono, who dedicated his life to excelling in making sushi. The method applied in the research was qualitative. The data were drawn from the film's cinematography which referred to the camerawork, and mise-en-scène, which referred to everything on the film frame, as part of the film studies method applied. The findings show that in terms of production and consumption of sushi within the circuit of culture, the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture: that in the context of Jiro Ono's sushi, sushi becomes more than just food, but through its complex production and consumption process, sushi culture becomes a representation of ancient Japanese concept, shokunin, which emphasizes on discipline, perfection, beauty and of course, hard work, and sacrifice. These findings are supported by visualizing the production and consumption through the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène.

Keywords: *shokunin, production, consumption, film studies, cultural studies*

INTRODUCTION

In the tradition of cultural studies research, the circuit of culture has become an inseparable part of the field. The circuit represents corresponding links among representation, production, consumption, distribution, and regulation which later produce shared meanings. Cultural studies is an inter-discipline interested in cultural practices where contestation and negotiation over meaning are at stake (Ang, 2020). The research focuses on applying cultural studies in film, particularly a 2011-American documentary about centuries-old Japanese food, sushi, *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, directed by David Gelb, who recently also conceptualized the Netflix series, *Chef's Table* (Leer, 2022). The research aims to understand how, as seen from the lens of Hall's circuit of culture, the culture shares its meanings through Japanese *shokunin*. The research focuses on two interrelated links: production and consumption. The production here refers to 'the production of meaning' (Arvind, 2019) in the context

of sushi production, while consumption refers to how sushi is consumed. The production and consumption of meaning related to the *shokunin* concept are supported by film studies through the element of cinematography and *mise-en-scène*. Cinematography is camerawork that includes camera choice, placement, and movement. While *mise-en-scène* refers to everything the audience sees inside the frame, including color, props, costumes, sound, actors, acting, dialogue, etc. These two elements help support the revelation of meaning through visualization.

Shokunin is craftsmen who strive to perfect their craft and life, thereby creating art (Dempsey, 2015). It is a mastery of one's profession, and it is evident in the film that Jiro embodies this concept. Thus, although the film was produced in 2011, the concept of *shokunin* remains an essential aspect of the lives of Japanese professionals. It also offers a valuable lesson about how and what it takes to excel in one's work. The research fills the gap in the interdisciplinary studies combining cultural and film studies on the

chosen film. One research that discusses the element of sushi consumption is by Nakayama and Wan (2019), who conducted a cross-cultural analysis based on Yelp reviews on sushi consumption. The discussion of the film from the perspective of film studies and the two elements of cultural studies has never been done before, thus making the research one of its kind.

Although it originally came from China, sushi, introduced to Japan in the 7th century (Kulawik & Dordevic, 2020), is undoubtedly one of the most famous cuisines in the world that most people know come from Japan. Globally, sushi is considered a healthy meal because it has low calories and low amounts of fat and cholesterol (Dordevic & Buchtova, 2020). Began as simple and quick-ready food, sushi has gained fame through technology that has accelerated the globalization process, bringing together customer tastes and turning local to universal flavors (Andriyani & Hidayat, 2021). The simplicity rests in the final product of traditional sushi, which contains two major elements: fish and rice. Baumert and Fukuda (2021) have stated that, "It is customary in Japan, among chefs and families alike, to say that fresh fish will be 'first eaten raw, and then grilled, and finally stewed,' in a slow transition that distances it from its original state because of the impossibility of conserving the flavor of raw fish products due to natural decomposition." It means eating fish raw is the best way to fully absorb all its flavors. Much research has been done showing recommendations and the advantage of consuming fish which is known for its nutritional values, "... being an important source of proteins, essential fatty acids, minerals, and micronutrients." (Neus et al., 2021). Sushi remains popular, although there are risks of eating raw fish, especially for those who never had one before, such as the disease called 'tingling throat syndrome' that causes by a moving worm inside one's lungs after consuming raw fish (Eskild & Aarhus, 2019). *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* depicts another perspective of the sushi world: the complexity and long tradition of sushi production and consumption.

The research is expected to contribute to the variety of cultural studies analysis on film in general and the discussion of the film specifically as one of the best documentaries on food culture.

METHODS

The method applied in the research is qualitative. Firstly, the researcher watches the film multiple times to gain a deeper understanding. Secondly, the researcher focuses on the film's cinematography and *mise-en-scène* to find required data regarding the topic discussed, i.e., the *shokunin* concept as seen from the consumption and production of the circuit of culture. After the data are collected, it is then processed to produce findings regarding the topic. Finally, a conclusion is drawn, and a future research suggestion is offered.

An interdisciplinary article combining cultural

and film studies requires a deep understanding of the two theories. The circuit of culture chosen is production and consumption. Production and consumption in this context do not refer to the production and the consumption of the film but the production of sushi by the craftsman and how the consumers consume sushi, which is the object in the film. Thus, the research looks at how the film helps produce the meaning of the production and consumption of sushi that pertains to the concept of *shokunin*. As for film studies, the aspect of cinematography refers to the camera movement, including where the camera is positioned and how it is moved. This camera placement and movement play an important role in providing meaning through visualization. For example, a close-up shot of sushi will offer a detailed texture of the food while giving a sense of closeness to the audience. *Mise-en-scène* refers to everything the audience sees in the frame, including dialogue, actions, sound, color, etc. This research mainly looks at special effects such as slow-motion to emphasize certain scenes or fast-forward to show the passing of time. Besides that, the dialogue and action of the characters are also significant in providing visualized meaning to the audience. The cultural studies and film studies theory are applied to understand how the film reflects the *shokunin* concept.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Jiro Dreams of Sushi is a documentary film showcasing a Japanese sushi maker family in Tokyo. In particular, the film focuses on the patriarch of the family, an 85-year-old Jiro, one of the best sushi chefs in the world. The film revolves around the everyday life of Jiro and his son in excelling in the sushi world. Even though the restaurant is small, located in a subway station in Tokyo's Ginza section, and only sits ten people, it has been awarded a three-star Michelin award, the highest accolade a restaurant can receive. The three-star Michelin restaurant equals exceptional cuisine and premium price, which explains why the waiting period takes months as the restaurant is so popular. A Michelin-star restaurant is assessed based on meal experience, brand credibility, trust, and service quality (Kiatkawsin & Sutherland, 2020). The latest news on the restaurant informs that in 2020, the restaurant lost its Michelin star because they no longer accept public reservations. The pandemic is probably one of the factors in play.

Nevertheless, to be awarded such a prestigious cuisine award is proof of excellence in food production technique and taste. The path to greatness requires hard work, discipline, and repetition, and this is where the concept of *shokunin* comes in. *Shokunin* is defined as 'craftsmen', but in the sushi world, sushi chefs are also called *shokunin*, which skill comes through the repetition of making and eating relatively standard forms of food using long-established techniques and ingredients (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). In another definition, *shokunin* also refers to the professional

cook of Japanese cuisine (Maurice, 2018). Dempsey (2015) has argued that the character Jiro Ono, a sushi chef, possesses traits that reflect the *shokunin* concept: passionate, persistent, disciplined, curious, imaginative, courageous, humble, and selfless. In other words, the sushi chef presents himself as a master, preserving the elite status of both the chef and the cuisine (Clark, 2017). In the film opening, Jiro Ono (Figure 1) expresses his life philosophy that accurately reflects a *shokunin* concept, “Once you decide on your occupation, you must immerse yourself in your work. You have to fall in love with your work. Never complain about your job. You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill. That is the secret of success and is the key to being regarded honorably” (Gelb, 2011). Ono’s dialogue as part of the *mise-en-scène* reflects the nature of a sushi chef, which includes being disciplined, passionate, and persistent. The film, through visualization, supports and emphasizes these traits to bring understanding to the audience about the concept of *shokunin*.



Figure 1 A Close-Up Shot of Jiro Ono, the *Shokunin* (Gelb, 2011)

To understand the shared meanings of the sushi culture through the concept of *shokunin*, it is imperative to look at the contribution of the film elements: cinematography and *mise-en-scène*. Visually, the film frames the consumption and production of sushi efficiently and directly through the two film elements. The film opens in a series of slow-motion shots showing a hand wearing a glove opening a door, then the shot changes into a shot of the gloves being taken off and then shifts to a shot of a small sushi restaurant (Figures 2 to 4).



Figure 2 A Close-Up Shot of a Hand Opening a Door (Gelb, 2011)



Figure 3 A Close-Up Shot of a Hand Taking off the Gloves (Gelb, 2011)



Figure 4 A Shot of a Small Sushi Restaurant (Gelb, 2011)

The first three shots (Figures 2 to 4) provide an important clue to the audience: the significant role of hands in producing sushi. The art of sushi-making undoubtedly requires the finesse of the hands. The gloved hand symbolizes hard work as it refers to hands that work. Figure 4 shows that the restaurant represents the ‘sushi world’ where sushi chefs produce and showcase their ‘art’ for the customers to appreciate and consume. From the element of cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots. Close-up shots give more intimacy between the object and the audience because the expressions and emotions are visible when the object is people, and they give details in texture and often raise appetite when the object is a thing such as food (see Figure 5). Close-up shots also psychologically increase viewer cognitive empathy (Lankhuizen et al., 2020). In this way, the film manages to draw the audience to feel involved in sushi production.



Figure 5 A Close-Up Shot of a Sushi (Gelb, 2011)

From the element of *mise-en-scène*, the film uses slow-motion and time-lapse shots to show sushi production. The slow-motion technique stretches the time to move slower, which can only happen in the movie. This technique aims to generate emotional feelings. This is what the film wants to achieve by shooting the two important objects, Jiro Ono and the sushi, in close-up shots to emphasize the details and their significance so the audience can see how they relate to the concept of *shokunin*. The second technique used is time-lapse shots that shorten the time and, at the same time, emphasize the long duration of sushi production from its preparation process to its serving on the table. The passing of time through the time-lapse shot technique gives the audience an understanding of the intricate and lengthy process of sushi production that may only take seconds to consume when the sushi is ready. On the other hand, the slow-motion technique combined with close-up shots provides the audience with a closer look at the detailed process of sushi production.

In another scene, the film visualizes how Ono's apprentices must massage an octopus for almost one hour (Figure 6) to ensure that it has a soft texture and to bring out the fragrance of the octopus.

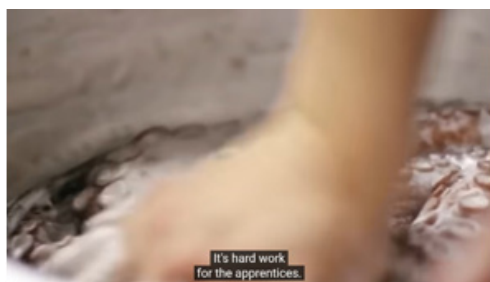


Figure 6 A Close-Up Shot of an Apprentice's Hand Massaging an Octopus (Gelb, 2011)

Like the octopus' massage, the apprentices perform a similar thing when preparing the rice. They perform the same tasks over and over for weeks before moving to the next step of making sushi. Before they reach the *shokunin's* standard, they will keep doing the same duty. This master-apprentice hierarchy and repetitive procedure are something common in the tradition of *shokunin*. What is vital to the *shokunin* is the quality of food served, not the price; as Ono explicitly mentions, "*Shokunin* try to get the highest quality fish and apply their technique to it. We do not care about money" (Gelb, 2011). These visualizations through *mise-en-scène* and cinematography emphasize the persistent and disciplined nature of the *shokunin*. In other scenes, the long-tiring process of sushi making is visually described in a normal tempo accompanied with detail elaboration from the interviewees, for example, in the scene when Yoshikazu, Jiro Ono's older son, has to prepare the seaweed wrappers for the sushi which informs the audience the meticulous

process of smoking them sheet by sheet (see Figure 7).



Figure 7 A Shot of Yoshikazu Smoking the Seaweeds (Gelb, 2011)

The interview of Yoshikazu, while he is performing his duty, provides detailed information from his dialogue and visualization of what he is doing. The alternate shots of Yoshikazu's face and what he does emphasize the delicacy of sushi preparation that is part of the *shokunin* tradition.

As a *shokunin*, Jiro is often framed through a medium close-up with his hands folded while scrutinizing every detail of his interns' and son's performance. The film also visually shows the long chain of production that begins at sea when the seamen catch the fish to be delivered to the then-famous Tsukiji seafood market (as of 2018, the market is moved to Toyosu and named Toyosu Market) and how difficult and sometimes frustrating it is to find good ingredients for the sushi. These visual examples are ways for the film to connect sushi production with the spirit of *shokunin*. *Shokunin* emphasizes, among others, discipline and expertise through repetition. As evident in that example, the film shows these traits through its repetitive shots of similar actions and explicitly through the interview of some characters. For example, Yoshikazu informs the audience that Jiro never skips work unless he is sick, during a national holiday, or goes to a funeral. Jiro clearly states that he never feels satisfied with his skills and is still looking for perfection even in his eighties. He is ninety-four today and is still active in the restaurant watching over his son, who will take over the business.

From some of these examples, it is evident that making sushi is not merely a mechanical or technical process in the context of production. Far from that, producing good sushi is a life mission, an ongoing and never-ending process of perfection. It requires sacrifice, good cooperation, and commitment. In other words, producing good sushi is a way of life. The concept of *shokunin* influences these processes deeply. Indeed, not all sushi chef applies a similar concept in producing good sushi, but Jiro, with his *shokunin* spirit, has set a very high standard for other sushi chefs to reach. However, his success is not without sacrifice. Being a devoted *shokunin*, the film also tells about how Jiro admits he is not a good father, to the point when his children do not recognize him as their

father. Being a *shokunin*, Jiro rarely has a ‘normal’ life, a life choice he takes to reach the highest standard as a sushi chef. Thus, producing good sushi for him is not a job but a life, and his dedication has won him not only acknowledgment, awards, and prestige, but more importantly, he manages to influence others, especially his sons and interns, to commit to the life of a *shokunin*.

The second aspect is the consumption of sushi. While the audience thinks that consuming sushi is just like consuming any other food, Jiro, as a *shokunin*, delivers a different message on how eating sushi means more than just putting sushi in the mouth and swallowing it. In the spirit of *shokunin*, Jiro explains that consuming sushi requires certain rules and rituals, including discipline and harmony. The customer is to eat the piece of sushi in one bite; biting it in half or leaving some is not acceptable, and it is to be eaten within seconds after the chef serves it in front of them (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). Even the process of reserving a table requires patience and a long wait; customers are required to reserve months before eating at Jiro’s restaurant (Sukiyabashi Jiro) in Ginza. The fact that the restaurant only seats ten people signifies that profit is not the main purpose of Ono.



Figure 8 Jiro Ono “Performs” in Front of his Customers (Gelb, 2011)

What is more important is the satisfaction of the customer and their experience of eating sushi in a *shokunin*’s way. The film visualizes this through close-up shots of Jiro Ono performing his ‘art’ (Figure 8) in front of the customers and watching the customers enjoy the sushi he makes. Although the restaurant has an exclusive atmosphere, Yoshikazu claims, “We are not trying to be exclusive or elite. The techniques we use are no big secret. It is just about making an effort and repeating the same thing every day” (Gelb, 2011). His comment confirms that profit is not the main thing, but customer satisfaction is, and the repetitive action is mentioned as a part of the *shokunin* concept. The small size of the restaurant supports the idea of *shokunin* because the space for eating sushi matters not simply for the preparation and eating of the food because it is where the customers and *shokunin* form a gathering (Holt & Yamauchi, 2019). It means that the smaller the space, the better it is to create intimacy between the sushi chef and the customers. For common customers,

as the film tells, eating sushi at Jiro’s place is tensing and almost intimidating, which is a clear sign of the aura of *shokunin* in the restaurant. Being disciplined is not only from the *shokunin*’s side but also from the customers, who are demanded to follow the strict tradition of consuming sushi. One of the interviewees, a culinary expert, explains in detail how he never feels disappointed every time he eats at Jiro’s place and often feels the tense atmosphere while eating. Jiro’s younger son, who owns a sushi restaurant elsewhere, explicitly mentions that some customers choose to visit his restaurant because the atmosphere is more relaxed compared to that of Jiro’s. As for the price, a minimum of around \$300 price tag is worth the money and trip because the customers know that they are only served the best sushi by the best chef. Another proof of *shokunin*’s concept of consumption is when the film visually describes the serving and consumption of sushi as an orchestra concert, as one of the interviewees says that the meal is divided into three movements: classic items such as tuna or *kohada* in the first movement; the second movement is the fresh catch of the day or the seasonal; and the last movement is the traditional such as sea eel, *kanpyo*, and egg. Jiro meticulously keeps thinking about what sushi to be served and how and to whom they are served. For example, he usually measures up the customer’s physical body to calculate how much rice he should prepare, or when he notices that a customer is left-handed, he will serve the customer in a way that will comfort the customer. Consequently, consumers are not supposed to eat as they like but must follow the procedure. Jiro explains that a customer can pick the sushi with a chopstick or their hands and that sushi must be eaten whole, not cut. These details reflect the value of *shokunin* in which the customers need to appreciate the beauty, the balance, and the harmonious ways of consuming sushi.

His fame as a *shokunin* sushi chef is internationally acknowledged, and many important figures have dined at Jiro’s place; for example, previous U.S. president Barrack Obama has dined there with the Japanese prime minister during one of his visits to Japan. It is understandable why the Japanese Prime Minister takes Obama there, not only to introduce him to traditional Japanese food and delicious sushi but more importantly to introduce Obama to one important virtue of the Japanese people: their perseverance and commitment to reach perfection, which is indeed something to be proud of.

The film is closed with a close-up shot of Jiro Ono inside a fast-moving train (see Figure 9). He is seen to be smiling, and then the film ends. The final scene inside a moving train suggests the fast-moving and advancing Japan, while Jiro Ono symbolizes the old tradition. His sitting on the train at the end of the film means that he will keep on moving and not merely stay still in pursuing his dream: perfecting the sushi production as long as he can while at the same time preparing his son to continue the tradition.

The findings show that production and consumption in the context of Japanese sushi culture

are closely intertwined and inseparable. Moreover, the meticulous and disciplined process of production is passed down to the next generation, which will ensure the quality of the food and the satisfaction of the customers. Regardless of the spreading of the sushi culture worldwide that may degrade the production quality, the strong-rooted concept of *shokunin* will prevail through people like Jiro Ono, who maintain the high quality of sushi production and preserve the Japanese sushi culture.



Figure 9 Jiro Ono Inside the Moving Train in the End of the Film (Gelb, 2011)

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, in terms of production and consumption in the circuit of culture, it is clear that the film has shown the interrelated meaning of sushi culture. In the context of Jiro's sushi, it becomes more than just food through its complex production and consumption process. Sushi culture becomes a representation of the ancient Japanese concept of *shokunin*, which emphasizes discipline, perfection, beauty, and, of course, hard work and sacrifice. The concept of *shokunin* is visually supported by the film's cinematography and *mise-en-scène*. From the cinematography, the film uses many close-up shots of the main characters, the production process, and the sushi. There are also many alternate shots between the characters and the activities they do to show the delicate process of producing sushi. The effect of close-up shots is a closer intimacy between the audience and the objects on film, which provides the audience with a deeper understanding of sushi culture and the *shokunin* concept. The close-up shots that are sometimes repetitive emphasize the nature of the *shokunin* concept: repetition for perfection and strict discipline. From the element of *mise-en-scène*, the film uses dialogue, slow-motion technique, and time-lapse shot technique to emphasize the concept of *shokunin*. The dialogue gives the audience first-hand information from the characters about the virtue of *shokunin*. The slow-motion technique is used to dramatize sushi production and immerse the audience into the world of sushi and the *shokunin* concept. The time-lapse shot technique is used to emphasize the long duration of sushi production, which makes the audience appreciate the production and consumption process. After watching the documentary, the audience

is expected to have a completely different perspective on sushi production and consumption. Sushi is not only food but a passion, a lifelong effort to perfection, hard work, and a way of life. For further research, a complete discussion of the circuit of culture in this film can be done, especially in the aspect of representation, regulation, and distribution, which will enrich and broaden the findings in the research.

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