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Quiet Reconciliation and Earthly Breakthrough: A Comparison of Sino-Japanese Paths of Transcending Death through the Lens of Visual Symbols---A Case Study of *Departures* and *The Last Dance*

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Abstract: Taking the Japanese cinematic work *Departures* and the Hong Kong, China feature film *The Last Dance* as primary case studies, this research employs a visual semiotics framework to systematically compare the distinct cultural pathways through which Chinese and Japanese societies conceptualize and transcend mortality. Grounded in Japan's historical Shinbutsu shugo tradition, which harmonizes indigenous spiritual practices with Buddhist philosophy, *Departures* articulates a paradigm of inward acceptance, emphasizing ritualistic purification and quiet emotional resolution. Conversely, *The Last Dance* is deeply informed by the syncretic philosophical heritage of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, alongside the localized folk customs prevalent in Hong Kong, China and Guangdong province. This narrative foregrounds an ethos of active breakthrough, wherein protagonists confront existential anxieties through pragmatic engagement and communal solidarity. Despite these divergent philosophical orientations, both cinematic texts establish a coherent narrative architecture characterized by a sequential progression: symbolic mediation, relational reconciliation, psychological self-redemption, and the intergenerational transmission of vitality. Through rigorous comparative analysis, this study elucidates how visual motifs function as critical conduits for cultural memory, ultimately revealing both the profound spiritual divergences and the universal human aspirations that underpin contemporary East Asian thanatological perspectives and cinematic storytelling methodologies. Furthermore, the findings offer valuable theoretical insights for future cross-cultural media research.

Keywords: visual semiotics; death transcendence; cultural comparison; cinematic analysis; east asian philosophy

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1. Introduction

Departures, adapted from Aoki Shinmon's memoir *Coffinman: The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician*, won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film at the 81st Oscars and stands as a landmark work of Japanese cinema centered on funeral narratives. Set in rural Yamagata Prefecture, the film follows former cellist Daigo Kobayashi. After his orchestra disbands, Daigo returns to his hometown and enters the funeral industry. Through witnessing countless deaths and performing encoffining rituals, he gradually dismantles social prejudice against morticians, reconciles with his long-estranged father, and ultimately gains a holistic understanding of life, death, selfhood and the cycle of existence. With restrained, delicate cinematic language, the film integrates Japan's mono no aware aesthetic and indigenous philosophy of life and death into its narrative, making it a canonical text for academic interpretations of Japanese attitudes toward mortality [1, 2].

A director from Hong Kong, China, created the film *The Last Dance*, which centers on the unique Cantonese funeral ritual 'breaking the hell's gate' as its narrative core. It

tells the story of wedding planner Dominic, who, due to financial hardship, becomes a funeral broker and gradually moves from initial resistance to mutual understanding with traditional Nam Mo practitioners [3]. The film set a box-office record for Chinese-language cinema in Hong Kong, China, and received numerous nominations for the Hong Kong Film Awards. Training its lens on the civil and martial (funeral brokers and Nam Mo practitioners) ecology of Hong Kong, China's funeral industry, the film employs the intangible cultural heritage ritual of 'Breaking the Hell's gate' to explore diverse issues including death, family, gender, and the interplay between tradition and modernity, offering significant cultural specimen value.

Both China and Japan belong to the East Asian Sinographic cultural sphere, sharing the psychological complex of 'cherishing life and fearing death', and thus possess common reflections on death, funerary rites, and lineage continuity. However, each is rooted in two distinct religious frameworks—Japan's Shinbutsu shūgō and China's syncretism of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist traditions—giving rise to two distinct approaches to existential meaning in relation to mortality [4]. This paper selects *Departures* and *The Last Dance* as core analytical texts for three major reasons:

First, homologous subject matter with heterologous cultural frameworks forms a natural comparative pair. Both films feature funeral practitioners as protagonists and funerary rituals as narrative threads, revolving around the universal human question of 'how to dispel the fear of death, repair familial bonds, and realize the continuation of life's value,' thus providing a solid basis for parallel comparison [5, 6]. Yet their ritual cores are entirely distinct: the encoffinement ritual in *Departures* derives from Shinbutsu shūgō thought, emphasizing bodily purification and cosmetic restoration, conveying a life attitude of compliance with nature and acceptance of impermanence; the 'breaking the hell's gate' ritual in *The Last Dance* is rooted in Cantonese Daoist practice, using ritual implements, liturgical recitations, and ceremonial acts to guide departed souls and ease the living's emotional burdens, highlighting the pragmatic orientation of Chinese culture that engages with the world, alleviates suffering, and proactively addresses challenges. This 'same theme, different structures' enhances the cross-cultural comparative persuasiveness.

Second, the deep-layer dialogue within the East Asian cultural sphere is significant. Japan and China, both members of the Sinographic and Confucian-influenced cultural spheres, share common cultural foundations in their views of life and death, yet have developed divergences due to different historical trajectories and paths of religious integration. Japan, under the influence of Shinbutsu shūgō and the aesthetic traditions of mono no aware and wabi-sabi, has cultivated a path of 'inward acceptance' for engaging with mortality; China, especially in the Lingnan region, under the combined effect of the 'three teachings in one' (Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist traditions) and local folk customs emphasizing auspiciousness and harmony, has formed a logic of 'active engagement'. Comparing these two films helps reveal the deep structure of 'harmony with difference' within East Asian culture.

Third, the theoretical framework of visual semiotics is well-suited for textual interpretation [6, 7]. According to semiotic theory, society often uses everyday objects for signifying purposes. All music, texts, ritual actions, and other elements can be deconstructed into a two-tier signification system of 'signifier—signified' serving as visual carriers for decoding cultural essence. *Departures* employs symbols such as the 'stone letter' (a pebble used as a 'letter'), cello, and unborn fetus to complete its spiritual sublimation; *The Last Dance*, in turn, uses symbols such as the peachwood sword, roof tiles, personal names, and wills to drive cognitive awakening. Together, they form a clear and symmetrical cultural mirror image.

The Japanese encoffining ritual depicted in *Departures* may be analogized to the Japanese tea ceremony: a quiet, introspective ritual that safeguards the dignity of the deceased. *The Last Dance*, conversely, resembles a lively Cantonese opera—an extroverted, functionally oriented ceremony embodying humanity's proactive resolve to dispel misfortune and protect the living. If funerary rituals constitute the external

manifestation of Chinese and Japanese views on life and death, emotionally and spiritually charged visual symbols represent the hidden codes that unlock core cultural identities [8]. Concrete visual symbols not only serve as narrative fulcrums propelling plot development but also materialize abstract philosophies of life and death. The layered narrative progression and symbolic sublimation within both films form the primary channel through which the living resolve grief, achieve spiritual reconciliation and transcend death. Rooted respectively in Japan's Shinbutsu shūgō culture and China's syncretic Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist beliefs paired with indigenous Hong Kong, China funerary customs, the two symbolic systems diverge in outward form yet uniformly follow the logical chain of 'symbolic bearing—relationship restoration—self-redemption—life transmission'. They clearly illustrate distinctions between Chinese and Japanese philosophies of mortality while revealing universal human aspirations when confronting death.

2. Reconciliation in Stillness: The Japanese Path of Transcendence through Life Symbols in Departures

The symbolic imagery of *Departures* is defined by inward quietude, emotional restraint, and implicit suggestion, avoiding overt emotional expression. Through understated symbolic circulation, the film depicts father-son reconciliation, individual spiritual awakening, and intergenerational life transmission, reflecting philosophical traditions that emphasize harmony with natural processes and acceptance of impermanence. It thereby constructs a distinctly Japanese mode of transcending death anchored in inward acceptance and personal self-reconciliation [9].

2.1. The Stone Letter: Father-Son Reconciliation and Emotional Transmission through Silent Circulation

The stone letter serves as the central emotional symbol in *Departures*, its material qualities and intergenerational passage reflecting Daigo's psychological evolution from paternal estrangement to reconciliation. Japan's longstanding cultural practice of conveying emotion through physical objects originates in classical traditions where tangible items—such as flowers, stones, and fans—were used to express subtle feelings difficult to articulate verbally. The stone letter in the film functions as a modern cinematic adaptation of this lyrical convention. As the narrative observes: "Long before written language existed, people exchanged small stones to communicate their inner feelings [10]. Recipients interpreted the sender's mood from the stone's weight and texture: a smooth stone signified peace of mind, while a rough stone conveyed worry." This non-verbal mode of emotional communication resonates with broader cultural norms emphasizing implicit expression and emotional restraint.

The pebble exchanged between young Daigo and his father on the seaside forms their original emotional bond and remains the sole distinct anchor within Daigo's fragmented childhood memories following his father's departure. That departure itself becomes a profound emotional burden Daigo carries for years. When Daigo, working as a mortician, prepares his father's remains and discovers the weathered pebble held securely in his father's hand, the symbolic resonance of the stone letter fully emerges. Smoothed by decades of time, the pebble embodies unspoken remorse and enduring affection, challenging Daigo's long-held conviction that he had been abandoned. Years of resentment dissolve without dramatic confrontation or overt emotional display. Significantly, Daigo places the pebble gently on his pregnant wife's abdomen, completing three layers of symbolic continuity: a childhood memento, a quiet testament to posthumous reconciliation, and a spiritual offering to the next generation [11]. The stone's enduring physical presence contrasts with the impermanence of human life, evoking perspectives rooted in reverence for natural continuity and the Buddhist understanding of impermanence: physical transition is an inevitable part of existence, yet emotional memory and relational bonds transcend temporal boundaries. This reconciliation across generations unfolds through silent, contemplative engagement between the living and the

departed, facilitating internal resolution—an approach characteristic of inward-focused pathways toward meaning-making in the face of mortality.

2.2. The Cello: From Shattered Ambition to a Hymn of Life and Self-Awakening

The cello undergoes layered qualitative shifts in symbolic meaning alongside Daigo's evolving professional identity, charting his full spiritual journey toward acceptance of life's impermanence and achievement of self-redemption [12]. At the narrative's outset, it embodies his artistic identity and musical aspirations. When the orchestra dissolves and he is compelled to sell the instrument to return home, it becomes a marker of shattered ideals and personal disillusionment. As Daigo gradually embraces his mortician vocation, however, its symbolic significance transforms fundamentally. During solemn, quiet encoffining ceremonies, gentle cello scores flow like water—soothing the bereaved while gradually alleviating Daigo's internal shame, evasion, and sense of inadequacy. At this stage, the cello transcends its function as a musical instrument, merging with ritual practice as a spiritual medium that affirms life and alleviates suffering. The mortician's hands, trained to prepare the deceased with tenderness, are equally capable of producing music that honors life—both acts expressing profound reverence for beauty and existence itself. This convergence forms the conceptual foundation of Daigo's professional self-acceptance and cognitive maturation.

The film's final solo cello performance elevates the instrument's symbolism to its culmination. Its melody, carried by wind and snow, bridges the boundary between life and death: tenderly bidding farewell to the departed while offering reverent acknowledgment to all living beings. It signifies Daigo's spiritual transformation—from retreating from reality to embracing life with unwavering presence. This self-redemption rests upon alignment with life's inherent transience, recognition of death as a natural dimension of existence, and release from compulsive pursuit of social validation and conventional success through sustained, intimate engagement with mortality. Such aesthetic sensibility resonates with traditions that locate enduring truth within imperfection and flux.

2.3. New Life: A Quiet Marker of the Natural Life-Death Cycle

Mika's unborn child represents the film's most direct symbol of life's continuity, rendered with restrained subtlety consistent with a calm, reflective perspective on the natural cycle of existence. The pregnancy advances in parallel with Daigo's professional awakening: as he moves from initial discomfort about his occupation to steadfast commitment to upholding human dignity, the impending birth serves as the ultimate reflection of his spiritual transformation [13]. The symbol functions to harmonize the interrelated dimensions of death and new life: Daigo confronts life's end each day at work, while his wife nurtures new beginnings within her body. Together, these two images convey a balanced, integrated understanding of existence.

When Daigo rests his father's pebble on Mika's pregnant abdomen, the unborn child becomes a physical conduit linking three generations: the deceased father (the past), Daigo as the bearer of familial responsibility (the present), and the incoming infant (the future). The narrative avoids overt, sentimental emphasis on "hope", instead framing new life as an inevitable expression of natural cyclical order. Traditional East Asian philosophical perspectives regard all life as part of an integrated natural whole; death is understood not as an absolute cessation but as a return to the natural world, while birth signifies nature's renewed presence within an unbroken cycle. Death forms life's natural conclusion, and new birth marks the natural beginning of a new life cycle—fully reflecting a worldview grounded in harmony with nature and acceptance of impermanence.

3. Breakthrough Amid Bustle: China's Ritual Symbol-Centered Path of Transcending Death in the Last Dance

The symbolic imagery of *The Last Dance* draws from the syncretic Three Teachings in One tradition and Hong Kong, China (and Guangdong) funeral customs, centering on the Taoist salvation ritual Breaking the Hell's Gate. These symbols simultaneously carry

sacred ritual significance and everyday worldly meaning, unified by the core verbal motif of "breaking". On one level, they alleviate spiritual suffering binding souls trapped in the underworld; on another, they address the living's internal preoccupations, strained family relationships, and fear of death. Through reconstructing interpersonal bonds, fostering proactive cognitive insight, and sustaining family continuity, the symbols facilitate spiritual resolution for both the living and the deceased, reflecting a pragmatic, relational, and this-worldly Chinese perspective on mortality [14].

3.1. Peachwood Sword and Roof Tiles: Ritual Implements as Vessels for Mended Relationships and Traditional Reform

As core ritual implements within "Breaking the Hell's Gate", the peachwood sword and roof tiles act as pivotal symbols connecting the yin and yang realms and repairing fractured familial bonds. Their signification directly serves the Taoist ritual's dual purposes: redeeming departed souls and dissolving earthly obsessions. According to folk custom in Hong Kong, China, nine roof tiles symbolize the nine layers of hell; guided by choreographed ritual steps, a Taoist practitioner wields a peachwood sword to shatter the tiles, an act representing the breaking of spiritual fetters and the liberation of wandering souls from cyclic suffering [6]. The "breaking the hell's gate" ritual has been practiced in Hong Kong, China for seven to eight hundred years; during the Southern Song dynasty, relevant Taoist texts began to appear in large numbers, and thereafter it gradually became an important ritual in Taoist rites for redeeming the deceased. The entire ceremony integrates Taoist exorcism and salvation traditions with the Confucian ethical principle of "Mourn the Deceased and Memorialize Those Long Gone".

Within the film, these two implements transcend their functional role as ritual tools to become critical narrative catalysts through which Man's children comprehend paternal love and repair their broken family dynamic. Man overturns the traditional folk rule restricting succession to male heirs, stipulating in his will that his daughter Yuet preside over Breaking the Hell's Gate at his own funeral. The peachwood sword thereby becomes a vessel for paternal confession: it breaks the shackles of gender bias while publicly affirming his daughter's professional competence and equal standing within the family. When Yuet grips the peachwood sword, performs ritual steps around the brazier, and finally smashes all nine tiles, the implements' symbolic meaning reaches its peak. The sword wields power not only to save souls but also to embody Yuet's understanding and acceptance of her father; shattered roof tiles symbolize both the opening of Hell's Gate and the complete dissolution of emotional rifts stemming from his traditional remarks about female ritual impurity.

This reconciliation mends multiple relational layers, spanning father-son and father-daughter bonds. Man's son Ben (Tommy Chu) gains new understanding of his father's insistence on passing down the family trade as a quiet concern for his livelihood while assisting with ritual preparations. Yuet, meanwhile, accepts and forgives her father's limitations—constrained by rigid folk traditions that prevented him from openly expressing affection [6]. This illustrates the core social function of Chinese funerary rites: a funeral is far more than a formal farewell to the deceased; it constitutes a social arena where family members renegotiate roles, responsibilities, and kinship ties. In short, funerals do not merely bid farewell to the dead, but reaffirm and restructure the living's social relationships. The dual acts of breaking and rebuilding embodied by the peachwood sword and roof tiles exemplify China's proactive, relationship-centered approach to reconciling with death.

3.2. The Name "Yuet" and the Will: Written Symbols Decoding Paternal Love and Individual Redemption

The name Yuet and Man's will function as implicit textual symbols within the film, jointly guiding Man's children toward cognitive insight and spiritual resolution. The Chinese character "Yuet" signifies "divine pearl", evoking connotations of intrinsic value and reverence. By conferring this name upon his daughter, Man conveys deep affection in a manner that contrasts with his outward statements questioning women's ritual

participation. Rooted in the literary tradition of "writing as a carrier of meaning", Chinese naming practice treats a given name not merely as an identifier but as a vessel through which elders transmit aspirations and heartfelt sentiment. The full significance of this symbolic act becomes apparent only upon disclosure of Man's will—a legal document designating Yuet as the principal officiant for Breaking the Hell's Gate, thereby establishing narrative intertextuality with her name. Together, naming and testament constitute a narrative of restrained paternal devotion, expressed through seemingly contradictory speech and action. Constrained by conventional social expectations, Man refrains from direct emotional articulation; instead, he embeds his deepest regard for his children in two enduring textual acts: bestowing a meaningful name and drafting a formal will. As a legally sanctioned textual symbol, the will facilitates emotional resolution, enabling Man's children to move beyond internal grievance toward self-integration.

For funeral broker Dominic, Man's passing and the associated funeral rites serve as a pivotal moment for personal transformation. Early in the narrative, upon learning of his wife Meiyu's pregnancy, Dominic responds with strong aversion. He worries the child may inherit lifelong obligations for elder care and, more fundamentally, fears the enduring emotional impact of irreversible separation. He initially interprets human existence as an inevitable progression toward suffering. This perspective arises from the convergence of intergenerational responsibility norms and universal concerns about mortality. After observing the reconciliation process between Man and his children, Dominic undergoes a fundamental shift in outlook: he transitions from apprehension about separation to appreciation of present relationships, and from reluctance toward new life to openness toward future possibilities. This mode of personal renewal—centered on intentional engagement—replaces passive apprehension and pessimistic interpretations of death, reflecting the pragmatic folk ethos of calamity mitigation prevalent in Hong Kong, China, and Guangdong. Mortal suffering is not an unbridgeable divide; sustained emotional connection and adaptive cognitive frameworks support meaningful spiritual growth.

3.3. New Life: A Beacon of Hope Linking Death Reconciliation and Family Continuity

In stark contrast to the quiet, inwardly framed fetus symbol in *Departures*, Meiyu's pregnancy in *The Last Dance* functions as a core imagery that actively alleviates concerns about mortality, its symbolic meaning evolving alongside Dominic's cognitive transformation to ultimately anchor hope for intergenerational family continuity [15]. At the story's outset, overwhelmed by fear of separation, Dominic views the unborn child as a heavy burden foreshadowing future sorrow. Later, however, he reaches a new understanding: "To be born human on this earth is an extraordinarily rare gift. Even if our lives count down toward parting, we have no reason to fear--we have already earned the gift of existence." At this turning point, the symbolism of new life completes its value reorientation: no longer a pessimistic omen of inevitable loss, but an internal motivation to cherish the present and prioritize family bonds.

This symbol resonates deeply with China's core cultural principle that bloodline continuity alleviates the existential weight of death, aligning specifically with folk beliefs in Hong Kong, China that childbirth brings lasting fortune [16]. Traditional Chinese religious and folk practices emphasize worldly continuity: new life represents not only individual continuation but the perpetuation of a family's ancestral incense, mitigating the living's concern over lineage extinction. The prospect of birth eases apprehension surrounding death while reinforcing the web of human kinship. It contributes to harmonious marital relations between Dominic and Meiyu and establishes a new node within the chain of generational transmission.

Within the syncretic framework of traditional Chinese thought—encompassing ethical, philosophical, and cosmological traditions—filial responsibility emphasizes sustaining the family line, doctrines of rebirth outline cycles of existence, and classical cosmology affirms continuous generative renewal. Combined, these traditions shape perspectives on life transmission: the value of human existence extends beyond individual

experience to encompass familial duty and sustaining relational networks. New life emerges as a vessel of hope transcending mortality and a medium for passing down family spirit, delivering final narrative closure to China's active, life-affirming path of meaning-making in the face of finitude.

4. Symbolic and Pathological Divergence: Core Divides and Shared Aspirations in Chinese and Japanese Views of Life and Death

Departures and *The Last Dance* deploy entirely distinct symbolic clusters that delineate essential distinctions between Chinese and Japanese philosophies of life and death. The divergent reconciliation and transcendence pathways embedded within these symbols originate from each society's unique indigenous religious, folk, and aesthetic cultural foundations.

Regarding symbolic traits and death-reconciliation logic, *Departures'* symbolic system is introverted and restrained. The stone letter, cello, and unborn fetus anchor a value system prioritizing individual dignity, constructing a transcendental path centered on inward acceptance. Through silent internal dialogue, individuals achieve relational harmony; by abiding by the natural laws of life and death, they attain spiritual awakening; within the endless natural cycle, life perpetuates itself. The film frames life and death as equal phases of existence, advocating calm acceptance of death as a natural homecoming, embodying core spiritual tenets found in Japan's syncretic traditions and *mono no aware* and *wabi-sabi* aesthetics. This worldview emphasizes harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature; death constitutes a tranquil return to the natural world requiring no external mediation, only reverent acquiescence.

The Last Dance's symbolic cluster, by contrast, is direct and extroverted. The peachwood sword, roof tiles, the name "Yuet", last will, and unborn child all advance the ultimate goal of bridging the metaphysical boundary between life and death. Its transcendental path revolves around proactive human connection: funerary rituals restore relational continuity and address familial estrangement; individuals actively release cognitive attachments to achieve spiritual breakthrough; bloodline continuity establishes enduring life value; death is framed as a pivotal moment to reaffirm kinship bonds [17]. This reflects the pragmatic spirit of China's Three Teachings in One syncretism and Hong Kong, China (and Guangdong) calamity-dispelling folk customs, emphasizing relational identity and earthly concerns. The yin-yang boundary may be bridged through ritual, emotional resonance, and blood ties: Nam Mo practitioners assist departed souls, while funeral brokers support the living; the peace of the deceased and spiritual well-being of the living exist as mutually reinforcing objectives.

Despite these prominent distinctions between the two cultural pathways, their symbolic narratives and philosophies of mortality ultimately converge. Whether the quiet, life-revering symbols of *Departures* or the ritual imagery of *The Last Dance* that fosters emotional connection, both films fundamentally uphold the dignity of human life and cherish interpersonal warmth. Life and death are not opposing binary forces, but interdependent facets of a unified life process [12, 14]. Reconciliation and spiritual transcendence represent humanity's enduring responses to mortality and vehicles for transmitting hope across generations. This shared spiritual resonance enables both films to transcend cultural boundaries and evoke universal empathy among global audiences.

5. Conclusion

This paper takes Japan's funeral film *Departures* and Hong Kong, China's *The Last Dance* as analytical subjects, applying a dual-layer semiotic framework of denotation and connotation to systematically sort and compare core symbols that mediate reconciliation with death within both works. The analysis demonstrates that *Departures'* stone letter, cello, and unborn child construct a Japanese transcendental path defined by inward acceptance, rooted in Japan's Shinbutsu shugo religious tradition alongside *mono no aware* and *wabi-sabi* aesthetic paradigms. This cultural framework prioritizes individual

introspection and harmonious coexistence with nature, framing death as a serene return to the natural world. Conversely, *The Last Dance*'s peachwood sword, roof tiles, given name "Yuet", and will sketch China's active breakthrough-oriented path to transcend death, grounded in the syncretic Confucian-Buddhist-Taoist belief system and Lingnan (Guangdong and Hong Kong, China) calamity-dispelling folk pragmatism. This worldview prioritizes reconstructing human relationships and earthly concerns, casting death as a pivotal moment to reorganize human social order.

From a broader academic perspective, this comparative film analysis delivers dual theoretical value. First, within East Asian cultural comparative studies, the two films clearly unpack the deep "harmony within difference" structural logic shaping Chinese and Japanese outlooks on life and death. Though both cultures share the Confucian ethical foundation of cherishing life and fearing death, divergent religious integration histories and indigenous aesthetic traditions spawn two corresponding yet opposing logics of transcendence: inward compliance versus outward proactive breakthrough. Second, from the perspective of visual semiotics, this study further verifies cinema's function as a cultural text encoding national symbolic systems. Concrete ritual symbols—props, musical scoring, naming conventions, liturgical movements and more—act not only as narrative anchors but material vessels that visualize and encode national philosophies of life and death. The circulation and sublimation of symbolic meaning constitutes the visual encoding process of a civilization's attitudes toward mortality.

Departures delivers the insight that confronting death unlocks the beauty of life, while *The Last Dance* articulates the dialectical wisdom that breaking hell's fetters also shatters the self-imposed spiritual prisons of the living. Both narrative systems converge on a timeless, cross-cultural proposition: death is not life's opposite, but an integral component of its complete cycle. Humanity's attitude toward mortality defines the depth of its understanding of life and its pursuit of existential meaning. As a medium for cross-cultural dialogue on life and death, visual symbols document diverse civilizational perceptions and responses to human finitude. Simultaneously, through shared symbolic resonance across cultures, they build a bridge for humanity to confront mortality and pursue enduring spiritual value. This dual function explains why both films resonate with audiences across regional and cultural divides, and marks the core scholarly objective of this research.

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