The Films of Kenji Mizoguchi: 
Authorship and Vernacular Style

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Portsmouth

October 2011
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Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.
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Notes on Translation

Japanese names are presented in Japanese order, surname followed by first name. Where an individual is historically known by their first name (as in the case of the author Izumi Kyoka), I have carried on this tradition. The first time a Japanese film is referenced, the title will be in romaji followed by the most commonly known English translation. Thereafter, the film will be referred to only in romaji.

Macrons are used to indicate extended vowel sounds in Japanese words which are less familiar in the English language. As many Japanese cities, regional locations, film titles and Japanese names have become more common in English, for these macrons are not used. The less common words have also been underlined.

In-text quotations which were originally in Japanese and all translated titles in the bibliography have been translated by Asano Reiko. She also transcribed and translated all interview material.

The filmography and the list of key names were compiled and translated by Takahashi Marika and include Japanese titles in both romaji and kanji. Titles are followed by the most commonly acknowledged English translation. No English translation is provided if either the film is unknown in the west or when the Japanese title is commonly referred to in English language (e.g. Nihonbashi, Ugetsu Monogatari).
Because there are numerous ways to read Japanese names, the list of kanji is an essential addition for Japanese readers of the thesis. The kanji used for many of the pre-war names have been updated accordingly.

All translated material has been checked and confirmed by the author. In the case of the more ambiguous material, in-depth discussions have taken place with Miss Asano and Miss Takahashi to confirm contextual meaning.

The thesis contains passages of film dialogue. Where appropriate, these passages are in English and Japanese. This is used to highlight important issues such as social status which can be read in the Japanese text. Where more direct language is used, the Japanese has not been included.
Acknowledgements

There are many people who have made this work possible. I would like to start by thanking my family, my mother, Pat and Jim Cole and Yōji and Chiemi Asano. Their belief in me has inspired every word of this project and I am forever grateful.

I would also like to thank my colleagues in the School of Creative Arts, Film and Media at the University of Portsmouth, especially Dr. Esther Sonnet, Dr. Deborah Shaw, and the faculty librarian Greta Friggen. Also, special thanks to Professor Sue Harper who always had confidence in me and my work.

Thanks must also be extended to the staff at the library of the British Film Institute in London who always went out of their way to help me find the most obscure material.

Much of my research was carried out in Japan and without the translation skills of Asano Reiko and Takahashi Marika, much of the original Japanese material contained in this thesis would not be present. Their professionalism and attention to detail was second to none, and I am eternally grateful.

The staff at the National Film Centre in Tokyo, the Hiroshima Library and the Kyoto Film Centre, whose knowledge and dedication made every visit a pleasure. Thanks also must go to the Oshima Noh family in Fukuyama City, the staff at the Film History Museum in
Onomichi, the Matsuda Silent Film Society, and the exceptionally talented Mie Yanashita.

I would also like to extend a special thank you to Midori Sawato for the remarkable interview she gave and her encouragement and belief in this project.

There are three individuals who, for my academic achievements thus far, I owe everything.

Dr. Dave Allen has constantly encouraged me since my early days as an undergraduate student at the University of Portsmouth. He has always been available to give help and advice when needed and I offer my heartfelt thanks.

In Japan, Tsutomu Saso has continually taken time to offer his incredible knowledge about Kenji Mizoguchi and Japanese film history. In terms of scholarship in the field, there is no other individual as knowledgeable and I am extremely fortunate to have had his assistance. As well as providing me with invaluable research material, Mr. Saso has also given his valuable time to read drafts, check historical details and offer help and advice.

Finally, and most of all, I would like to thank my Director of Studies Dr. Justin Smith. Without his intellectual engagement and his emotional support, the work would not be at the standard it is. He never gave up on me, and most importantly, made me believe in myself even during the darkest times. His dedication to this project, despite his many scholarly pursuits, has been quite incredible. He is my mentor and my friend.
Dedicated to my beautiful wife Reiko ... My soul mate in this life and the next.
Introduction

Aims

This thesis explores the work of Japanese film-maker Mizoguchi Kenji (1898-1956) through an analysis of key film texts in their social, cultural and industrial contexts. Since coming to international prominence in the 1950s, Mizoguchi has been placed in western accounts of Japanese cinema, alongside Kurosawa and Ozu, as one of that country’s most celebrated auteurs. As we shall see, this positioning has tended to cast Mizoguchi in a certain critical light which has subsequently been challenged from different perspectives. Mizoguchi’s film career, which began in 1923, spanned the silent era and sound films, continued under Imperialist rule (1930-1945) and the American occupation (1945-1952), but gained world attention only in the last four years of his life. His life and films have since been the subject of academic studies, festival retrospectives and television documentaries, both in Japan and in the west (notably the United States). He is acclaimed, like Federico Fellini, Satyajit Ray and Ingmar Bergman, as one of the handful of film-makers who have had a profound influence upon world cinema, although in the west his reputation has remained under the shadow of his better-known countrymen Kurosawa and Ozu. This study will seek to critique rather than celebrate that legacy. But Mizoguchi’s career as a whole also has much to tell us about the history of Japanese cinema and its relationship to culture and society. And in re-focussing critical attention upon the context which informed his work, this thesis will offer a re-appraisal of his auteurist status, and suggest new ways of considering the issue of authorship.
There are a number of challenges presented by the study of a single director. Firstly, we need to consider the relationship between the man and his work. On the one hand, it would be crudely simplistic to view Mizoguchi’s films as a reflection of his life. On the other hand, in embarking upon an extended film analysis, it would be foolish to ignore the biographical. Any account of a creative artist should seek to trace the well-spring of inspiration and chart the major influences upon his output. We should therefore take into consideration the political, social and industrial constraints upon his working methods. As the thesis will seek to establish, such conditions affected the quality and themes of his work. This brings us to a second challenge, that of the relationship between a director and the film culture in which he worked. Film, unlike literature, is the product of creative collaboration. In this way, any account of a single director, must pay due attention to his key co-workers.

From an awareness of this complex set of relations attendant upon cultural production, a third question arises. What are the challenges of considering cinema as an index of social and cultural change? This thesis will examine Mizoguchi’s work in the context of the historical period in which it was made. Film history has long since outgrown the reflectionist model (see for example Durgnat, 1970). Yet in assessing the work of any director it is important to take account of the ways in which it engages as it must, directly or indirectly, with its social constituency. Otherwise, film study becomes a matter of mere aesthetic appreciation, or the history of an industrial technology.

Fourthly, we must consider the challenges of western film scholars approaching the life and work of a Japanese director. As we shall see, there are difficulties here not simply of
language, but also of cultural difference. These extend far beyond the basic issues of translation. Indeed, it is possible to argue that Japanese film culture itself has been constructed, historically, as a western phenomenon. One of the aims of this study, therefore, is to engage with critical debates about notions of ‘Japaneseness’, and to offer a new way of thinking about how Mizoguchi deployed ‘traditional’ cultural referents in his films.

Beyond this set of conceptual difficulties, there are also some practical problems which we must take into account. There are challenges in reappraising the work of a director a significant proportion of whose work no longer exists. Of course, any history can only be written on the basis of the sources which survive. But in this case when we know something approaching sixty per cent of a film-maker’s output is lost, we must allow that our assessment of his career will be skewed towards the extant works which are available to view. Most of Mizoguchi’s films from the 1920s have not survived, and a number of major works (dating from the 1940s) no longer exist. In this study I have endeavoured to draw upon Japanese archival sources to recover something of the production histories of non-extant films. And I have also pursued some of those works which exist only in fragments and which have been reconstructed by using stills. It is important to consider what may be learnt from films we cannot see, as well as from those we can.

Another practical problem with studying the output of a film-maker of Mizoguchi’s longevity and productivity is film selection. As the work of several notable scholars reveals, an inclusive survey approach does not allow sufficient scope to pursue either rigorous textual analysis or contextual production research. In seeking to balance a
thematic approach which engages with and situates key film texts within a social and industrial chronology of Mizoguchi’s career, choices have had to be made. It is hoped that this structural balance has avoided the risk of inductive readings. Too frequently, western scholarship has tended to focus upon a handful of Mizoguchi’s most celebrated films in order to appreciate his achievements. However, if proper consideration is to be given to what survives of his oeuvre, incomplete as it is, one should also try to address the lesser known and critically maligned works. Such cases may reveal as much about a director’s working methods or film style, as those masterpieces for which he is celebrated. This balanced approach may also act as a corrective to the exclusivity of some auteurist scholarship. Let us now survey the critical heritage which has informed this study in more depth.

Sources

i) English language film criticism

The western critical heritage surrounding the work of Mizoguchi is rooted in the 1950s essays published in the celebrated French film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Even today, the influence of writers such as Truffaut, Astruc, Bazin and Rivette is still apparent in film scholarship. We could argue that if it were not for their reverence of the director, much of the writing which has appeared since this initial exploration would not exist. So it is important to recognize that France was the first western country to celebrate his work. Mizoguchi’s status as an auteur derives primarily from this critical stable, and this will receive more detailed attention in Chapter Two.
The first English-language writer on Mizoguchi to make a significant departure from the auteurist position of the French critics was the American Donald Richie. Beginning in the 1950s, Richie’s work, alone and with Joseph Anderson, situated Mizoguchi for the first time within the context of Japanese film history. Anderson and Richie’s monumental study, *The Japanese Film Art and Industry* (1982 [1959]), chronicles the economic, social and political history of the film industry, highlighting key developments and surveying personnel and output. This book offered the first comprehensive and immersive account of Japanese cinema. Inevitably, its ambitious scope limited the space given to close analysis of the work of particular film-makers. However, their biographical accounts of nine directors including Gosho, Mizoguchi, Ozu, Naruse, Kinoshita and Kurosawa, offer useful stylistic comparisons and help to situate key personnel within their working contexts. Anderson and Richie were also pioneers in drawing upon some early Japanese studies including *Eiga Gojunen Shi (Fifty Year History of Film*, 1942) by Hazumi Tsuneo. As a sole author, Richie offers a plethora of rich information which covers a wide range of Japanese cinematic history, including a book-length study of Ozu (1977), general work on Japanese cinema, (1966, 1971) and chapters included in other works (1993, 2001).

Anderson and Richie’s industrial survey (reprinted in 1982), was followed by a similarly comprehensive critical reference work devoted to Mizoguchi. Paul and Dudley Andrew’s *Mizoguchi: A Guide to References and Resources* (1981), includes a detailed biography, critical survey, extensive filmography and a full critical bibliography. As a reference work this is indispensible for Mizoguchi scholars, but the book also presents a useful summary of themes and debates, and pays some brief attention to the director’s methods and style. My own frequent trips to the National Film Centre in Tokyo and the Film History
Museum in Hiroshima would not have been as successful had it not been for the reference material that the Andrews compiled. Chronicling almost every published work on the director up until 1981, it is an essential guide.

By the time of Andrew and Andrew’s book, other American scholars had contributed to the growing literature on Mizoguchi, including Joan Mellen (1976) and Noel Burch (1979). Mellen was one of the first writers in English to advance the feminist view of Mizoguchi as a champion of women’s struggles against Japanese patriarchy and Audie Bock followed this lead with her work *Japanese Film Directors* (1990 [1978]), which supports the idea that there are two kinds of female representation in Mizoguchi’s films; The rebel and the conformist. Both Mellen and Bock see the director’s work as representative of the plight and repression of the Japanese woman. This critical focus on what Catherine Russell calls the “Japanese feminisuto tradition” (in Dissanayake 1993, p.146) was challenged by the Andrew brothers, who insist “it is perverse to focus too narrowly on the explicitly political dimension in Mizoguchi’s handling of the theme of women” (1981, p.27). This is an issue that has preoccupied almost every subsequent scholar writing on Mizoguchi.

Noel Burch’s *To the Distant Observer* (1979) is regarded as one of the most trenchant western analyses of Japanese cinema. Burch pays tribute to the stylistic contribution made by Mizoguchi to the development of Japanese cinema, but locates his most innovative work in the 1930s. For Burch this decade was the true golden age of Japanese cinema. The 1930s saw Mizoguchi transcend the stylistic influences of European cinema which had characterised his silent work, and establish a method which confirmed the essential otherness of his native culture. Persuasive though Burch’s account remains, he
tends to be overly prescriptive in pinpointing Mizoguchi’s abandonment of western film style, and it is difficult to justify his comparative neglect of the 1950s output.

Keiko McDonald’s *Mizoguchi* (1984) was the first book-length sustained analysis of the director’s work and quickly became an established reference point for Mizoguchi historians. As an American-based Japanese writing in English, she is able to provide an insight into cultural specificity which many other scholars miss, and her appreciation of Japanese response to Mizoguchi is sensitive. She explores each film chronologically, highlighting both the director’s motivations and the industrial circumstances behind each. McDonald favours a biographical approach which is both illuminating and fascinating. However, broad though her appreciation is, her film selection is predictable, and her analysis is not always grounded in production history. McDonald followed her book on Mizoguchi with *Japanese Classical Theater* (1994), a work which was invaluable during this research. The work is an ambitious and comprehensive study, which is set in two parts. The first is historical and McDonald explores the modes of theatrical performance, both pre- and post-modern, before developing the relationship between cinema and theatre. The second part of the work is film specific and explores the influence of classical theatre on a range of single films.

Following Burch, Donald Kirihara’s 1992 work *Patterns of Time* maintains a focus on the 1930s; the author engages in an extended analysis of four of the director’s eighteen films of the decade: *Orizuru Osen* (1935), *Naniwa Ereji* (1936), *Gion no Shimai* (1936), and *Zangiku Monogatari* (1939). Kirihara insists that the 1930s was a period where, in contrast to popular thought, there was some international recognition of Japanese
cinema. He goes on to argue that Mizoguchi was at the centre of innovative practices in terms of new and traditional art-forms. Kirihara’s theoretical study of parametric narration also owes much to Bordwell (1985).

Both Kirihara and Bordwell offer important revisionist readings of Mizoguchi. Both writers contest, in different ways, what had become by the 1980s a critical orthodoxy around Mizoguchi’s predominant film style and preoccupations. For example, Kirihara proceeds from this critique of auteurism: “Although auteurist approaches have revealed much about Mizoguchi’s films, analyses at the level of devices such as the long take remain limited in what they are able to accomplish”. He proposes a more sophisticated model of film authorship which positions “the artwork as existing within a network of economic and social constraints that both encourage and restrict the artwork’s creation” (Kirihara, 1992, p.30). This is an important concept in film history which this thesis will seek to carry forward. Kirihara also offers a more nuanced notion of the influence of Japanese cultural traditions upon Mizoguchi’s work, where Burch’s essentialism is sometimes rather prescriptive. Like Bordwell, Kirihara argues that, “In the arts of 1930s Japan, tradition and modernity worked together in complex ways: one cannot be understood without the other” (1992, p.35). Whilst his attention to the influence of western modernism on Mizoguchi’s film style provides an important corrective to Burch, Kirihara does not give equal space to exploring the “huge, tangled bricolage of traditions” (Dale, 1986, p.39) which informed Mizoguchi’s work. But his innovation is in pioneering a diffuse conception of authorship which incorporates both the circumstances of production and the interpretive demands made upon the viewer (1992, p.16). Both aspects will be central to this study.
In the same year as Kirihara’s work, Noletti and Desser published the collection *Reframing Japanese Cinema: Authorship, Genre, History* (1992). After accepting that authorship, history and film genre undergo constant re-assessment, they note the limitations of those models of authorship which “expressed a belief in a transcendental subject, one virtually outside of historical circumstances who imposed, by sheer design and dominating creative intelligence, a personality upon a group of films” (p.xiii). Theirs is perhaps the first coherent attempt to situate analyses of individual film-makers alongside an historical survey of commercial film culture, though the three-part structure of this anthology inevitably separates their main spheres of interest. But this anthology, alongside Kirihara’s work, provides further evidence of what one might term the ‘historical turn’ in Mizoguchi studies. This thesis hopes to advance that approach.

Another important historical survey from this period is Peter High’s (2003) study of Japanese film culture during the Imperialist rule (1931-45). His use of official documents and knowledge of censorship regulations provides a thorough contextualisation of the film industry’s response to political intervention. It is especially useful in endeavouring to understand Mizoguchi’s apparently contradictory responses to political constraints. This book is a welcome companion to Hirano’s *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo* (1992), which pursued a similar analysis of the post-war occupation, in which context Mizoguchi’s later work must be understood.

Mark LeFanu’s 2005 book *Mizoguchi and Japan* was, as the author explains, the first single volume English-language study of Mizoguchi’s cinema since McDonald’s in 1984. However, his approach, as Freda Freiber (2006) notes, is grounded in a reassessment of
French critical perspectives. His originality depends upon his use of a range of French language sources, and the influence of Bazin predictably focuses attention upon *mise en scène*. Whilst LeFanu’s survey includes some films ignored in previous studies, his analyses pay little attention to production history or cultural context, and his thematic structure is somewhat incoherent.

By contrast, in *Figures Traced in Light* (2005), David Bordwell offers a characteristically formal analysis, which nonetheless situates his work in relation to the development of film technology and style in the silent era. This is a preoccupation sustained in an important chapter on Mizoguchi. Here, Bordwell offers an approach which attempts, albeit in compressed fashion, to situate Mizoguchi’s film style in the context of Japanese society and film culture. Building on the work of Burch and Kirihara, Bordwell also raises some important questions about Mizoguchi’s richly pictorialist *mise en scène*. “What historical circumstances”, he asks, “led Mizoguchi to pose such staging problems?” (Bordwell, 2005, p.93). His artistic training, coupled with “an extraordinary passion for densely composed images”, provide obvious answers (2005, p.94). But Bordwell’s analysis of Mizoguchi’s “one scene-one cut” technique examines the dramatic effects of “modulation”: a complex range of subtle changes (in performance, camera position, lighting, sound and music) within a single, prolonged shot (2005, p.95). However, Bordwell is sceptical of interpretations which identify this style as “purely Japanese” (2005, p.97). Rather, “In studying Japanese cinema, is seems most fruitful to treat the flamboyant visual devices we notice as strategic means for achieving specific ends – one of which may indeed be the evocation of ‘Japaneseness’ as a distinct national/cultural essence” (2005, 98). Bordwell’s scepticism about the western tendency towards
Japanese cultural essentialism is valid, and a topic which this thesis will address. However, while regarding film style as predominantly self-conscious and “strategic”, Bordwell is less clear about the “specific ends” which are achieved in the case of Mizoguchi. If there is a weakness in his otherwise thorough approach, it is Bordwell’s tendency to see aesthetic effects as products of film analysis in themselves, without venturing cultural interpretations. And he is somewhat contradictory in concluding that “by 1950 Mizoguchi ... had created one ‘distinctively Japanese’ style that could answer to various cultural demands” (2005, p.135). This vision of the film-maker as cultural strategist offers only one aspect of a much more complex picture of collaborative creativity which this thesis will endeavour to explore.

More recent English-language work in the field has directed attention back to social and economic history. As Phillips and Stringer (2007) note, Isolde Standish’s *A New History of Japanese Cinema* (2005) seeks to situate the film industry in the context of socio-political changes:

> Standish’s work is not just distinguished by its attempt to move away from the ‘authorial model’; it also returns to the question of periodisation and the benefits of more contemporary, revised notions of film historiography which challenge a single teleological account of the ‘development’ of Japanese film (2007, p.12).

The questioning of received models of authorship, neat historical divisions and monolithic accounts of film culture, constitutes a welcome revisionist approach to Japanese film history which also inspires this study. The potential for fresh approaches is borne out in
Phillips and Stringer’s collection, and Mori’s re-examination of Mizoguchi’s *Naniwa Ereji* in particular offers an exemplary analysis of its modernist codes.

One of the most innovatory models for re-appraising film authorship in the context of western industrial influence upon East Asian culture has been provided by Miriam Hansen’s idea of “vernacular modernism” (Hansen, 2000). In examining the case study of Shanghai cinema in the 1920s and 30s, Hansen builds on an alternative to the concept of the popular she first advanced in respect of the classical Hollywood cinema (Hansen, 1999, pp.59-77). “The dimension of the quotidian, of everyday usage, combined with the connotation of language, idiom, and dialect, makes me prefer the term vernacular, vague as it may be, over the term popular” (Hansen, 2000, p.11). Here she argues that “Shanghai cinema of the 1920s and 30s represents a distinct brand of vernacular modernism, one that evolved in a complex relation to American – and other foreign – models while drawing on and transforming Chinese traditions in theatre, literature, graphic and print culture, both modern and popular” (200, p.14). She advances the notion that “a certain kind of cinema offered a sensory-reflexive horizon for the contradictory experience of modernity”. This can be identified across a number of discursive registers: “the thematic concerns of the films; their *mise en scène* and visual style; their formal strategies of narration, including modes of performance, character construction, and spectatorial identification; and the films’ address to and function within a specific horizon of reception” (p.14). These elements, in Hansen’s terms, provided audiences with “a matrix for the articulation of fantasies, uncertainties and anxieties” (p.15). Whilst “this modernist vernacular may not always have tallied with the ideals of national culture
formulated in literary and political discourse at the time ... it clearly represented an idiom of its own kind, a locally and culturally specific aesthetics” (p.20).

Hansen’s model provides a useful way of negotiating the complex cultural and political influences (from inside and outside Japan) upon the Japanese cinema during Mizoguchi’s career. Its invocation of the term vernacular enables us to identify in Mizoguchi’s work an evolving cinematic discourse which was popular in its modes of address (Shimpa melodrama) and cultural referents (traditional arts and practices). But it also allows us to examine the influence of (an often feminized) modernity which challenges the established masculine social order. While Hansen’s attribution of vernacular modernism to the international hegemony of classical Hollywood cinema may be problematic, her attention to the discursive formation of local cultural practices is useful. Arguably, situating the contradictions of tradition and modernity within local cultural practices and recognizable social milieu (for example the ‘floating world’), enabled Japanese audiences to find stimulus and solace in respect of their desires and fears in response to twentieth-century social and political transformations. Drawing additionally on the work of American anthropologist Margaret Lantis, Hansen’s concept will be adapted in order to conceptualise a common quotidian cultural discourse which Mizoguchi mined and shared with his audiences, and which was expressed through his unique pictorial staging.

As we have seen, this range of English-language perspectives on Mizoguchi may be seen to derive from, and in many cases includes, broader western conceptions of Japanese cinema. A focus on authorship and the formation of ideas about national identity and cultural essentialism are characteristic of larger debates. While those earlier industrial
surveys and biographical accounts offer a broad historical perspective, later dedicated studies have been informed by a range of theoretical orthodoxies within western film criticism: auteur theory, genre studies, feminism, semiotics and psychoanalysis. Few previous studies of Mizoguchi have convincingly managed to bring together a thoroughgoing analysis of his film style and preoccupations within an historical survey of production contexts and social change. Film history approaches have offered some partial solutions to this challenge in terms of other national cinemas, but the difficulties of accessing archival sources about Japanese cinema have perhaps thwarted a considered application of these approaches. Indeed, with the exception of Richie and McDonald, primary source material has only sparsely informed English language criticism of Mizoguchi. The importance of attention to Japanese sources, in the pursuit of a critical position which transcends the ongoing debates about essentialism and otherness, will underpin this thesis. Indeed, as much as a third of the sources employed here are Japanese, and a good number are contemporary accounts from the archives. Employing Japanese language sources and scholarship has two advantages. Firstly, this material can offer the best available evidence about the contexts of production and reception, and the constraints upon Japanese film culture. Secondly, it promises to furnish a more nuanced account of Mizoguchi’s career, providing a critical perspective situated between the cultural registers of western scholarship and Japanese criticism.

ii) Japanese film criticism

The post-war development of Japanese language film criticism has taken place in the shadow of western scholarship and has therefore never been entirely free from its influence. Nonetheless, early Japanese film histories were plundered by the likes of
Anderson and Richie and underpinned those pioneering English language surveys which followed. Thus, Japanese film criticism has always provided a rich seam of ‘primary’ source material for western scholars, whilst the emergence of the Anglophone discipline of Film Studies has offered to Japanese writers a range of critical concepts and theoretical tools.

A critical community has emerged around the work of Sato, Yoshimoto, Saso, Izuno, and Fujii, which can be said to have consolidated this hybrid approach to the study of Japanese cinema. Sato Tadao is regarded as one of the key figures in Japanese film scholarship. From his early writings in the film magazine *Eiga no Tomo* (1967), he has developed a special interest in Mizoguchi. As well as numerous articles, Sato has also authored *Mizoguchi Kenji no Sekai* (1982) which has recently been translated into English, *Kenji Mizoguchi and the Art of Japanese Cinema* (2008). Sato provides descriptive biographical passages, rather than focusing on particular films. Instead, he examines major aspects of Mizoguchi’s career, working practices, elements of film style such as camerawork, and the role of women. Rather like McDonald, he demonstrates the usefulness of native Japanese perspectives in illuminating some of the cultural influences upon Mizoguchi’s work.

The ongoing scholarly debates about Mizoguchi and women have also received attention from Izuno and Fujii. In Izuno’s chapter *Josei wa Shori Shitaka: Mizoguchi Kenji no Minsyusyugi Keimo Eiga* (2009), she insists that Mizoguchi’s treatment of women bordered on the sadistic, observing that “the cruelty in Mizoguchi’s films is based on the philosophy that a female character cannot change her reality” (in Iwamoto, 2009, p.141).
She also questions what she sees as earlier critical misreadings of Mizoguchi’s women. Fujii also criticises the director over the same issues. In his work on Naruse, *Ie Kara Teiko e – Naruse Mikio no Josei Eiga* (1999), he asserts that “Mizoguchi’s women are merely tools to be exploited, existing simply to forgive the sins committed by men. They are elevated to the status of martyrs in a male-dominated society” (1999, para.6, n.p). The main concern in the work by these scholars is the ‘actual’ cultural role of characters such as Shiraito, Michiko, Oharu or Miyagi. Their concerns highlight the problems of applying western critical concepts to Japanese film. Furthermore, Fujii, challenges the views of earlier Japanese scholars, especially Sato Tadao (1975). Such critical interventions offer useful Japanese perspectives on key critical debates and, and as more material is translated from western sources, Japanese scholars are taking the opportunity to fully engage with these discussions.

This is a continuing issue with Japanese film academics, and as western scholarship continues to be translated and dissected, there is a new wave of opinion beginning to emerge. An example of this can be found in work by Waseda University’s Fujii Jinshi (1999) and most notably in a recent study by Izuno (2009). The direction in which scholarship is heading in Japan is a welcome one and should assist in helping scholars to re-assess previous research, while at the same time helping to establish an increased sympathy towards cultural nuance. This thesis hopes to follow in that direction.

Although there are many magazine articles dedicated to Mizoguchi, the number of single studies in Japanese is small. The first was Yoda’s *The Life and Art of Kenji Mizoguchi* which was taken from a series of essays printed in *Eiga Geijutsu* (January – December 1963) and
reprinted as a single collection in 1970. Along with the Andrews’ work, Yoda’s personal but informative work is an essential resource. The events prior to the start of this collaboration are summarised well, but it is from the mid-1930s where we begin to establish Mizoguchi’s working practices and his position within the film industry. Progressing chronologically, Yoda uses diary entries, personal letters and script blueprints to chart the career of the director. Yoda’s approach is personal; he writes from the position of friend and trusted collaborator, and much of the information is anecdotal. However, the insights that Yoda is able to give us on production history and Mizoguchi’s methods are invaluable.

The 1920s especially is a fascinating period in Mizoguchi’s career and has been chronicled extensively by Saso Tsutomu. His 1991 work 1923溝口健二『血と霊 (Mizoguchi: Blood and Soul, 1923), was followed by a collaborative work with Nishida Kenji Mizoguchi- Women with Burning Passion, the Dreamy Vision in Realism (2006). This book examines Mizoguchi’s films chronologically, with short synopses and analysis. The most important work by Saso however is his ongoing series of books (2001- ) which explores the work of the director in meticulous detail. In this series, Saso examines the work by using an exhaustive selection of contemporary magazine reviews and articles. Each volume focuses on a selected film or films, and proceeds to analyse them by using extensive contemporary material. Where Saso differs from his peers is that, where the lost films are concerned, he does not stop short at analysis, considering them to be as important in establishing the director’s social and political context as the surviving work. This is achieved by archival research carried out throughout Japan. Saso also examines films
individually which allows him to establish major shifts in both culture and the film industry. Such approaches have greatly inspired this thesis.

One of Saso’s most fascinating insights is the relationship between Mizoguchi and the Russian avant-garde movement, which manifests itself through the director’s late-1920s work. This influence had been seen previously in the promotional film for the Japanese newspaper *The Asahi Shimbun*, titled *Asahi wa Kagayaku* (1929). Here Mizoguchi’s style is heavily influenced by the work of European directors, an influence to which the director attests in his essay *My Thoughts* (1926). The eye-catching editing techniques, which include fades and overlays, are complemented by distorted and unconventional camera angles. Though this was strictly a promotional film, Saso notes that even at this early stage of the director’s career, it was a “distinct reversal of what we perceive as the Mizoguchi style” (2008, p.30). This obvious difference in style is taken further by Saso and he applies the notion of a distinct Russian influence in relation to one of the better established films of the period, *Nihonbashi* (1929). There is no doubt that if scholarship on Mizoguchi is to be reassessed fully, Saso’s work must be made available in English.

Alongside the growing significance of Japanese scholarly contributions to Mizoguchi studies, there are a number of important contemporary accounts derived from a variety of sources. The thoughts and ideas of many of Mizoguchi’s closest collaborators such as Irie (1957), Yoda (1970), and Yamada (2003) offer us a wealth of in-depth knowledge. Irie’s biography especially gives an insight into the director’s ruthless pursuit of perfection in his art. Such material will be used alongside Shindo’s 1975 documentary *Aru Eiga-Kantoku no Shogai*. These revealing first-hand accounts provided by the director’s
contemporaries offer a unique commentary upon his relationships and working practices. The published writings and recorded interview testimonies of Mizoguchi’s collaborators and friends offer one important kind of primary source for this study. But I have also pursued original primary material of my own.

iii) Primary Sources

By visiting the National Film Centre in Tokyo, I have been able to obtain many contemporary critical reviews and articles from film publications such as Kinema Junpo and Eiga Hyoron. Although these constitute published material, because they offer contemporary perspectives on the work of Mizoguchi they can be considered for our purposes to be useful primary sources. Translation of these texts from the Japanese was carried out by the author, and professional translators Asano Reiko and Takahashi Marika.

Additional primary material for this thesis has been obtained from interviews conducted in Japan with three experts in the fields of scholarship, performance and theatre. Oshima Kinue is a noh actor, based in Fukuyama City, Hiroshima. She has toured extensively with her family troupe both in Japan and throughout the world. Miss Oshima’s interview highlighted certain aspects of performance and style in noh theatre which was invaluable in analysing Mizoguchi’s use of traditional theatre in his films. Sawato Midori has written numerous articles on Japanese film. She has been published in her own right and more recently in the Matsuda Film Productions’ journal Silent Cinema. However, she is better known worldwide for her benshi performances, at film screenings and on the Digital Meme Talking Silents series of DVDs. Her knowledge of Japanese cinema, especially from the early period of film history, is extensive. Finally, as I have already established, Saso
Tsutomu is one of the leading Mizoguchi scholars. His enlightening interview highlighted problems with established critical orthodoxy as well as offering many new ideas about Mizoguchi’s work. Of course, interview material must be treated with customary caution, as the opinions of individuals recorded in conversation. Ethical protocols have been observed in managing the interviews, and full transcripts are presented in an appendix to this work.

One of Saso’s most valuable contributions to this study of Mizoguchi was an essay entitled ‘My Thoughts’ written by the director in 1926, which appeared in the studio publication *Nikkatsu Cinema Magazine*. There are no archival holdings of the magazine and this rare find was obtained from a private collector. It constitutes a new addition to the very small number of published writings by Mizoguchi. A translation by Asano Reiko can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

iv) Wider reading

In addition to the range of film-specific works published in English and Japanese, the focus of this cultural history re-appraisal of Mizoguchi also draws upon a range of non-filmic literature. Valuable sources of information about Japanese theatre include the aforementioned book by Keiko McDonald, and in addition: Poulton (1995) on shimpa, Thornbury (1977) on kabuki, Yomota (2003) on melodrama, and Jones (1966) and Lemarque (1989) on noh. For information on Shinto recourse has been made to Tomoeda (1930), Ponsonby-Fane (1931) and Holtom (1945). Studies of literary culture include Kim (1961) and Heine (1994) on The Floating World, Mason (1980) on narrative poetry, Ueda on Chikamatsu (1960), Hibbett on Saikaku (1952 and 1957), Inouye (1991 and 1996) on

As well as surveying the sources we can draw upon, it is as important, at the outset, to acknowledge the gaps in evidence. The Japanese archives are patchy and difficult to access. Much material has been lost or destroyed. Beyond the range of contemporary film criticism which this study draws upon, there is little information about audiences and popular reception, and scarcely any empirical data about film performance at the box office, marketing or distribution. Clearly, this absence of material makes drawing conclusions about audience response and popularity very difficult in the case of Mizoguchi, relying as we must on contemporary critical reviews and anecdotal remarks from interviews. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the reception of Mizoguchi’s work has been largely ignored in existing scholarship, and that critical approaches have tended to focus on textual and production side analyses.

**Methodology**

But sources aside, this study also seeks to develop semiotic approaches to Japanese cultural analysis which may provide the means to deconstruct film language in the context of the larger cultural lexicon. Here Roland Barthes’ *Empire of Signs* (1970) provides an important point of departure. For Barthes the “Orient” as a “reality” was “a matter of indifference, merely providing a reserve of features whose manipulation –
whose invented interplay – allows me to ‘entertain’ the idea of an unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from our own” (1982, p.3). Japan is cast as a semiotic paradise embellished with a vivid repertoire of floating signifiers entirely free of anchorage in reality. It is a post-structuralist playground of “surfaces” and “fragments” (p.108), “decentred” (p.22) and without depth. Ranging in characteristically eclectic manner across topics as diverse as chopsticks, the station, haiku, bowing, the city-centre and souvenir gift-wrapping, everywhere Barthes finds an elaborate pattern of semiotic gesture without meaning. His final words on the subject are: “there is nothing to grasp” (p.110, emphasis retained). Japan for Barthes is a pure semiotic system which provides the perfect exercise in rehearsing the continual deferral of meaning. Barthes was neither the first nor the last western critic to invoke the spirit of Zen in this system: “All of Zen … appears as an enormous praxis destined to halt language” (p.74). But Barthes use of this “faraway” ‘system which I shall call: Japan” (p.3) has, probably unintentionally, contributed to the western stereotype of exotic otherness in its very abstraction of Japanese language from its historical processes. The essential foreignness of Barthes’ subjective reading, his production of something called “Japan”, amounts to a sort of philosophical tourism which denies the possibility of the sign’s anchorage in historical circumstance, in a particular time and place. Also, as Fabio Rabelli (2011) suggests, Barthes’ careful avoidance of the contemporary or exceptional in his selection of examples falls back upon essentialist notions of kokugaku [nativism] which became associated in mid-twentieth century Japan with the idea of Nihonjinron. This tendency towards abstract cultural stereotyping has also influenced many western critics of Japanese cinema who have been seduced by the aesthetic affect of mise en scène which
resonate beyond the barrier of the verbal discourse of foreign language film, most notably perhaps in the films of Ozu.

This study proceeds from the assumption firstly that narrative cinema always situates signifiers, providing a contextual anchorage which delimits their polyvalent capacity. Secondly, it follows from this that textual analysis should attend to the contingent complexities of that site of anchorage in interpreting the arrangement of the visual and verbal registers. The thesis argues that the success of this interpretive strategy will depend both upon contextual knowledge of historically-specific Japanese cultural signifiers, and research into production histories in order to recover something of the motives of, and constraints upon, the film-maker. It is hoped that this methodology will also enable us to pursue the relationship between film texts and their cultural contexts in a more inclusive and coherent manner than some previous studies have provided. This approach is informed not only by a range of Japanese film sources, but also draws upon the wider cultural literature identified above, in what might be called a cultural studies approach to the films of Mizoguchi.

This cultural studies approach employs semiotic practices of textual analysis. But, in following Hansen’s work, this approach further seeks to elaborate in Mizoguchi’s work a vernacular lexicon which, it is argued, offered Japanese audiences “a sensory-reflexive horizon for the contradictory experience of modernity”. In contextualising this discursive framework the study will necessarily draw also upon the methods of revisionist film history. This perspective proceeds from a recognition that films are cultural artefacts that are shaped by historical processes from which they should not be separated if a thorough
appreciation of their cultural function is to be achieved. Historical processes include both
the material determinants (financial, industrial, political, and censorial) upon film
production, and an awareness of the cultural capital and intentions of the key creative
personnel and their collaborative working practices. Attention should also be paid where
possible to the cultural status of the cinema in the time and place of a film’s first release
and anything that can be recovered about its critical and popular reception. This field of
enquiry depends crucially upon what primary sources may be identified (especially
archival materials relating to production and reception), and the role of personal
testimony both in memoirs and interviews. However, as Chapman, Glancy and Harper
(2007, p.8) point out, film history’s recourse to contextual research must be balanced
with an awareness that film style itself is historically specific; film is subject to trends and
cycles like all cultural products, and textual analysis must therefore take into account the
prevailing climate in visual and aural discourses, and the currents of change in popular
culture.

Although the methods of film history are no longer new, the advantages which this
approach affords have rarely been appreciated by scholars of Japanese cinema. In
applying these methods to the work of Mizoguchi this thesis hopes to bring new light to
bear upon practices in Japanese film history, despite the relative paucity of archival
sources. In presenting an analysis of key films which acknowledges their rootedness in
Japanese cultural traditions it may be possible to recover something of the lost
perspectives of contemporary Japanese audiences and thus to understand the specific
cultural tasks these films were able to perform. I argue that more orthodox approaches
to the study of Japanese film have led to critical interpretations which neglect the cultural
specificity in which cinema is rooted. By re-locating Mizoguchi’s work in its social, historical and cultural context, we may better appreciate the diversity of the film culture in which he worked, his unique place within it, and the responses of Japanese popular cinema to social and political change. Drawing upon the advances made by Kirihara and Bordwell, this thesis seeks to advance a dynamic model of film authorship which locates personal style within the context of industrial and socio-political determinants and collaborative practices.

Structure
This thesis has a dual structure. Firstly it adopts a thematic approach, beginning with issues of language and authorship, advancing approaches to the study of *mise en scène* and spectatorship, and concluding with thorough considerations of the importance of melodrama and theatre to Mizoguchi’s work. Secondly, alongside this text-based analysis the thesis also pursues an historical trajectory, mapping the successive phases of Mizoguchi’s career, and locating film analyses in the contexts of production, political influence and social change. By adopting this dual-lensed approach it is hoped to offer an account more balanced and nuanced than some hitherto – one which places its focus on the director as artisan rather than auteur. Artisan is a useful term in that it negates the elitist image of the lone film-maker working in creative isolation from those around him. The artisan relies upon his creative collaborators to stimulate his work; his team of craftsmen constitute a cottage industry, working within a studio system. In pursuing his craft the artisan hones his technical skills to create functional and popular artefacts. Moreover, the artisan draws upon residual cultural motifs and vernacular styles in fashioning work which communicates directly with its audience.
The thesis begins by exploring both verbal and visual language, outlining the fundamental challenges that the non-native film historian faces when reading a Japanese text. I seek to pinpoint some limitations in established critical orthodoxies based upon the concept of the auteur, but advance instead a cultural studies approach - one which privileges the context in which cultural texts are produced, rather than arguing for the autonomy of their creator. From the outset, a methodology is presented which combines semiotic analysis and film history methods. Chapter Two critiques Mizoguchi’s artistic standing in western film criticism, offering a pluralistic model of film authorship which takes into account the collaborative nature of agency, and the social and historical determinants upon film production. I will establish how a comprehensive appreciation of collaborative agency can only come from a culturally-informed analysis of mise en scène, which is the subject of the third chapter. Proceeding from a case study of the 1933 film Taki no Shiraito, this chapter examines how, from this period, Mizoguchi’s recourse to traditional Japanese cultural materials, such as the emakimono and kakejiku, not only established a distinctive, vernacular film style, but also advanced a peculiarly Japanese ‘way of seeing’. Chapter Four considers further issues of spectatorship and Japanese interpretation. The argument here is that an awareness of the way in which spectatorial relations are constructed across the mise-en-scène depends upon knowledge of traditional Japanese art practice, as well as social convention.

Issues of the depiction of social space, performance, theatricality and body language are explored in the final two chapters on melodrama and theatre. Chapter Five examines the longevity of the melodrama in Japanese culture, its western influences and its impact on popular cinema. I explore how melodrama was adapted and re-presented in Japan
through traditional forms and modern literature. I also consider how the presentation of
the melodramatic character through body language and diction enabled the film-maker
to critique the rigidity of Japanese social structures, highlighting a dramatic tension
between feudal tradition and the impact of modernity, and between public and private
space.

Chapter Six begins with a survey of the influence of the traditional theatre on the early
cinema of Japan, including the roles of the benshi and kowairo. I then go on to highlight
how Mizoguchi employed theatrical forms and subjects in his theatre trilogy (1939-1941).
Finally, analyses of the later films Joyu Sumako no Koi (1947), Ugetsu Monogatari (1953)
and Uwasa no Onna (1954), illustrate how Japanese theatrical symbolism and stagecraft
work as potent signifiers in this vernacular film style. A culturally-informed analysis of the
range and function of these theatrical devices enables a comprehensive appreciation of
Mizoguchi’s most important work.

The conclusion summarises the major strands of the argument and presents a summative
re-appraisal of Mizoguchi as an artisan director. From this some suggestions are made for
the implications of the approach adopted here for the study of Japanese cinema, and
consideration is given to possible future work in the field. The appendices contain a full
glossary of Japanese terms alongside transcripts of original interviews and other primary
source material. Before embarking on this re-appraisal of Mizoguchi’s work in the context
of Japanese cinema and society, it may be useful to offer a brief biographical summary as
a point of departure.
Mizoguchi’s Life and Work

Mizoguchi Kenji was born on May 16, 1898 in Tokyo, the second of three children to his father Zentaro and mother Masa. Like many of Mizoguchi’s characters, Zentaro was a dreamer, a man with big ideas which never seemed to come to fruition. His business plan to sell raincoats for the troops during the Russo-Japanese war ended in disaster, as the war ended before he had even taken delivery. Mizoguchi’s feelings toward his father have been chronicled by authors on the subject. Yoda notes that Mizoguchi had once commented on the struggle of his family life: “we were very poor, my father, typical of Edoko was such a coward but he always had big dreams. He always failed” (Yoda 1970, p.16). Kishi further notes that Mizoguchi hated his father because of his weaknesses: “You can see Kenji’s hatred toward his father in Naniwa Ereji for example, and how he portrays Yamada Isuzu’s father ... it has been pointed out that his mannerisms and behaviour when he is eating sukiyaki is the spitting image of Zentaro” (1970, p.573). If this hatred for his father is manifested in his films, the same can also be said of his sister Suzu, who at fourteen-years-old became geisha to support the family. Like Oharu in Saikaku Ichidai Onna, Suzu would later go on to become the mistress of Viscount Matsudaira Tadamasa. Matsudaira’s social position meant that he was not able to support a geisha, so in 1912 at seventeen, Suzu moved in with the family as a mistress and was given a house in Asakusa. Suzu represented an air of hope in what was a miserable existence. The family were so poor that after his elementary school education, where he briefly met future collaborator Kawaguchi Matsutaro, his education came to a shuddering halt as the family could not afford to send him to junior high school. Mizoguchi’s formal education stopped at the age of twelve.
His life became one of idleness and switching from job to job. In 1913, Suzu used her contacts to get him work as an assistant to a kimono designer, although the position did not last. Her continual spoiling of her younger brother peaked when, in late 1915, Masa passed away. Suzu’s forthright manner can be seen by her actions at this point. Moving her two brothers in with her and setting up her father in his own house enabled her to both keep an eye on her brothers, as well as keeping her father separate from the rest of the family. Mizoguchi continued to flit from job to job. However, through one of Suzu’s contacts, he managed to gain a place at Aoibashi Youga Kenkyujo art school in Akasaka Tameike in Tokyo. Here, with the help of Suzu’s money, he studied western painting under the tutelage of Wada Mitsuzo, dabbling first in water colour and later in oil painting. However, Suzu was keen that her brother should have a suitable career and pushed him into applying for a job as an advertiser on a Kobe newspaper. Again, his sister’s connections ensured that he was given a chance, and his western art training impressed the management. His contribution included the publication of a series of poems, dealing with his life experiences thus far, including the homesickness he felt at living far from Tokyo. This struggle to come to terms with homesickness resulted in his quitting his position, giving no notice to his employers nor informing his devoted sister. This time was spent reading, attending the theatres of Asakusa in Tokyo and spending time with school friend Kobayashi who taught the Japanese biwa to some of the staff at the Nikkatsu film studios. One of the pupils, the actor Tadashi Tomioka, befriended Mizoguchi, encouraging him into a career in film. Through Kobayashi, Mizoguchi became close to director Wakayama Osamu, and with the abundance of actors at Nikkatsu, Mizoguchi was put to work in script transcription. By 1920, at the age of twenty-two, Mizoguchi had secured a job as an assistant director at Nikkatsu. His first film experience
was with Oguchi Tadashi. In the context of 1920s Japanese cinema, an assistant director’s tasks involved cleaning, looking after the actors and relaying messages.

After the Kanto earthquake in 1923, Mizoguchi moved to Kyoto to work as a director in his own right at Nikkatsu Kyoto. This exciting opportunity was met with little success however. Saso and Nishida term these early days as a slump era: “Most of the films he made were not well received whereas his rival Murata Minoru was successful” (2006, p.7). In 1925 the famous ‘slashing scandal’ gained national headlines. He was living with a woman in Kyoto - Ichijo Yuriko - and in the midst of a massive row, she slashed him across the back with a razor and fled to Tokyo. Nikkatsu suspended him immediately. Mizoguchi pursued her but the relationship ended and Yuriko became a prostitute. In 1927 he married Tajima Chieko, a music-hall dancer from Tokyo who worked in Osaka.

Mizoguchi continued to work for Nikkatsu throughout the 1920s before the staff unrest at the studio in the later part of the decade forced him to leave. He made forty-seven films in nine years before teaming up with noted actress and producer Irie Takako at Shinko. From *Taki no Shiraito* onwards, Mizoguchi focussed on Meiji period dramas known for their historical accuracy. He moved from Shinko back to Nikkatsu to make *Aizo Toge* (1934), before moving to Nagata Masaichi’s Daiichi studio. It was here that he planned a trilogy of themed films set in Osaka, Kyoto and Nagoya. Although the last film was never realised, the two that were completed, *Naniwa Ereji* and *Gion no Shimai*, met with critical acclaim, despite only modest success at the box office. The latter film also ran into censorship problems due to its sexual content, and themes which were too shocking for the political mood of the period. Many of the films of this period were not well received,
such as *Aizo Toge*, and *Gubijinso* (1935). In 1936 Daiichi went bankrupt, Mizoguchi retreated to Shinko where he made *Aien Kyo* (1937) based on Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*, before being forced to make *Roei no Uta* (1938). After making this militaristic piece, “he vowed never to work for Shinko again” (Andrew and Andrew, 1981, p.11).

In 1937 the Japanese invasion of China provoked political tension, state control over the film industry increased, and anti-nationalistic and decadent films were outlawed, especially themes such as double suicide or romance. Saso and Nishida note: “As a result Mizoguchi had to cancel two of his films *Kaitaisha* and *Baragassen*” (2006, p.11). Amidst the political uncertainty and restrictions, 1939 saw Mizoguchi make what is regarded as one of his finest films. *Zangiku Monogatari* was made for Shochiku who had trumped Toho Studios for Mizoguchi’s talent by agreeing that he could make a film with no interference. The result was a work which encompassed the struggles of artists working in the theatre, but also critiqued the structure of Japanese society. 1940 was an important year as it saw the first collaboration between Mizoguchi and actress Tanaka Kinuyo in the film *Naniwa Onna*. However, his wife Chieko, who was diagnosed with congenital syphilis and descended into madness, was committed to a mental asylum in Kyoto. Amidst this tragedy, Mizoguchi made the epic *Genroku Chushingura*. His attention to period detail, for which he was by now renowned, resonated throughout this historical epic.

The American occupation (1945-1952) was a period of adjustment and saw Mizoguchi make five films for Shochiku between 1945 and 1949. Shochiku were in a fortunate position as pre-war they had been a company specialising in women’s films. The Americans were keen to promote women’s emancipation and accepted Shochiku’s film proposals. Starting with the contemporary drama *Josei no Shori* (1946) which sees Tanaka
Kinuyo play a lawyer, Mizoguchi went on the make the Edo period drama *Utamaro o Meguru Gonin no Onna* (1946) which portrayed ‘the people’s painter’ Kitagawa Utamaro. This was a film that Mizoguchi was desperate to make and saw him plead with the American occupation for approval. It was agreed that could shoot *Utamaro* in exchange that he made films about women. These came in the form of *Joyu Sumako no Koi*, a film based upon *shimpa* theatre director Shimamura Hogetsu, with a plot revolving around a production of Ibsen’s *The Doll’s House*. There followed another ‘woman’s film’ *Yoru no Onnatachi* (1948), which focused upon the struggles of women in post-war Japan and *Waga Koi wa Moenu* (1949), a film about the life of post-Meiji feminist figure Kishida Toshiko.

In 1950, Mizoguchi left Shochiku due to a disagreement about a project which he was keen to direct, a film based on the work of Saikaku. He was at this time a free agent, not contracted to any studio for more than one film. He worked with Shin Toho to make *Yuki Fujin Ezu* (1950), before moving on to Daei to make *Oyu Sama* (1951), and then Toho for the undervalued *Musashino Fujin* (1951). His passion for a film based on the work of Ihara Saikaku was realised in 1952 when, after returning to Shin Toho he made the internationally award winning *Saikaku Ichidai Onna*. This film’s success elevated Mizoguchi onto the world stage.

Mizoguchi’s old friend and partner at the ill-fated Daiichi, Nagata Masaichi, set up Daiei Eiga, a company which exploited the newfound success of Japanese films abroad and focused on exporting films. Mizoguchi’s confidence was high and this new freedom working with Nagata seemed to stimulate his creativity. He signed a long-term contract
with Daiei in 1953, where he would remain for the rest of his career. His first film for Daiei is arguably his most internationally recognised film, *Ugetsu Monogatari*. The films which followed *Ugetsu* bear testament to Mizoguchi’s long and fruitful career. Some of his greatest work, most notably *Uwasa no Onna* (1954) and *Chikamatsu Monogatari* (1954) was completed in this mature phase. However, the period was not completely successful. The 1953 film *Gion Bayashi*, a remake of the 1933 film *Gion Matsuri*, received a poor reception in Japan and was not shown in the west until after Mizoguchi’s death. As was apparent throughout Mizoguchi’s working life, artistic consistency was something that was difficult to maintain.

Mizoguchi’s last films saw the director draw upon three very different literary sources. *Yokihi* (1955) was set in eighth-century China during the T’ang dynasty; *Shin Heike Monogatari* (1955) was in the more familiar historical setting of twelfth-century Japan; *Akasen Chitai* (1956) was set in the contemporary world of Yoshiwara, Tokyo’s red light district. *Akasen Chitai* was to be his last film. On August 24 1956, at Kyoto Prefectural Hospital, he died of leukaemia.
Chapter One
Ideas of Language

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight some of the fundamental challenges which face the non-native film historian in approaching Japanese film texts. It seeks to pinpoint some limitations in established critical orthodoxies, and to present the case for a methodology which combines semiotic analysis and film history methods to a study of Mizoguchi’s work.

Many questions require addressing when watching a Japanese film. Firstly, there is the problem of language, both verbal and visual. It may appear that the primary difficulty for a non-Japanese viewer is the language barrier and the reliance upon the accuracy of subtitles. Indeed, the dependency of the ‘foreigner’ upon subtitles is only challenged by their intrusiveness in the visual apprehension of the film. In some countries (Italy and Germany for example), voice dubbing has long been preferable to subtitling in popular cinema, and American audiences retain a profound antipathy to subtitles. Some of these issues have been explored in interesting work by Nornes (2007) and more recently O'Sullivan (2011). However, the symbolic value of verbal language is only part of the challenge in interpreting Japanese films.

Films are primarily visual rather than verbal texts. To some extent, the visual primacy of the cinema may be said to transcend the linguistic barrier, since narrative film may be considered a universal language in terms of its visual codes and conventions. Indeed, the international acclaim which Japanese cinema earned during the 1950s can be attributed to aesthetic qualities apparent in the films of Mizoguchi and Kurosawa. When judges at
The Venice Film Festival awarded *Rashomon* (1950) the Golden Lion (in 1951) and *Ugetsu Monogatari* (1953) shared The Silver Lion (in 1953), their recognition appeared to the critical community to transcend national boundaries. And both film-makers were steeped in, and influenced by, European and American cinema. “What is striking about this work”, wrote André Bazin of Kurosawa’s film *Ikiru* (1952), “is the universal value of its message” (in Hillier, 1985, p.262). This purist approach to the acknowledged masters of Japanese cinema has since accrued a sort of critical orthodoxy, especially in American film scholarship. This thesis argues, however, that this approach has led to critical interpretations which often devalue the cultural specificity in which Japanese cinema is rooted. Nowhere is this truer, I suggest, than in the case of Mizoguchi. One of the purposes of this chapter, therefore, is to argue the necessity of a semiotic approach to Japanese film language.

A semiotic analysis of *mise en scène* can drastically affect the manner in which a film is perceived. However, we should not be ignorant of the elements which exist beyond the screen; internal and external cultural and industrial influences upon the film-makers should also be considered. But let us begin with language itself. Sometimes, *kimono* is not just *kimono*, but a device which could be offering us a meaning which is specifically cultural. With this in mind, we find ourselves with obstacles to overcome in terms of what we see on screen, and what we perceive these signifiers to mean. Do we, as non-Japanese, read these films in a similar manner to a Japanese audience? How much do we miss? How can we endeavour to recover something of the experience of a popular audience who were Japanese, and moreover, were watching Mizoguchi’s films between the 1920s and
the 1950s? These obstacles can only be approached, I argue, by rigorous analysis which is informed by historical research.

One of the most obvious aids to a culturally grounded interpretation of Japanese cinema is a contextual knowledge of social and historical events. Robert Cohen argues, “Certain elements of any alien culture must be understood, to be able to recognize historical details and social customs, to better understand character motivation and to appreciate subtleties of imagery and language” (1978, p.111). At a relatively simple level, knowledge of Japanese history is an important aid to interpretation. A good example here would be the political film-makers of the 1950s and 1960s. Work by directors such as Oshima, Teshigahara and Shindo carry weighty ideological messages which address the political issues facing Japan during the period. Here knowledge of both social and political history is crucial to the understanding of these texts in which radical directors struck at the core of the Japanese political system and policy makers. The previous manner, in which subversive messages were covertly encoded within film language, gave way to a much more critical and confrontational mode of representation. In this way, cinema was reflecting the mood of society: it was around this time that Japanese people became increasingly active politically; they were frustrated by a number of events which had demeaned the country and placed them in a position of social and political danger. Examples of such anxiety began to manifest in the mid-1950s when a Japanese fishing boat, the Daigo Fukuryu Maru 第五福竜丸, cruised too close to an American nuclear testing site on Bikini Atoll, resulting in the death of a crew member from acute radiation syndrome. This was a catalyst for the following political unrest, which saw an increasing number of protests throughout the country.
The nuclear issue was highlighted further by the Suginami Ward Appeal, a petition to abolish nuclear weapons which attracted over 20 million signatures. There was also violent confrontation between authorities and workers during the Miike miners’ strike in Kyushu in 1960. In the same year, Prime Minister Kishi set about revising the peace treaty signed with the Americans and although the new treaty was more favourable to Japan, it caused uproar in the country because of its notion that Japan would no longer be a country of peace but an ally of America, existing under the US nuclear protection.

Many artists, film-makers and authors were active during this period and would address these political struggles in their work. Nagai Takashi wrote *Nagasaki no Kane* (*The Bells of Nagasaki*) in 1949 (adapted for the cinema by Oba Hideo in 1950), which recollected the author’s experience of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. In 1952, with finance from the Teachers’ Union, Hiroshima native Shindo Kaneto adapted Osada Arata’s novel *Genbaku no Ko* (*Children of Hiroshima*) in which Shindo, in docu-fictional style, relived the horror of the Hiroshima bomb through a child’s perspective. Teshigahara’s *Otoshiana* (*Pitfall*, 1962) laid bare the struggles of the Kyushu mine workers, highlighting the danger, poor conditions and repression which they faced. Finally, Oshima Nagisa, arguably the most overtly political of these film-makers, made films from a leftist ideological perspective, with works such as *Nihon no Yoru to Kiri* (*Night and Fog*, 1960) and the brilliantly subversive *Taiyo no Hakaba* (*The Sun’s Burial*, 1960).

Some knowledge of the specific historical events which are addressed in films such as these allows us an insight into the political standpoint of the film-makers concerned, and the social context in which they worked. If we were to base an analysis of these films on
the idea that they straightforwardly insert such debates into their texts, that would be unhelpfully reflectionalist. There has clearly been a process of selection and interpretation during the production process. The reflectionist model of film history positions cinema as a popular, if not unproblematic, index of social change. This approach has been refined elsewhere through a number of important critical studies, from Durgnat (1970), to Allen and Gomery (1985) and more recently Chapman, Glancy and Harper (2007). Contextual knowledge, not only of events themselves, but also of the film-makers’ intentions and political persuasions, can render film a useful, if complex, source of historical evidence. Such contextual knowledge may be gathered from archival sources and production history. However, other levels of interpretation depend upon cultural knowledge being applied to the text itself in a thorough analysis of mise en scène.

An understanding of films such as those of Teshigahara and Oshima, for example, relies primarily on an informed reading of mise en scène which acknowledges the cultural context from which the films emerged. For example, at a straightforward level, banners and signs that are displayed within a shot are written in Japanese; if we are unfamiliar with the language, we are immediately at a disadvantage. We might recognise that the banners and signs exhibit some form of protest but remain ignorant of the details. For example in Otoshiana, Teshigahara reveals the lengths that the government will go to in order to fill the military quota. During a scene where miners are waiting for work at a mine recruitment office, a poster reading 自衛官採用 (Japanese Defence Force Officer Recruitment) is displayed prominently in the foreground. The impact is striking, as this is not a place where you would expect to see such a poster. However, its location is revealing: Teshigahara is linking the mine employment office to a military recruitment
Considering the poor conditions in the mines and the treatment of the workers, this association is damning. Although we are only privileged a brief glimpse of the poster, its inclusion is crucial to understanding the political message. In this way, communication through written language aids our interpretation.

However, beyond the level of written language, other elements of the *mise en scène* – location and social setting – cannot be so easily decoded, since interpretation requires more than a command of Japanese language. If we cannot read these location markers and visual clues, we are ignorant of these signifiers, and fall back upon a superficial reading of the filmic world, or languish in Barthes’ false paradise of semiotic suspension. The challenge of interpreting non-verbal clues within an alien *mise en scène* is therefore considerable, especially in the case of film-makers whose work is not in the social realist mode.

The interpretation of non-verbal clues in cultures with which we are familiar is relatively straightforward. It is fair to assume that we easily read the signs that film texts present. From an early age we are inscribed within culture; we learn to recognise and interpret familiar signifiers without having to think about what they mean. To us, the signified is something that communicates without difficulty, even at the level of more obscure codes of behaviour and cultural traditions. We are aware of manners and customs which these signifiers connote, and readily interpret their meaning in film. For example, a film where a family group is opening gifts around an indoor tree indicates the traditions of Christmas, with all the connotations which that festival implies. A calendar does not have to be displayed; our experience and cultural knowledge tell us this. However, to someone not
versed in the tradition of Christmas these associations are lost, and thus if the narrative is connected to this time of the year, in for example *It’s a Wonderful Life* (Capra, 1946), a powerful western text loses its potency.

**Foreign Film, Foreign Language**

What do we mean by film language? It is both visual and verbal. However, it is also culturally inscribed and idiomatic. Therefore, any thoroughgoing analysis of a Japanese film will need to be informed by cultural knowledge as well as engaging with the language barrier. To write about any film, we should at least be aware of its provenance; we need to be sympathetic to its cultural complexity. In respect of Japanese films, we should realise that what we are viewing on screen is much the same as looking at a page of written Japanese *kanji*. The two symbolic codes should be approached in the same manner: both are a series of pictures which inform, explain and enlighten, but require specific cultural knowledge in order to decipher their meaning. Written or verbal language, obscure as its system might be, can be understood precisely with the right technical knowledge. The visual language of cinema, paradoxically, seems more open to interpretation, but is therefore likely to be more ambiguous in its meaning. In the visual field, therefore, cultural knowledge is vital in any attempt to interpret an alien culture with anything more than superficial understanding. In interpreting the visual field, we are concerned primarily with the analysis of the deeper cultural language of *mise en scène*. This rich and complex territory has often been neglected in studies of Japanese cinema and by scholars of Mizoguchi in particular.
I want to argue that embedded within the *mise en scène* are a plethora of culturally rich communicative devices which aid our understanding of characters, locations and the social world. A culturally informed analysis of *mise en scène* is vital if the contemporary western scholar is to be able to recover any sense of the cultural function which specific films might have performed for Japanese audiences at particular moments. Ambitious though this may be, it is only through such culturally informed analysis that we can attempt to relocate cinema in its particular social and historical circumstances. The central aim of this thesis therefore, is to reassess and rehabilitate the work of Mizoguchi Kenji. Although widely acknowledged as one of the grand masters of world cinema, a comprehensive appreciation of his achievements must include a reappraisal of the cultural function of his work in its social and historical context. This enterprise depends crucially upon the hypothesis that film language can be considered universal only on a superficial level, and that it is irrevocably rooted, like any living language, in the culture from which it stems. In order to engage with this enculturated language it is appropriate to begin with a semiotically informed account.

**Mizoguchi and Semiotic Analysis**

Mizoguchi’s films often take us on journeys which are fraught with hardship and emotional disquiet. Their emotional landscapes are distinctively Japanese and, at the level of *mise en scène*, draw upon a wide range of referents embedded deep within Japanese artistic, literary and cultural traditions. Throughout this thesis I shall be examining the non-verbal language of ‘culturally specific’ textual signifiers, such as *chinmoku* 沈黙, *honne to tatemae* 本音と建前 and *mu* 無. This analysis will provide examples of the language that Mizoguchi employs. Though this language is specifically Japanese our
analysis needs to proceed from an awareness of semiotic theory in order to inform our methods. I shall briefly introduce some key semiologists and their philosophies, before using their ideas to examine key scenes from three Mizoguchi pictures.

Semiotic theory has its roots in the western philosophical tradition and addresses “speculation concerning language and the relation between words and things” (Stam, Flitterman-Lewis, Burgoyne, 1992, p.2). Its purpose is to re-conceptualise the world through linguistics. Early theories in the use of language can be traced to the Pre-Socratic philosophers whose chief catechism surrounded the motivation of signs, the relationship between object and word, and questions about whether this relationship is consensual.

One of the first modern philosophers to use the word Semiotic was the English philosopher John Locke, (1632-1704). In his work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke notes that words alone have no significance; the relationship between the spoken word and the idea that it represents is central to his philosophy. Writing of the limitations of words, Locke notes the natural causes of their imperfection, especially in those that stand for mixed modes, and for our ideas of substances. Words having naturally no signification, the idea which each stands for must be learned and retained, by those who would exchange thoughts, and hold intelligible discourse with others, in any language (2001, p.391).

Locke elaborates this point in four ways. Firstly, he suggests that the ideas words stand for are very complex and made up of a great number of ideas put together. Secondly, he observes that the ideas represented by words have no certain connexion in nature, and
so no settled standard exists by which to measure them. Thirdly, he proposes when the
signification of the word is referred to a standard, which standard is not easily known.
Finally, he asserts that the signification of the word and the real essence of the thing are
not exactly the same (2001, p.391).

Let us pause here to examine Locke’s ideas in relation to Japanese language. His first
observation examines the problem of meaning through the spoken word. In the Japanese
language, one word such as shura 修羅, has no direct English translation. The word
refers to one of the gods in Indian Buddhist teachings. However, when used in a sentence
such as ‘watashi wa shura no michi wo iku’ 私は修羅の道を行く, it literally means ‘I
lived the way of shura’, where shura represents a concept of battle or antagonism, a
constant reference to the urge to fight. Thus, in Japanese it is used to describe a state of
mind. Japanese Buddhism divides this state into ten sections, number ten
representing jigoku-kai 地獄界 (hell) and number one representing bukkai 仏界
(enlightenment). An example of this in contemporary cinema is Shurayukihiime (Fujita,
1973), where shura is translated as Netherworld, yuki 雪 as snow, and hime 姫 as
Princess. The literal translation of the title would be Snow Princess of the Netherworld. In
Britain, however, we know it as Lady Snowblood – Blizzard from the Netherworld. Either
way, the original meaning of shura is lost, and as such, all Buddhist connotations have
been removed.

Locke’s second example relates to words that are or have become dangerous, where the
unnatural word creates a sense of self-awareness, or fear upon its utterance or
representation. For example, bakudan 爆弾 directly translates as bomb, and has the same
connotation within English. The world is unnatural, creates images of despair and carnage and is detached from a natural reading.

Locke’s third note, however, once again brings into question the differences in language. There must always be a standard by which to interpret a work. When carrying out an analysis of a foreign text, we read it by our own standards from a position of a recognisable and comfortable social perspective; we then use this standard to critique other texts. For example, a Japanese word which has gained currency in the west is Zen 禪. It is used to evoke a feeling of tranquillity and calmness or when describing Japanese decoration or fashion. It indicates something which is mysterious and exotic, not of the everyday. However, the true signification of the word has been totally lost in its journey from eastern to western culture. Upon hearing the word, most Japanese would immediately connect it with the Zen sect of Buddhism, its art or philosophy, all of which have a particular preconceived role in society. Zen is not a word that can be easily explained, and of course any such explanation is dependent upon the context of its use. For the moment however, let us pursue a brief diversion from Locke in order to examine the word’s application within film criticism.

The western interpretation of Zen has also been brought to bear upon the study of Japanese film. Paul Schrader, who writes on Ozu in his book *Transcendental Style in Film* (1988), is a perfect example of a foreigner who has attempted to apply the term with a degree of specificity which the Japanese would find it difficult to accept. Schrader writes: “For thirteen hundred years Zen has cultivated the transcendent experience, and the Transcendental has found expression not only in religion and the arts, but also in a wide
variety of ‘commonplace’ activities” (1988, p.17). He finds that transcendental spirit in Ozu’s refined observation of Japanese family life in the contemporary *gendaigeki* 現代劇 dramas: “In Ozu’s films Zen art and thought” evoke that long “civilisation” (1988, p.18). By the end of his career, “in Ozu’s mind Japanese life had resolved into certain opposing forces which he repeatedly demonstrated in his films, and although these forces must be reconciled, they would not be reconciled by anything as artificial as plot” (1988, p.19). In eschewing plot-driven drama for the contemplative mode, Schrader finds in late Ozu what he calls *Zen* transcendentalism. Although Schrader’s application of the term has some value, this ultimately represents an attempt to explain what is in essence unexplainable: to find *Zen* in Ozu and to explain Ozu through *Zen*.

Schrader’s reading has prompted critique from Japanese scholars, particularly Yoshimoto who observes: “In Schrader’s argument, ‘Zen’ and ‘Orient’ are magic words that miraculously solve critical dilemmas and contradictions.” He adds that, “the ambivalence of *Zen* is never resolved; on the contrary, it is precisely through his ambivalent use of *Zen* that Schrader tries to reconcile the universal with the particular” (2002, p.16). Yoshimoto’s comments alert us to the problems of adopting culturally specific terminology in critical analysis. By misapplying Japanese terms in film criticism there is a danger of falling back upon caricature and subjective interpretation. This example demonstrates the need to come to terms with the culturally specific connotations of verbal and visual discourses and resist the temptation to abstract words from the context of their own linguistic standards.
Finally, Locke’s last point reiterates the warning about the inability of language to grasp the essence of things. Language cannot have stable meaning outside the context of its usage or apart from the cultural resonance it accrues. For example, a Japanese word such as natsukashii (懐かしい) is not an object but a feeling. I would hear this word used frequently and asked Japanese friends about its connotation, only to be told that there is no word in English to describe it. It is only when living in the country and listening to when and how the word is used that I have finally realised its true significance. So then, if a character on screen feels natsukashii what would be the subtitle translation? There is no equivalent word; the closest explanation could be remembering something, someone or an event with fondness, or missing, wanting or enjoying something from the past. Also, use of the word depends entirely on context: where, when and why it is used. I feel that although these explanations go some way to decoding meaning, they do not really uncover the essence of the word satisfactorily. The cultural inscription of language was a central concern of twentieth-century semioticians Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes, and has been applied to the study of cinema most notably by Christian Metz. It is to the work of these thinkers that we now briefly turn.

**Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Christian Metz**

In opposition to Locke’s thoughts about language as signs which are representative of ideas, de Saussure believed that language enabled human beings to rationalise and form an understanding of their reality. The use of verbal signifiers was perceived by de Saussure as central: “Human existence is, by definition, a linguistically articulated existence” (Harris, 1997, p.208). Language has generally been accepted as the main source of expression, without which reason would not be possible. De Saussure’s legacy
cannot be overstated; his work is considered to mark the start of twentieth-century structuralism. Also, his presupposition of the importance of speech over writing inspired literary critics such as Roland Barthes, whose science of signs was based upon de Saussure’s philosophies and the anthropological analysis of myth and ritual that these signs propagate.

In 1966 Barthes travelled to Japan to give a series of lectures at Universities, among them Kanto and Kyoto. Barthes’ work in Japan invoked an image of the Japanese at peace with the absence of a unifying signifier. In *Empire of Signs*, while revelling in Japan as a fictive nation, he acknowledges that its essential otherness, upon which his thesis rests, also betrays the need for deeper cultural understanding:

> Today there are doubtless a thousand things to learn about the Orient: an enormous labor of knowledge is and will be necessary (its delay can only be the result of an ideological occultation); but it is also necessary that, leaving aside vast regions of darkness (capitalist Japan, American acculturation, technological development), a slender thread of light search out not other symbols but the very fissure of the symbolic (1982, p.4).

Barthes was correct to observe that in order to be able to understand Japan one must first understand its signs and the language. In the chapter entitled ‘The Unknown Language’, he comments that this understanding requires an undoing of our own reality, a descent into the untranslatable, and that we (who are in this case ‘the other’) cannot begin to contest a society in which we have no enlightenment. This is both a problem of foreignness and a problem of proportion. For example, in Japan he argues, “the empire of signifiers is so immense, so in excess of speech” (1982, p.9). The Japanese, like others, do
not just communicate with the spoken word, but with silence and gesture too. Indeed, Mizoguchi directed his actors to perform and express emotion through culturally specific body language; this reveals his concern for the extended repertoire of non-verbal communication.

These observations offer a stern challenge to scholars of Japanese cinema and justify the need to include the interpretation of bodily communication within a wholesale analysis of *mise en scène*. But the challenge of the obscurity of Japan which Barthes presents and fetishises, necessitates that in film analysis we seek to interpret signifiers within the context of the spatio-temporal narrative world. Barthes’ semiotic paradise requires bringing down to earth. Although Barthes has not previously been applied in any systematic way to the study of Japanese cinema it has encouraged certain Japanese scholars to pursue semiotic evaluation or *kigōron* 記号論. The most widely recognised of these are Monnai Teruyuki, Aoki Tamotsu and Ikegami Yoshihiko. And it has influenced some western writers on Japanese film to revel with the same purely aesthetic pleasure in the realm of cinematic signifiers without attempting to ground their analyses in the historical process of narrative.

Finally, it is useful to examine the work of Christian Metz whose 1974 essay ‘Some Points in the Semiotics of Cinema’, offers a comprehensive critique of film semiotics. Metz points out the problems of reading texts semiotically in terms of narrative, lighting, optical devices and language: “The concept of linguistics can be applied to the semiotics of the cinema only with the greatest of caution,” he argues (in Mast et al, 1992, p.178). Metz insists that when applying semiotic theory to film, attention must be paid to the
hierarchy of visual and verbal signs. In respect of Japanese cinema, this observation lies at the heart of any analysis. This thesis will argue that in attending to the relationship between the visual and verbal discourses in Mizoguchi’s films, it is possible to offer a culturally grounded interpretation of the narrative world. To this end, as I have proposed throughout this chapter, to read a text semiotically one must undoubtedly possess the cultural knowledge, as well as the analytical tools, with which to do so. This involves researching the culture and traditions, in addition to the political and industrial context, in which the film is produced.

Having surveyed the importance of semiotic analysis to an understanding of the cultural inscription of verbal and visual signs in film, we are now in a position to apply these ideas to some specific examples from the work of Mizoguchi in order to demonstrate what these methods might reveal.

**Mizoguchi’s Signs**

This thesis proposes that it is essential to read Mizoguchi’s films from a culturally informed perspective. Mizoguchi’s work presents us with a number of symbolically complex Japanese concepts that require deconstruction. It is the purpose of this section to outline a taxonomy of these concepts and to offer a semiotic analysis of three examples using the following films: *Naniwa Ereji (Osaka Elegy, 1936)*, *Gion Bayashi (Gion Festival Music, 1953)* and *Chikamatsu Monogatari (The Crucified Lovers, 1954).*
(i) Taxonomy

1. Location: Requires a reading of buildings, local industry and regional music that exist in the represented world.

2. Language (spoken): Advises the reader initially of the characters in terms of regional background and social status.

3. Language (written): Signs displayed on shop-fronts give indications to the trades of the area or what the region is famed for.

4. Kimono (traditional Japanese clothing): In period dramas for example, Japanese clothing can give the reader an initial indication as to the characters’ profession, time of year, occasion, class and the period to which they belong.

5. Features: Personal features give indications of personal situations. For example, in period dramas we see signs such as the ohaguroお歯黒 (blackened teeth) of the married female, hairstyle or the high painted eyebrows of female nobility.

(ii) The Language of Mizoguchi - Titles

Firstly, let us address the individual film titles so that we may begin to establish some kind of relationship with the work. Immediately, the translation from the original Japanese to English presents problems. Possibly the most difficult example is Chikamatsu Monogatari.

Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725) is one of the most famous Japanese playwrights, although his work is generally not widely known outside Japan. For the film Chikamatsu Monogatari, Mizoguchi and his scriptwriter Yoda Yoshikata adapted two stories: Daikyōji Mukashigoyomi by Chikamatsu and Koushoku Gonin Onna by Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693). Chikamatsu was known for his populist writing and appealed to the chōnin町人 (normal Japanese townsfolk), because he used vernacular language and colloquial terms. At this
time, most writing was scholarly and was written in kanji. Chikamatsu, however, appealed to the chōnin with his writing style, and his popular texts fuelled and divided criticism. Ueda observes:

Conservative critics regard him as a playwright with a strong sense of morality, as a writer who insisted on the importance of reason over passion on all occasions. Romantic commentators think otherwise; in their opinions his drama presents the purest type of love which, because of its very purity, cannot find its fulfilment in this world. Finally some leftist critics, who are becoming more and more influential in Japan nowadays, hold that Chikamatsu's tragedies exemplify a clash between the conservative society and the progressive individual, between the moralism of the feudal age and the humanism of the commoners (1960, p.107).

The second author that this story draws influence from is Ihara Saikaku. He was born and raised in Osaka and by the age of twenty, under his real name of Ihara Kakuei, developed into a master of a sixteenth-century style of Japanese verse called haikai. Most importantly, and like Chikamatsu, Saikaku used colloquial Japanese language to connect with the chōnin. Saikaku is an important literary figure whom we will study in greater detail later in the thesis.

The problem Mizoguchi faced at this time however was composing a script combining elements of the two masters. Scriptwriter Yoda explains that in the first half of the script Mizoguchi wanted to use Chikamatsu to explain the mix of social structure and the shackles of feudal society. However, from the beginning of the writing process Mizoguchi had also been attracted by the extraordinary beauty of Saikaku’s writing (1970, p.305). By demanding of Yoda that Chikamatsu Monogatari was a combination of both authors, Mizoguchi created a film for the popular audience - a tale that is critical of society's
intolerance of the emotions and needs of normal people, and where irresponsibility can cause heartbreak and desperation. Mizoguchi elaborated on the feeling of human desperation he was trying to create, in a conversation later reported by Yoda. Commenting on the scene at Biwako Lake, Mizoguchi told his screenwriter about his dissatisfaction with the script, insisting that the whole story should be summed up in one scene:

If they [Mohei and Osan] die at Biwako Lake, it won’t work. They go there thinking that they will die but just as they are about to commit suicide on the boat, they reveal their true feelings. All of a sudden they don’t want to die anymore; this is what drama is (1970, p.310).

Here, Mizoguchi’s aim was to keep the spirit and message of both Chikamatsu and Saikaku in order to encourage the expression of desire. But, at the same time he wished to retain the feeling of struggle and sacrifice. We get our first indication of the nature of this narrative through the title *Chikamatsu Monogatari* and of the kind of popular appeal it might have. This example demonstrates the significance of the film title itself for a contemporary audience, and the connotations which a culturally informed semiotic analysis might reveal. In this case research into the production history and literary sources provides the evidence of the titles’ importance.

The title *Naniwa Ereji* also informs its audience of the type of story to expect. Elegy (Ereji) indicates a mournful or melancholic tone. However, with the addition of the word Naniwa the title becomes more alluring. Naniwa is the old name for the city of Osaka and evokes the cultural characteristics of that city. *Naniwa* has a rich heritage, not just in terms of art, literature and theatre, but also in trade and industry. Naniwa was a city of merchants
where almost anything could be bartered for. It was also the place where Sen no Rikyu established the contemporary tea ceremony in the sixteenth century.

People of Osaka connect the name Naniwa to its history and rich culture, and a great deal of pride is attached to the name. In cinema, up until the mid-1930s, characters from Osaka were regularly presented to outsiders as comedians, buffoons or caricatures. However, Mizoguchi’s use of the word Naniwa also indicates something deeper. This is not a story about Osaka’s comic stereotypes but a meditation on the city through its rich cultural heritage. Mizoguchi’s film is about the honesty, pride and individuality of its people. Here again, historical knowledge reveals the originality and poignancy evident to Japanese audiences from this film’s title.

Finally, although the film Gion Festival Music is a direct translation of the Japanese title Gion Bayashi, this also conveys much more. Gion is the district in Kyoto which is famed for its maiko 舞妓 and geisha 芸者 and is arguably one of the most significant cultural districts in the whole of Japan. Gion Bayashi refers to the type of Japanese festival music that is played only at the Gion Matsuri 祇園祭 (Gion Festival) and therefore would only be heard in Kyoto. So this title not only indicates location, but also signifies the time of year. The Gion Matsuri takes place during July. During this month many events occur such as yamaboko junkō 山鉾巡行 (the parade of a portable shrine through Kyoto City). The main spectacle of the Gion Matsuri happens on the seventeenth of July and involves a huge parade through the centre of Kyoto. Gion Bayashi is heard constantly around this time. Like the example of Christmas earlier in this chapter, Mizoguchi’s festival-set film communicates to a Japanese audience a specific time, place and mood.
Having interrogated the associations which these film titles might have for a Japanese audience, let us now move to examine aspects of the language of mise en scène. In each case some general observations will be followed by a key-scene analysis.

_Naniwa Ereji_

The hōgen 方言, or colloquial accent, is an important signifier of community and milieu in all Mizoguchi’s location-set films. The language spoken throughout this film is an accurate representation of the language of Osaka. Communication is more direct than in standard Japanese and more expressive in terms of personal emotion. The film also contains the famous elements of regional humour, particularly in the dialogue between Asai (Shiganoya Benkei) and his wife Sumiko (Umemura Yoko) during the film’s opening sequences. This, along with location signifiers such as Osaka _wan_ 大阪湾 (Osaka bay), _Kōraibashi_ 高麗橋 (Korai bridge), the socially diverse district known as Dōtonbori 頓堀 and the Osaka neon, enables us to experience the city topographically. We are also aware of the time period through technological and stylistic signifiers. The telephone is an icon of 1930’s modernity; the film’s main protagonist Ayako, played with remarkable maturity by Yamada Isuzu, is a telephone receptionist for Asai Pharmaceutical. She is the young, fashionable _moga_ (modern girl) as observed by the newspapers of the day: “A woman with domestic aspirations ... and romantic goals” (Kirihara, 1992 p.36). The neon lights of the cityscape are captured evocatively by Mizoguchi’s regular Director of Photography from the mid-1930s, Miki Minoru. As Mori Toshie indicates, “_Osaka Elegy_ sets out to show the same mixture of the modern and the traditional that existed in the time and place in which the film was set” (in Phillips and Stringer, 2007, p.40). This
mixture is highlighted further by the costumes. Throughout the film we see western-style business suits alongside traditional Japanese yukata 浴衣 and kimono as well as the soundtrack of big band jazz, indicating that we are in a city which is embracing a range of influences. The set design of the Asai Pharmaceutical offices is also indicative of western style, and although the period is not obvious from a single signifier, the mise en scène as a whole establishes that this is contemporary Japan.

The non-verbal communication exhibited throughout Naniwa Ereji is just as important as the spoken word. The mood, ideology, needs and desires of Mizoguchi’s characters are displayed by chinmoku (silence in communication). An essay on chinmoku in the collection edited by Davies and Ikeno explains:

> Silence is commonly thought to indicate thoughtfulness or hesitation in trying to find a good way to communicate smoothly; therefore, even though people have something to say, they may not express everything they have in mind and may leave their true intentions unspoken (2002, p.53).

This is a distinctively Japanese concept. In a western film, silence seldom has such profound associations. Conventionally, a period of silence between two characters indicates a mood of discomfort; in Japanese film, and indeed in social life, it indicates thoughtfulness and intelligence. Naniwa Ereji employs chinmoku as a distinctively Japanese evocation of normal everyday life.
A fine example occurs at Ayako’s apartment where she ends her relationship with Fujino (Shindo Eitaro), a man who she had previously ‘been with’ for money. During the exchange, Ayako’s prospective boyfriend Nishimura (Hara Kensaku) hides in an adjoining room. Ayako informs Fujino that their relationship is over and that he should be careful because she has a house guest who is a ‘tough guy’. The camera cuts from a medium two-shot of Ayako and Fujino, to a long-shot from the corner of the room where Nishimura is kneeling, shrouded in darkness (Figure 1). This camera position allows us to see all three protagonists and takes in the whole apartment. Ayako, now in long-shot continues to warn Fujino: “He may look gentle, but he’s vicious when mad. Leave now before you get hurt”. She adds sarcastically: “Be a good boy and go home”. Ayako’s conceited behaviour is in contrast to Nishimura’s who fidgets uncomfortably in the adjoining room. Fujino finally leaves after warning Ayako: “You’ll be crying later”. After the commotion, Nishimura enters the main living room in a state of disbelief: “Does that mean that you and he …” he asks, to which Ayako cheerfully replies: “Of course not, silly”. Ayako instructs Nishimura to sit down before asking: “You’ll stand by me, won’t you”? He assents unconvincingly, and his answer is greeted with delight. However, his body language (bowed head and uncomfortable posture), suggests otherwise. Throughout Ayako’s monologue, expressing her wishes for their relationship, Nishimura never responds, but remains silent. He does not ask questions of Ayako, neither does he seem
to share her happiness. Nishimura’s chinmoku indicates that he has already made a decision to leave; we can read his intention through his prolonged silence. Mori rightly indicates that the apartment scene is key as it embodies a “paradoxical complexity of a society that is rooted in traditional moral values while practising modern patterns of behaviour” (in Phillips and Stringer, 2007, p.44). This is highlighted by Ayako’s desire to help her family financially, but in a manner which is seen as dirty and immoral. Although she does not admit it, Ayako can read Nishimura’s response and she knows that their relationship is hopeless. These non-verbal performance strategies are accentuated by the position of the camera, which remains at a critical distance, observing the action in long-shot. We never see Nishimura’s facial expressions; rather our reading of his reaction is determined by his body language and his silence. As Ayako leaves the shot the camera remains fixed on Nishimura (Figure 2). We hear Ayako but we are focused on him, dejected and betrayed. After the shot, which lasts for two minutes and fourteen seconds, we cut to a new camera position behind Nishimura, while Ayako prepares a meal in the background. Throughout this part of the scene she whistles happily, but this sounds a false note. Inevitably, Nishimura finally rises expressing his intention to leave. The scene is emotionally intense; Ayako does not receive any kind of support from Nishimura, even after Fujino threatens her. It is easy to suggest that Nishimura is a weak character, however it is also important to remember the revelation
he has just witnessed. Miki’s photography highlights Nishimura’s feeling of desperation by
remaining at a distance from the action (Figure 3). At no point do we see any facial
expressions; Nishimura’s emotional response to Ayako’s verbal expression is conveyed
through body language and accentuated by his silence. Before Nishimura leaves it is
revealed that Fujino has reported Ayako, and as a result the police arrive. In the next
scene, Ayako is being interrogated at the police station. Nishimura’s true nature is
revealed here as Ayako overhears his statement in the adjoining room, which only serves
to protect himself and impugn her.

As well as establishing character
through chinmoku, some of the
most challenging narrative
signifiers in *Naniwa Ereji* appear in
written Japanese. This presents
difficulties for those without
Japanese language since such
information is rarely subtitled. Yet
detail provided in this way is often highly significant. For example, there is a shot early in
the film that focuses on a magazine headline which Ayako is reading. The text reads, ‘金
故に堕落した女’ (Woman corrupted for money). This stark warning prefigures Ayako’s
involvement in sexual scandal and illicit moneymaking. Its place in the narrative indicates
her personal choice at this stage. The presentation of this dilemma is a common

technique in Mizoguchi’s work and is something that will be examined further in relation

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Figure 3
Scene Analysis

Building on these examples of meaning encoded in the mise en scène, there follows a single scene analysis which demonstrates how such individual devices can be brought together to inform the interpretation of a key episode. Asai has taken his mistress Ayako to the bunraku 文楽. During the performance he is called from his seat by an acquaintance (the family doctor). In the corridor of the theatre Asai and the doctor begin an exchange. The doctor says, “これが来てるがな” meaning “It is here”, but we have no idea what this “it” is, until the doctor raises his little finger. Immediately, through this signifier it is clear that the doctor is referring to a woman. The context (Asai in a theatre with his mistress and the panic of the doctor), alerts us to the fact that the doctor is referring to Asai’s wife Sumiko, although she is never named. In fact, the doctor is himself an important signifier. He appears four times throughout the film and each appearance corresponds with personal problems or situations that affect the main characters. When it is clear that the doctor means Sumiko, he says, “きついこれやがな” meaning “She is very…” He extends the index fingers of both hands and places them on either temple to represent an oni 鬼 or Japanese demon, indicating that she has the fury of the devil. When Sumiko approaches the dialogue is descriptive. However she comments on Ayako’s clothing, exclaiming with a deal of sarcasm which is indicative of the wife during this scene, “あやこはん、いつお嫁入りしはったん” ? She is asking Ayako, “When did you get married”? The question is somewhat perplexing; if Ayako is out with Asai, as Sumiko suspects, then what prompts this enquiry? Ayako is in fact a signifier; she is dressed in
a *kimono* and is wearing her hair in the style of a married woman. Sumiko’s suspicion is confirmed when Asai calls Ayako *omae* お前, a term of endearment which immediately indicates an intimacy between the pair.

The cinematography of Miki Minoru is crucial to our understanding of this scene. When Asai and Sumiko are arguing in the theatre hallway, the camera is removed from the action; they are in the background. It is almost as if their situation is not as important as Ayako’s, who is positioned in the foreground with her back to the viewer and sharing the same perspective (Figure 4). We are offered her point of view, but are also invited to witness the beginning of her downfall as prophesied in the newspaper headline. This analysis demonstrates that a sophisticated reading can only be achieved by combining a culturally informed understanding of both verbal and visual discourses at work.
Gion Bayashi

As with Naniwa Ereji, the Kansai regional location and the cultural particularities of the social milieu are vital to understanding the filmic world of Gion Bayashi. Set in Kyoto during the annual Gion Festival, the film highlights the Gion maiko and geisha, arguably two of the most significant symbols of Japanese culture. Gion Bayashi, in terms of the spoken word, presents a meticulous recreation of Kyoto ben. Because of the cultural specificity of this milieu, Mizoguchi pays a great deal of attention to detail in order to ensure its authentic recreation. This kind of cultural accuracy is a recurrent feature throughout Mizoguchi’s work. The screenplay, like that of Naniwa Ereji, was written by Kyoto citizen and regular collaborator Yoda Yoshikata. Yoda was born and raised in Kyoto and his background enabled Mizoguchi’s Kansai-set pictures to portray the region with accuracy and sensitivity. Kansai is a major southern-central region of Japan’s main island Honshu. The area is also steeped in history and includes the major cities of Osaka, Nara, Kobe and the ancient capital, Kyoto. Kansai is home to over 20 million people. In order to recreate the distinct manners and customs of Kansai, it was crucial that Mizoguchi paid close attention to the details of mise en scène and the authenticity of the dialogue. Yoda remembers that, “Mizoguchi seemed to like the Kansai ben I wrote. He was interested in the mood which produces a human essence. He was very attracted to that” (1970, p.57).

Gion Bayashi centres on a geisha, Miyoharu (Kogure Michiyo), who runs an establishment in Gion. In terms of production design, Art Director Koike Kazuyoshi and his assistant Kajitani Ichizo built a studio set at Daiei which faithfully reproduces Kyoto’s physical characteristics such as the machiya style architecture. The houses are longer than
they are wide and consist of narrow entrances, and this style is synonymous with Kyoto. The film’s locations also include the many drinking bars and ochaya お茶屋 that populate the area around Gion. Here, in terms of regional signifiers, it is important to understand the specific social space occupied by the ochaya. Strictly speaking this is a tea house, but one that doesn’t just serve tea; it would be more accurate to describe it as an upmarket bar. The ochaya would serve sake and food, and provide geisha from the okiya 置屋 (geisha boarding house) from which they requested geisha and maiko. Such an association is evident within Gion Bayashi as the owner of the Yoshikimi Ochaya is supplying geisha for her customers.

As the title suggests, music plays a vital role, signifying both location and season. Mizoguchi drew here, as elsewhere, on the expertise of traditional Japanese music specialist Mochizuki Tamezo. The distinctive Gion Matsuri music recreates the ambiance of the area whilst the festival is at its peak. This vivid recreation of atmosphere is important for a film of this genre: a geisha drama. A Japanese audience would understand the cultural nuances which the film draws so heavily upon, especially at the level of mise en scène. Elements such as costume, makeup and hairstyle required pinpoint precision, since minor variations in this area of display communicated fine social distinctions to a contemporary spectator. An example of this is the subtle contrast between the Kyoto maiko and the Kansai area geisha, the geiko 芸妓.

To the casual observer, the clothing of maiko and geiko are almost indistinguishable: both wear kimono. However, the manner in which these kimono are worn is different, and such differences signify the status of the wearer. There are many visual clues which allow
us to distinguish the senior *geiko* from the junior *maiko*. Firstly there is the *obi* 帯, which is the sash worn just above the waist. A *maiko* *obi* is worn differently and is much longer at the back. Secondly, there is a difference in the actual *kimono* itself with the *geiko* *kimono*’s lower sleeve is a lot narrower than the *maiko*’s. Thirdly, there are differences in the shoes: *maiko* shoes are called *pokkuri* ぽっくり and are much thicker in the sole than the traditional *geiko* footwear which changes dependent on occasion or seasonal events. In the film these subtle but crucial distinctions in dress are beautifully presented by costume designer Kurosawa Yoshiko, in consultation with Mizoguchi’s regular period costume maker Ueno Yoshio. Finally, hairstyle has an important cultural significance as a *maiko* would adorn her hair with *kanzashi* 箸. *Kanzashi* are hair fixings and ornaments from which seasonal flowers would trail. These *maiko* decorations would be elaborate and more colourful than a *geiko*, as evidenced in the hairstyling of Nakai Tsuru. These observable distinctions in costume and adornment would be, for a Japanese audience, clear signifiers of status.

A *maiko* is a young apprentice and, as they train, they serve one elder *maiko* or the more senior *geiko* from between six months to two years. A *maiko* debutant has to be accepted by the *okiya*’s *okami* (the female owner of the *okiya*), as well as by the many local *ochaya*. The term *okami* 女将 means madam or mistress and is used by customers towards her. A *maiko* must conduct herself impeccably, paying respect to both customers and tradition. The *maiko* in *Gion Bayashi*, Miyoei (Wakao Ayako), is not prepared to follow tradition or to accept the behaviour of some of her customers. The dramatic scale of her rebellion is evident in her dialogue, and also in her mannerisms and physical performance. According to *geisha* conventions, her behaviour is at times deeply shocking.
Another difficulty for an audience unfamiliar with the hierarchies of this distinct social world is presented by its nomenclature. Miyoei the maiko, addresses Miyoharu the geiko, as onēsan お姉さん or elder sister. In turn, they both address the okiya’s okami as okāsan お母さん, meaning Mother. This becomes confusing because, as we would understand it, the three are related in a familial sense. However, in geisha society these terms are used very differently. The owner of the okiya literally takes the place of a maiko/geiko’s birth mother; furthermore, the geiko becomes the maiko’s elder sister, there to guide and help her whenever needed. Traditionally, the maiko has an elder who is a guarantor, not in terms of finance, but in terms of reputation and behaviour. Therefore, if the maiko makes a mistake, the onēsan or elder geiko is ultimately responsible. Onēsan is also responsible for teaching the maiko how to behave.

In Mizoguchi’s film, Miyoei craves the life of a maiko, but she begins to realise how different the reality of this world is from the life she imagined. For those who have no knowledge of geisha, Gion Bayashi is a confusing text. At the level of mise en scène it demands a much more sophisticated attention to detail and specific cultural knowledge than Naniwa Ereji. An example from a key scene will serve to demonstrate how a culturally informed reading enhances our understanding of the films major themes.
Scene Analysis

After Miyoei’s debut in Kyoto, she returns to the okiya with Miyoharu. Miyoei is drunk after being encouraged to drink sake by one of the customers. Miyoharu protests at this, but is called ‘old game’ for her interference. Miyoei’s inexperience has led to a conflict developing between the maiko and her onēsan. As Miyoharu helps Miyoei down the long Kyoto lane and back into the okiya, we are reminded that this is the day of her debut (Figure 5). Knowledge of Japanese language would draw a viewer’s attention to the wall behind Miyoei where many congratulatory messages celebrate her debut. As she begins to undress, her exchanges with Miyoharu indicate a sense of change – of traditional Japan being replaced by the modern. The fact that Miyoei is ungainly in her drunken state, but is still dressed as maiko is subversive. This juxtaposition is reinforced by the behaviour of Miyoharu during this sequence. The experienced and wise geiko remains elegant and graceful and although their exchange is terse, she does not raise her voice or become irritated with her unruly sister. The verbal conflict signifies a changing Japan. Miyoharu states that even though Miyoei is of the post-war, modern generation, she should not forget about giri 義理 and ninjō 人情 - terms related to Japanese social virtue.

Usually, giri translates as social obligation. However, in this case we can read it as loyalty: not something that has to be done, but something that should be done. Ninjō can be read as
humanity although this could also be translated as kindness, generosity, understanding or mercy. Miyoei asks: “What is giri? What is ninjō? I don’t understand!” These virtues are part of Japanese tradition, and most certainly a virtue of geisha. This then is a shocking scene: to see Miyoei, a symbol of Japanese virtue, question the codes of behaviour she has been brought up to adhere to, is an indication of an uncomfortable divide. This episode reveals to an observer conversant both with the subtle nuances of Japanese language and the fine distinctions of costume and non-verbal clues, the magnitude of the divide. Arguably, it is only with such informed analysis that it is possible to interpret this scene as a metaphor for the generational divisions and conflicts of post-war Japan itself.

**Chikamatsu Monogatari**

*Chikamatsu Monogatari* provides a story which examines relationships between social classes and ruthless business practice; it critiques a constrictive and unforgiving social structure. It is useful here to elaborate upon the intricacies and cultural significance which the title indicates. *Chikamatsu Monogatari* literally translates as *A Story of Chikamatsu*; however, Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s original title, *Daikyōji Mukashigoyomi* (1715), has much deeper social connotations.

As I have already argued, Mizoguchi’s adapted version of the two novels is a combination of work by Chikamatsu and Saikaku. Both stories are based upon a factual event when the wife of daikyōji 大経師 caused a scandal by eloping with one of his workers. Although the novels are linked by this event, where Chikamatsu’s finale sees the couple saved from execution by a monk, Saikaku’s ending, which Mizoguchi adopts, suggests that the couple
are crucified. The films social world is drawn more substantially from the origins of Chikamatsu’s title.

So, let us examine the first word of Chikamatsu’s original novel title, Daikyōji. This term has important social implications and is given to a workshop owner whose team of artisans create, repair and maintain important interior artwork. Examples of such art would include fusuma 襖 (Figure 6), byōbu 屏風 (Figure 7) and koyomi 历 (Figure 8). The term connotes an individual who runs a highly respected business with a team of skilled artists. In the eighteenth century the title daikyōji was given by the Emperor and comes with great social responsibility and pressure, but also accorded status and substantial wealth. For example, the workshop of daikyōji would be the only place deemed worthy of carrying out craftsmanship of important artistic value. And the business would be assigned the prestigious task of making calendars which were sold across Kyoto and displayed within the imperial Palace. In Mizoguchi’s film, Ishun (Shindo Eitaro) is daikyōji and Mohei (Hasegawa Kazuo) is his top artist.
The second part of the title, Mukashigoyomi 昔暦 can be quite comfortably translated as old calendar, mukashi 昔 meaning old and koyomi (or goyomi when attached to another word) 暦 meaning calendar. The title of the novel is thus rich in specific cultural and historical reference. It connotes a particular business, its social standing, hierarchies and location. In the film all these connotations are indicated in Ishun’s print shop, which is making calendars for the imperial Palace. Not only does this signify that the film is set in Kansai/Kyoto, but also indicates to us the Edo period setting (1603–1868) - a time when the imperial palace was in the old Japanese capital, Kyoto. It is indicative of the lengths to which Mizoguchi was prepared to go in order to recreate this period with fidelity on screen, that he employed a historical researcher Ueno Hosei, on this film.

In the film, Mohei is a renowned printer working for a company, owned by daikyōji, Ishun. The company is prestigious because, as indicated, they provide koyomi to the imperial palace. We soon learn, however, that the respected workshop has many internal problems. Ishun’s wife Osan (Kagawa Kyoko) is distressed about her family’s money troubles and confides in Mohei. In an attempt to help Osan, Mohei fakes an invoice, so that she may temporarily borrow the money from the business. However, racked with guilt Mohei confesses his crime to Ishun who immediately banishes him from the print shop.

Ishun himself is not so innocent however, as he had previously made sexual advances to one of his young female employees Otama (Minamida Yoko). Otama informs Osan about her husband’s advances, and in an attempt to catch him in the act, she waits on Otama’s futon for her unfaithful husband. In a cruel twist of fate, the banished Mohei
enters the room to thank Otama and to say goodbye. Instead of Otama he finds Osan who, in an outpouring of emotion, expresses her guilt for the situation. Mohei and Osan are then found together by a worker who had earlier been alerted to Mohei’s presence within the print shop. Irrational conclusions are drawn, Mohei flees whilst Osan is encouraged to commit honourable suicide by Ishun. Later, by chance the pair meet and decide to run away together to Osaka to earn the money that Osan initially needed.

More so than in either *Naniwa Ereji* or *Gion Bayashi*, dialogue plays a vital part in this film. The literary power of both Chikamatsu and Saikaku is preserved in Yoda’s screenplay and is evident throughout. The language system employed is complex, indicating power balances within romantic and personal relationships. Hierarchies in these relationships can be immediately established through spoken language and from this, class relationships and the social status is instantly recognisable. One example is the distinction between *samurai* and merchants, which is evident from the use of certain words and the structure of verb endings. Another example is the manner in which the spoken word is used to indicate the relationship between Mohei and Osan. At first, there are clear indicators that her social position is higher than his: he does not call her by her name, referring to her instead as *Oiesama* お家様, meaning the wife of one’s master or superior. What is interesting here, however, is that as their feelings for each other begin to fracture the social barrier between them, Mohei’s language begins to change. He gradually begins to address her more informally. As in *Gion Bayashi*, Yoda’s script and Mizoguchi’s desire for cultural accuracy, allows for a perfect recreation of Kyoto ben. These intricacies of linguistic discourse cannot, of course, be interpreted without a knowledge of Japanese language.
Analysis of the *mise en scène* in the scenes set in the print-shop reveals the attention to detail with which this social world is rendered. Production design was the responsibility of Mizoguchi’s regular Art Director Mizutani Hiroshi, and his assistant Naito Akira. The *fusuma*, *byōbu* and *koyomi* that are present in the background of many of the early shots are a clear indication of the high status craftsmanship and dedication of the business. The film is also rich with written Japanese, especially the shop-front signs which indicate the scope of the commercial district in which Ishun’s print business is located. Again in this film clothing plays an important role in identifying wealth and social status. Ito Natsu’s costume design features symbols on certain characters’ dress; these symbols are called *kamon* 家紋, and are indicative of a well-educated, upper-class family background. Equally, clothing is an important signifier of the artisanal trades and of the subaltern *chōnin*, in the popular tradition of Chikamatsu’s literature. Thus any presence of an expensive *kimono* seems to draw attention whenever it is seen amongst the *chōnin* dress. It is also worth noting that by law, female commoners were not permitted to wear certain *kimono* materials, colours or patterns during the Edo era. In this way, female wealth and status are easily identifiable. Hanai Ritsu’s hairstyles also reflect the Edo period and do much to reinforce social standing. For example, the *mage* 髪 or topknot hairstyle separates *samurai* from other classes; no other class would have a similar style. Again an informed semiotic analysis of these visual codes reveals much about the structure of this milieu and its rules. Mizoguchi’s commentary upon the conflicts between individual desires and ambitions, and social stricture and stigma, can be shown in a brief example.
Scene Analysis

The forbidden lovers, Mohei and Osan, elope pursued by the authorities, and flee to Biwako Lake to commit suicide together. As they are about to commit the act, they realise the love which binds them. As the boat that they travel in crosses the lake – always a site of transformation in Mizoguchi’s films - we see Mohei standing and Osan sitting before him; both have their heads bowed. This scene indicates a dramatic change in the film’s direction; Mohei kneels before Osan and binds her legs together in a last act of service in preparation for their death, but unable to contain himself he makes a desperate confession of his true feelings. He recounts the injustice of their plight: for Mohei to fall in love with his master’s wife is not just morally wrong but socially incomprehensible. It is arguable that Mizoguchi is more concerned to explore Japanese notions of social obligation than matters of the heart, which might be construed as merely the catalyst for the catastrophe of their tale. The director questioned the virtue of *giri* in *Gion Bayashi* and again here its voracity is tested. Osan’s loyalty lies with her immediate family and their financial plight, which has precipitated her into this impossible situation. Mohei’s loyalty however is shifting, and the duty once shown to his master Ishun has now been subsumed by his irrepressible passion for Osan. Unlike the scene of disavowal between Ayako and Nishimura in *Naniwa Ereji*, there is no *chinmoku* here. Mohei’s declaration is almost heretical. Throughout the scene he does not look at Osan directly, so burdened is he by the shame of his disloyalty to Ishun. He grasps her legs and buries his head. Osan is surprised and confused by this confession. She thought that Mohei’s protection and service to her family came from a duty of *giri*. With this revelation she is transformed, and declares that she does not want to die; she in turn is now abandoning her loyalty to her
husband. She turns, and kneeling at the feet of the seated Mohei embraces him. Their body language is telling: she buries her face in his chest clasping his torso feverishly. During the embrace Mohei does not return any affection and averts his gaze from her display of unbridled passion. He is overwhelmed by this revelation of Osan’s reciprocal feelings, and at the same time dumbstruck by the realisation that this seals not just his own fate, but hers also. In this unstable floating world, the doomed lovers confront the full force of their passionate rejection of the social order. Without an understanding of the Japanese concept of *giri* it is impossible to appreciate the enormity of their transgression.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the problems that western readers of Japanese texts face, in endeavouring to recover something of the understanding which contemporary Japanese audiences might bring to bear in the case of Mizoguchi’s work. It has been suggested here that this task depends upon specific cultural knowledge of Japanese customs, traditions and language. It has been argued that a semiotic approach to textual analysis of verbal and visual codes is required in order to advance this enterprise. Careful attention must be paid at the level of *mise en scène*, and research into production history reveals the important contributions of a range of creative agents to the complexity of Mizoguchi’s films.

Despite the challenges it undoubtedly presents, readers of Japanese cinema have a distinct advantage because of the manner in which things are ordered, both socially and in the filmic world. As I have shown, there is a clear social hierarchy, and individual social
status can be ascertained from visual codes such as hairstyle, dress, make-up, and verbal codes such as dialects, accents and honorifics. To this end, what looks like a room full of people in similar **kimono** becomes a structured and organised social gathering, where we can visually establish social order. With knowledge we can decode who belongs where and then judge behaviour accordingly, as in the case with **Gion Bayashi**’s Miyoei, whose behaviour is a paradox to what is traditionally expected of her. If we are able to employ such reading protocols, these texts become rich with cultural markers, and assist us in gaining a better understanding. This is not to say that there exists definitive readings, or that there is no place for alternative interpretations. The argument here, however, is that on the journey towards interpretation we should pay due attention to the cultural framework from which the text was produced.

During the analysis of the three Mizoguchi pictures here, I have tried to offer some useful methods to assist in the understanding of Japanese films. At the same time however, I have also uncovered challenges in terms of cultural reading and deconstruction. In order to interpret the narrative it is essential to appreciate the emotional register and cultural complexity at the level of script and **mise en scène**. Elsewhere Barthes insists it is not enough to just remove the mythic message, we need to change the object itself (in Allen, 2004, p.65). In the case of Japanese cinema and its critical heritage, Barthes’ assault on the sign could be liberating. By critiquing the stereotypical western preconception with Japanese signs (hairstyle, music, dress, shoes, make-up, architecture) which Barthes paradoxically seems in thrall to in **Empire of Signs**, we can then proceed to re-evaluate them, locating them within a culturally-specific discourse. This gives us license to remove all preconceived ideas of what the sign falsely denotes. It is then up to us to relocate it in
its own cultural anchorage. In respect of the semiology of Japanese cinema, again we are at an advantage since the structure of society has not been subjected to major changes: the social values connected to Mizoguchi’s work are still prevalent today.

As this thesis will explore throughout, Mizoguchi was preoccupied with the nature of Japanese society. Its angst, fears, desires and ambitions both political and personal resonate throughout his work. Even the films which are noted as being his lesser works have great social value and should not be dismissed in favour of the more populist ‘festival pictures’ of the 1950s. If we understand Japanese society, if we can establish differences in dress, if we are versed in the role of traditional arts such as noh 能, bunraku 文楽 or kabuki 歌舞伎, then and only then, are we able to begin to understand these texts.

This chapter has introduced some key ideas which provide us with a framework from which to analyse this complicated and vibrant national cinema. By questioning previous readings and then offering a new, culturally grounded analysis, we ourselves have embarked upon a journey which will be both challenging and hazardous. It is not our place to attempt to “embody the truth”, but to offer an informed reading of film texts which remain sympathetic to the culture from which they emanate.

For the first half of the twentieth century, cinema was the dominant audio-visual medium in Japan, as elsewhere. Popular film is both an art form and a commercial enterprise. A film may be made for a variety of reasons but its ability to engage with contemporary issues and to address, however indirectly, the fears and aspirations of a popular audience
make an awareness of its social and historical context vital to our understanding of its power and influence. In Mizoguchi’s case, these determinants varied from the foreign-influenced Chi to Rei (Blood and Soul, 1923), and the military-requested Manmo Kenkoku no Reimei (The Dawn of Manchuria and Mongolia, 1932), to the anti-war adaptation of literary epic Genroku Chushingura (The Loyal 47 Ronin, 1941-1942), and the culturally rich Ugetsu Monogatari. In every case, it is important to explore the cultural discourses, social context and production histories of these texts, in order to inform our reading strategies and our appreciation of the work. The contexts of, and determinants upon, authorship will be the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Two
Ideas of Authorship

Introduction

An obvious way of accounting for the originality of film-makers such as Mizoguchi, Kurosawa, Ozu and Naruse is by recourse to auteur theory. This has proved to be a durable approach which has underpinned much western film criticism of Japanese cinema. In 1954 François Truffaut published an article in the French film monthly Cahiers du Cinéma entitled ‘Un Certaine Tendance du Cinéma Français’ (Truffaut, 1954). It was inspired by Alexandre Astruc’s 1948 article ‘Naissance d’une Nouvelle Avant Garde: La Caméra Stylo’, which had been published in L’Ecran. Truffaut’s later article further suggested that in French cinema, such new forms were not yet apparent. French film-makers, he believed, were content to sacrifice their artistic integrity by making films which did not push boundaries; they were generic and made by people who underestimated the capacity of the medium of film. Marilyn Fabe writes:

An underlying assumption of auteur theory was Astruc’s idea that, despite film’s status as primarily a commercial entertainment medium, it could potentially be an art form as powerful in its means of expression as literature or poetry. In order to propose filmmaking as an art, however, there had to be an artist, a central consciousness whose vision is inscribed in the work (2004, p.121).

Fabe adds that, “For the French New Wave theorists, the author of the film (the auteur) was the director” (2004, p.121). However, Truffaut’s article, like Astruc’s before it, was not a rigid theoretical framework, but a series of ideas and thoughts which contributed to a “Politique des Auteurs”. He made polemic assertions in order to promote the centrality
of the director and the value of film itself. Subsequent discussions and critique have
detached these ideas from their original context, and they have become mired in
argument and counter argument. One of the great supporters and author of numerous
articles relating to what he termed ‘auteur theory’ is Andrew Sarris. Ironically, however, it
is Sarris himself who in some respects is responsible for the fact that the concept of the
auteur has become so problematic.

Sarris’ work on the subject seems to reject the element of open discussion which
characterised ‘La Politique des Auteurs’. Whereas Astruc and Truffaut’s work encouraged
debate, Sarris’ critical approach attempts to negate it. His work reduces cinema to a set of
categorisations: good and bad, right and wrong.

There is also the argument, which forms a large part of the case for the auteur, of
authorial intention. Here the director, as sole author, is assumed to control every aspect
of his vision and realises it by exercising supreme command over everything that the film
contains. Marilyn Fabe, referring to previous criticism by psychoanalytic theorists,
dismisses this, noting that:

The idea of the auteur as visionary genius assumes that the artist is a unified subject,
who consciously inscribes a profound meaning upon his or her works. This view was
seen as hopelessly naive by psychoanalytic critics, who understand the artist not just
as a conscious producer of messages but as someone prone to unconscious impulses
as well. Although the artist may intend a certain message or theme, the
psychoanalytic critic can read beneath the surface of the text to reveal other themes
and preoccupations of which the artist may be entirely unaware (2004, pp.122-123).
Film authorship is subject not only, as Fabe suggests, to unconscious processes and the role of chance in the production process. It is also, always a collaborative endeavour. I want to argue that in order to reach a fuller understanding of the work of Mizoguchi, a pluralist conception of authorship is required.

**Mizoguchi and Authorship**

A pluralist approach to authorship necessitates that we attempt to trace in production history, the creative determinants condition which mark the finished film. Firstly we need, in so far as is possible, to recover information about the conditions under which a film was made: the studio regime, the financial arrangements and the wider political constraints upon the cinema. Secondly, we need to pay attention to the creative process itself: the working practices and predilections of the director, his cultural capital and the trajectory of his creative impetus. Thirdly, we must take into account the collaborative nature of the film production process: the creative partnerships the director forged, dissolved, and those which were foisted upon him. Any evidence available to the film historian about the production context enables us to observe how creative struggles condition the film itself, and allows us to speculate about how cultural ideas are addressed in popular cinema.

Greater awareness of such important cultural influences offers insight into Mizoguchi’s methods and style, and potentially reveals something of his motivations. This is a central aspect of film authorship which auteur theory appears to ignore. Not only is it impossible to ignore the cultural specificity of film, but moreover, an appreciation of the director’s achievements depends upon our understanding of the cultural influences which appear,
consciously or otherwise, in his work. Nowhere is the pluralist model of film authorship more clearly evident as in the territory of *mise en scène*. Here it is possible to assess the orchestration of the various creative elements: script, camerawork, art direction, performance style and editing. Here also, close analysis enables us to discover how cultural influences inflect film language. And it must be appreciated that these cultural influences are the products of multiple agencies which the director, at best, orchestrates rather than creates.

The formal elements of film can, of course, transcend cultural boundaries. And narratives of love, hardship, loss or guilt may have universal appeal, which is open to the interpretation of individuals. Much of the writing which followed Truffaut’s ‘La Politique des Auteurs’ seemed quite blind to the aforementioned factors. In the *Cahiers* article, ‘Les Taches du Soleil’, Hoveyda discusses the idea that there is no requisite for a cultural reading of *mise en scène*. In response to Marcabru’s argument that “There is no single, universal cinema, but cinemas governed by geography and time” (in Hiller, 1992, p.140), Hoveyda insists that:

> We do not lump together Lang, Rossellini, Losey, Preminger, Ermler and Mizoguchi on the grounds that they use the same language. But, in our view, they differ more in the individual style of their *mise en scène* than through their racial or geographical origins (1992, p.140).

However, Hoveyda’s distinction is a false one. A film-maker may pursue a personal vision and develop an individual film style, yet he cannot help but be inspired by his cultural surroundings, nor can he escape the influences of those various determinants, political,
religious, technological and artistic, in which he is socially inscribed. And an appreciation of his oeuvre must take into account the films he was directed to make as well as those projects he chose to pursue. Too frequently auteur criticism has constructed a canon of masterworks which conveniently cohere around particular themes, styles and preoccupations. In order to approach a comprehensive account of Mizoguchi’s work, we need first to appreciate that every element of his art was culturally inscribed, and that much may be learnt from researching the history of lesser-known or even lost works, alongside those films which earned him international recognition. Knowledge of his milieu is thus essential in order to fully grasp the complexity of his work. As Stephen Heath notes: “The author is constructed only in language and a language by definition is social, beyond any particular individuality” (1981, p.182).

Neglect of cultural and historical influence upon Japanese cinema has restricted western appreciation of its achievements. This study of the films of Mizoguchi seeks to appreciate his stature as a film-maker of unique vision and style, precisely by recovering something of the complexities, the struggles and the collaborative partnerships of his film-making process. And, further, it seeks to locate his singular achievements within the broader context of Japanese cultural development, by taking account of the range of artistic, literary and theatrical influences (both Japanese and western) which can be seen to have informed his particular contribution to cinema. Only a revisionist film history which considers the range of determinants upon creativity (both creative stimuli and production constraints) can provide a thoroughly grounded appreciation of the work itself, and the originality of the film-maker. Let us now explore this assertion within a broader critical perspective on Japanese cinema.
Cahiers, Japanese Cinema and the Auteurs

The attention given to Japanese films at European film festivals in the 1950s, most notably Venice, gradually saw works by the nation’s directors begin to inspire debate amongst the Cahiers critics. For example, the discussions on Kurosawa between Moullet, Bazin and Rivette during the spring of 1957 surrounded works such as Yoidore Tenshi (Drunken Angel, 1948) and Ikiru (1952). Bazin went on to examine the cultural aspect of Kurosawa’s work, and highlighted the fact that his films are not particularly Japanese in style but intentionally international, aspiring to portray a universal understanding. He noted that films such as Rashomon (1950) and Shichinin no Samurai (The Seven Samurai, 1954) attested to “an extremely skilful and deliberate Westernism” (in Hillier, 1985, p.261). Bazin claimed that Kurosawa was influenced more by American directors such as Ford, Lang and Chaplin, than those from Japan such as Mizoguchi, Ito or Inoue.

Mizoguchi began his career earlier than Kurosawa, but it is widely acknowledged that both made their most critically acclaimed films during the international award-winning period of the 1950s. Mizoguchi was championed by the French critics, as he epitomised the Cahiers model of authorship, especially Bazin’s insistence on the primacy of mise en scène. A comparative study highlights certain aspects in relation to the technique and innovation of their work. Early comparisons come from the Cahiers critics who, in respect of this period of Japanese cinema, were outspoken in their views. Luc Moullet, writing on Kurosawa’s Yoidore Tenshi, notes that the film “never rises above the levels of mediocrity and is completely lacking in interest; its aesthetic pretensions, especially in the dream sequence and the hero’s death scene, surpass in their grotesqueness anything even the European cinema has produced” (in Hillier, 1985, p.260). Moullet then proceeds to
discuss the funeral scene in *Ikiru* noting that, “Here the director’s misanthropy goes to such extremes that it quickly turns against him”. He concludes that, “The real Japanese cinema is elsewhere” (in Hillier 1985, p.260). Moullet’s observations here are not unique; Godard referred to Kurosawa as “second rate” (in Bock, 1990, p.35), and Cahiers’ comparisons between Kurosawa and Mizoguchi offer a fascinating discussion. For Bazin, the inferiority of Kurosawa is manifested in his film style, which owes more to Hollywood cinema and more specifically to John Ford. There is no such obvious influence within the work of Mizoguchi; his films are considered “more characteristic and more pure” (in Hillier, 1985, p.261).

There are of course distinct differences in the two masters’ work and we can establish these in part through the production methods employed. Photographer Miyagawa Kazuo, who worked with both, recalled in a 1979 *Sight and Sound* interview:

Mizoguchi started building a mood, an atmosphere, and then placed his actors and scenes inside that mood, whereas Kurosawa started with the actors themselves and then created the mood from their playing and interconnections. Mizoguchi’s pictures were very much influenced by the Sumi-E, I believe, and we often had to wait for a very long time since he had the background of the scene painted in more or less dark grey – to give it more of that ‘ink feeling’. He often wanted to have trees or boats, or whatever, painted on the background, to emphasise the mood (Tessier and Buruma, 1979, p.189).

Whilst the Cahiers critics’ admiration for Mizoguchi’s more authentic productions reside at the level of *mise en scène*, they made little effort to appreciate its cultural inscription. They valued the look of Japan but not its meaning.
The writings on Kurosawa and Mizoguchi in the 1950s, and eventually on Ozu in the 1970s, persist in ignoring cultural elements and, when they are deployed, tend to misinterpret social sensitivity. Critical doctrine has aided the stereotypical notion that sees Kurosawa as a western-style director, Mizoguchi as a director of beauty, and Ozu as spiritual or Zen-like! However, these distinctions are too simplistic to be taken seriously. Less has been written about Mizoguchi than about his contemporaries. LeFanu makes the point that Mizoguchi is, along with directors such as Bresson, Murnau, Dreyer and Ophuls, “confined to the shadows of the inner sanctum”, adding that: “People know about him more than they know his actual work” (2005, p.1). The reason for his relative obscurity is unclear, but I would suggest that critics have been strangely unwilling to engage with the complexities of Mizoguchi’s work, content rather to admire its undoubted beauty for aesthetic reasons alone. Of the most acclaimed Japanese directors, including Naruse, Ichikawa and Kinugasa, I would argue that Mizoguchi sits most uneasily upon the pedestal of auteurism. Perhaps to a greater extent than any of his compatriots, in order to appreciate the nature of Mizoguchi’s authorship it is necessary to understand his work both aesthetically and culturally, and to recover something of the sources of his inspiration and working practices. A survey of the range of his early work in terms of subject matter and sources, will serve as a useful introduction to this enterprise.

Early Themes and Influences

It might appear from this discussion that Mizoguchi falls into the Cahiers critics’ category of a director whose themes and preoccupations are consistent. Such a reading would assume that every Mizoguchi film displays these properties. However, as well as being a
social commentator, Mizoguchi was also a film-maker of diverse subject matter, and we
must attempt to account for this too. When looking to unify his films thematically for
example, we would struggle to place lesser known pictures such as Toge no Uta (Song of
the Pass, 1923) or Musume Kawaiya (My Lovely Daughter, 1928). And there is a
significant change in style in the war-time period dramas, such as Genroku Chushingura or
Miyamoto Musashi (1944). We then need to address period concerns; an historical drama
such as Ugetsu is vastly different from a contemporary story such as Naniwa Ereji.
Similarly, adaptations from works of western literature, such as Shirayuri wa Nageku
(1925), taken from John Goldsworthy’s play The First and Last, or Gion no Shimai, adapted
from Yama by Alexandr Ivanovich Kupin, may be compared with traditional Japanese
adaptations such as Izumi Kyoka (Nihonbashi and Taki no Shiraito), Tanizaki Junichiro (Oyu
Sama – Miss Oyu, 1951) and Oka Shohei (Musashino Fujin – The Lady of Musashino, 1951).
It is also important to mention here briefly the 1926 comedy film Kane. Andrew and
Andrew note that the script, by Takeda Akira and Hatamoto Shuichi, was taken from an
original idea by Marcel L’Herbier, from a section of Feu Mathias Pascal (1925) (1981,
p.67). However, it is more likely that direct inspiration for the film came from Bunshichi
Mottoi 文七元結 which was a rakugo 落語 (Japanese sit-down comedy) story (Saso,
2008, p.40). Mizoguchi’s influence from L’Herbier came more in stylistic form, as in the
previously released 1926 film Kaminingyo Haru no Sasayaki (A Paper Doll’s Whisper of
Spring). Saso notes that:

The French director Marcel L'Herbier had a great influence on Mizoguchi. You can
clearly see this influence in Kaminingyo Haru no Sasayaki. He copied the illusion
scene’s double exposure, mastered by L'Herbier, and used it in his film. To do this
now is nothing new of course, but at the time it was a fantastic new technique
(personal communication, September 20, 2011).

Although *Kane* no longer exists, its value should not be underestimated as it provides a
cue to the motive behind the comic relief which we see in the later Mizoguchi films.
Regular art director Mizutani Hiroshi, speaking to *Kikan Eiga* in 1969, remembers that
Mizoguchi was very fond of the genre, recalling that the director would proudly declare
‘I’m very good at directing comedy’. Mizutani goes on to agree that although much of the
1920s work is lost, “they must have been great! He shot so many films at Nikkatsu and he
was just so confident” (in Saso, 2008, pp.38-39). Mizoguchi’s confidence was justified as
the film was a success both with the public and the critics. In a contemporary review from
*Eiga Jidai* in March 1927, Suiko enthuses, “From beginning to end, *Kane* was just so funny.
It had everything: comedy, tragedy, humanity and it seemed to finish just as quickly as it
had started” (in Saso, 2008, p.40). It could be argued that these comedic elements
seemed to disappear from Mizoguchi’s work as the director’s career progressed. His
comedy tends to get lost in arguments surrounding the more prominent themes.
However, this is a device that Mizoguchi used sparingly but effectively, and one which I
shall return to during the analysis of *Saikaku Ichidai Onna* in Chapter Five.

Whilst I have insisted thus far upon the need to identify the Japanese cultural origins of
Mizoguchi’s film style, we need also to bear in mind that he was as influenced by
developments in European cinema as he was by western literature for his sources. One of
the best examples of such a combination occurs in one of the earliest Mizoguchi pictures,
*Chi to Rei* (*Blood and Soul*, 1923). This film, his tenth of 1923, was adapted from Ernst
Wilhelm Hoffmann’s *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* and exhibited a style which was in common with European films of the period. Andrew and Andrew pick up on this fact and note of *Chi to Rei* that “The pictorial composition was made up from straight-line elements, in the manner of German Expressionism” (1981, p.49). Andrew and Andrew’s comments are correct to a degree; however such comparisons are not quite as simple. Their 1981 comment may have been conceived without the benefit of the stills of the film, which we have today. A re-examination of this early work will provide a useful point of departure in which to explore other aspects of authorship. An awareness of specifically Japanese cultural inflexions shows how the film elaborates upon its original source and transcends stylistic influences in drawing upon traditions of Japanese art and theatre.

**Chi to Rei Case study**

*Chi to Rei* is a lost Mizoguchi picture. Remarkably, however, the film still screens in Japan with *benshi* commentary by Sawato Midori and piano accompaniment by Yanashita Mie of the Japanese Silent Film Preservation Society. This has been primarily achieved by the use of a collection of stills obtained by Mizoguchi scholar Saso Tsutomu. These stills and promotional shots were collected from newspapers and magazine articles published at the time of the film’s release, and such material is essential as it allows us a glimpse at a period of Mizoguchi’s work which is generally ignored. As we can clearly see from the below shot (Figure 9), the straight-line elements that were mentioned by Andrew and Andrew are absent, and what we see is quite opposite: a skewed and distorted *mise en scène* which adds much to the atmosphere of disorientation and danger which the film exhibits so distinctly. Such construction of *mise en scène* highlights how, even during this very early period of his career, Mizoguchi is influenced by his own artistic culture.
Expressionist influence is apparent through the lighting used; however it is the Japanese cultural material that makes the film so distinctive. There is a strong suggestion that the backgrounds and the forms of expressionism in *Chi to Rei* were influenced by the Japanese expressionist painter Yanase Masamu. Yanase was influenced by western artists such as Van Gogh and Munch as well as the Japanese portrait painter Takehisa Yumeji. Saso Tsutomu notes that Yanase was aware of Mizoguchi’s *Chi to Rei*, referring to it in an interview as “the expressionist film”. Yanase also had links to the film through leading actress Eguchi Chiyoko whom he photographed in 1923 (2006, p.110).

Andrew and Andrew rightly point out the expressionist influences upon *Chi to Rei*, but it is also important to highlight the differences. Even though *Chi to Rei* only exists as stills, one can clearly see how the film is distinct from its western counterparts. Mizoguchi has
altered the Occidental expressionist style and combined it with contemporary artistic styles which were prevalent in Japan. *Chi to Rei*, as is apparent by the examples, is characteristic of Japanese expressionism’s emphasis on twisted curves and warped perspectives.

Such cultural adaptation was not confined to film but was also more widespread in Japanese fine arts, where ようga洋画 (western style) artists such as Fujishima Takeji, Umehara Ryuzaburo and Yasui Sotaro created work which, like Mizoguchi’s, exhibited a distinctive Japanese character. Such methods were crucial in helping to define an original Japanese style and, as Munsterberg notes, in artistic circles, such adaptation was not restrictive:

There were Fauves and Cubists, Abstractionists and Expressionists, Surrealists and Magic Realists, and even conservatives who continued to work in the Realist and Impressionist styles. Usually there was a certain cultural lag between the latest avant-garde movement and its Japanese version, but sooner or later the Japanese equivalent of each European trend would occur (1967-1968, p.154).

Mizoguchi, much like the artists mentioned, combined Japanese artistic influences with those from abroad. In *Chi to Rei* these influences are not confined to the contemporary but include elements of traditional art in the form of kabuki theatre, represented by the actors’ faces, which are painted in the style of kumadori隈取 (make-up which is associated with the rough acting style of aragoto荒事 from kabuki theatre). Saso explains that expressionist plays such as Georg Kaiser’s *From Morning Till Midnight* (1912) used
strong eye-shadow, but it is most likely that Chi to Rei’s influence stems from kabuki (2006, p.113).

This mixture of influences is characteristic of Mizoguchi not only in these early films but throughout his career. Whether modern or classic literature, kabuki or noh theatre, or traditional art forms, he utilised Japanese artistic heritage to inform production design, costume and make-up, performance style and music. Such influences were not confined to the contemporary, as the example clearly shows; Mizoguchi also borrowed heavily from traditional material. As the director himself said in a 1929 interview with Kinema Junpo, “It is important to use yesterday’s beauty to create the beauty of tomorrow” (in Saso, 2006, p.113).

Mizoguchi elaborated on the matter of western influence on Japanese cinema in a 1926 article written for Nikkatsu. In the piece entitled, ‘Omoukotonado: Edo Jocho no Eigaka Sonohoka’ (My Thoughts: Creating Edo Culture in Film), he questions the future of Japanese film. Mizoguchi believed that although the industry had gathered momentum and reached a standard which was as good as foreign cinema, in his opinion too many of his fellow directors were seeking to emulate Hollywood and were neglecting films from Europe. Mizoguchi opined: “It is inevitable that if American cinema suffers some kind of creative deadlock, Japanese cinema, which has been stimulated and influenced by it, will suffer the same fate” (Mizoguchi, 1926, p.32). Mizoguchi’s warning was couched in the form of a provocation to his peers. Chi to Rei had already represented a distinctively Japanese exploitation of the “sharp and sensitive” European film style, and this article was a challenge to others to follow his example. Such a challenge was enhanced by the
work of the late 1920s and its influence from Europe, especially the Russian avant-garde movement. This is a subject tackled extensively by Saso (2008). He notes that prior to the making of *Nihonbashi* (1929) “Mizoguchi was intrigued by a play he saw at the Tsukiji Shogekijo in Tokyo. Although based on *Kokusen Yakasen* by Chikamatsu, stylistically it was heavily influenced by Soviet theatre, especially that of Vsevolod Meyerhold” (2008, p.238). The Soviet influence manifests itself through *Nihonbashi*, the style and pace of the film is both unusual and experimental. Saso again notes: “It was no surprise that Mizoguchi wanted to use these newly discovered techniques on old material such as *Nihonbashi*. It was the director’s intention to make something new. This we can see in the quick tempo of the film” (2008, p.240). Saso also discusses the influence of *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*, Eisenstein, 1925): “The reason why Mizoguchi shot a scene which included live maggots can be pinpointed to the influence of Eisenstein’s *Bronenosets Potyomkin* … there is no doubt that this is where Mizoguchi found his inspiration” (2008, p.265). If *Nihonbashi* explored new methods of film-making, the follow up *Asahi wa Kagayaku* (*The Morning Sun Shines*, 1929) allowed Mizoguchi to fully exploit the freedom given to him on the project. The film was made to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the *Asahi Shimbun*, and the remaining footage gives an insight into the bold type of film-making with which Mizoguchi was experimenting. The film opens with fade after fade of the Osaka cityscape and neon lights, before cutting to the illuminated sign of the Osaka Asahi Shimbun.

Below the sign, the film’s title flashes across the electronic ‘news board’. We then see more conservative shots of Osaka at dawn, as the city awakes. The style is very much indebted to the city scenes of Vsevolod Pudovkin’s *Konyets Sankt Peterburga* (*The End of
St. Petersburg, 1927) and Walter Ruttman’s Berlin Die Sinfonie Der Groβstadt (Berlin: Symphony of a Great City, 1927). We are then shown people from all walks of life and social classes reading the Asahi Shimbun before experiencing the processes of newspaper production. We are taken to the sales division, editor’s office and the research department, and then witness the industrial side of operations with shots of the print mechanisms. The film then begins to portray the worthy news stories of the day, soldiers shown in ruined buildings – again reminding us of Pudovkin – the Japanese parliament, commercial travel, and the breakout of a fire. Like Nihonbashi, Asahi wa Kagayaku is fast-paced with rapid editing, and remarkable special effects, most notably the images of newspapers covering a spinning globe (Figure 10). As a promotional film for the newspaper, we are continually reminded of the trials and tribulations which Asahi Shimbun reporters go through to bring the news. The inspiration Mizoguchi derived from European cinema is evidence of his putting into practice what his 1926 article had preached. And he could not resist taking a swipe at his peers, sarcastically noting that the “‘Oh so smart’ Japanese film-makers are finally beginning to catch up with these European techniques and in the process, are beginning to reject the old American ways” (Mizoguchi, 1926, p.32). In order to understand the motivations behind Mizoguchi’s challenge, it is necessary to set out the creative context in which his own directorial career was beginning to become established. Creative opportunities and industrial
constraints are equally important factors in determining Mizoguchi’s output and authorial trajectory.

The 1930s

Mizoguchi made eighty-five pictures from 1923 to 1956. The films exhibited a wide range of influences from the expressionist style of Chi to Rei to the Hollywood-influenced narrative, style and music of Gubijinso (1935), from which not even Mizoguchi was immune. There is such diversity within his films that it would be simplistic to reduce this body of work to a monolithic model of authorship. For a comprehensive account it is necessary to examine Mizoguchi’s career in the context of the conditions under which his films were made, and the influences upon him. Production constraints were determined both by the economic structure of the Japanese film industry and, increasingly, during the 1930s, by political interference. Working in these volatile circumstances Mizoguchi’s achievements should be appreciated as the products of both cultural influences and collaborative struggles. The extent to which Mizoguchi’s working practices and creative impetus were compromised by these production constraints can be clearly seen by an examination of his output during the 1930s.

By 1930 Mizoguchi had established himself with an output of over forty films for Nikkatsu, and it might be assumed from this that he would have been able to pick and choose his projects hereafter. However, this was far from the truth. Although many of his silent films had been successful there were others which had failed both critically and commercially. Mizoguchi made fifty-seven films during the silent era, although many of these works are now lost (only six survive). This period in Mizoguchi’s career has been the subject of
extensive research by Saso (2001-2009). This pattern of creative peaks and troughs continued well into the 1930s, and through his difficult transition to sound pictures. There are a number of explanations for the uneven career path he pursued: studio disputes, lack of technological investment and political unrest.

(i) Creative Struggles
Whilst Mizoguchi was beginning to create films in a style which was very much his own, away from the set, his life within the studio system in Japan was proving to be one of frustration. The 1930s witnessed major changes in the way films were made. In 1930 sound was introduced, with Mizoguchi directing one of the first sound pictures for Nikkatsu, Furusato (1930). However, the sound quality was poor, and Mizoguchi laid the blame at the door of incompetent engineers and the inferior technology at Nikkatsu. In a 1956 interview with Kinema Junpo he recalled that, “The recording technicians had no idea about acting or cinema ... We had to bring in people from the Ministry of Communication. I told them to record the voice of a patient in a bed. They said, ‘the machine will not pick up the sound from this far away’” (1954, p.50). The introduction of sound cinema demanded a re-evaluation of the way that Japanese films were produced and experienced. Kishi Matsuo reports the extreme lengths that Mizoguchi went to in order to become more familiar with the use of sound on Furusato: “Because it was his first, he sought a new cinematic expression. So he studied music from scratch. He studied the life of Beethoven!” (1954, p.46). Thereafter, Mizoguchi did not make another sound feature for two years; his next being Toki no Ujigami (The Man of the Moment 1932). The transition to sound cinema also impacted on the exhibition culture, especially the benshi who had been an integral part of the silent era.
Nikkatsu’s mishandling of the transition to sound was only one of a number of managerial misjudgements at this time. As Anderson and Richie comment, the studio refused to “produce contemporary-life films in Tokyo, the center of modern Japan; ... it tried to act as though talkies did not exist; it refused to raise the pay of its top stars and directors; and it forced employees to make pictures they did not like” (1982, p.79). As a result, many Nikkatsu employees, disillusioned with the company, moved elsewhere, some establishing new production companies. One such individual was director Murata Minoru who formed the Shin Eiga Sha, based at the newly-built PCL studio (Photo Chemical Laboratory). The first film to be released by Shin Eiga was Showa Shinsengumi, released in December 1932. The film starred Shima Koji, was scripted by Ito Daisuke, and was co-directed by Tasaka Tomotaka and Murata, all ex-Nikkatsu personnel. Of course the problem was then how the film would be seen in cinemas, although this issue was easily solved since, “Shochiku, always anxious to irritate the rival Nikkatsu, thoughtfully provided wide distribution for the film” (Anderson and Richie, 1982, p.79). This was also a period of change for Mizoguchi; after a nine-year apprenticeship which had established him as a prominent directorial talent, he too left Nikkatsu in 1932. Although they had given him his entry into the world of directing, his exit was not surprising given the frustrations of the previous two years. Mizoguchi did not follow the example of Murata and others but instead decided to sign a contract with Shinko, a new studio funded by Shochiku.

This was a time when many successful creative talents had become disenchanted with the control exerted by the major vertically integrated combines. Shinko was formed in 1931 by ex-Shochiku employees Otani Takejiro and Shirai Shintaro and was connected to
Irie productions, run by actress Irie Takako. Irie was one of the biggest film-stars in Japan during this period but, as many had done before her, she left Nikkatsu. This was not however, a decision that she made personally. As Kontaibo recalls:

Miss Irie was a massive star at Nikkatsu. Her popularity was number one, but within the studio she was seen as the number two actress. Of course, the Iries were not happy about this. Not Miss Irie herself, but her brothers, director Higashibojo Yasunaga and scriptwriter Kimura Chieo. They were determined that she would leave and eventually carried out their coup d’état” (in Shindo, 1975, p.183).

Before Irie had left Nikkatsu however, her advisors had already cleverly secured a distribution deal. As well as this, they had ensured that a production company was set up bearing her name. Irie recalled that “Yasunaga, Kimura Chieo who was my brother-in-law and Mr. Shirai Shintaro secretly discussed the Shinko deal. They only told me the details when they had decided everything” (1957, p.125). Irie added that although she was the first woman to be the head of a production company, for actors to do this was not uncommon; such was the power that actors had during the silent era:

1931-32 was a time when film stars had huge influence. It was not just me, lots of us made our own production companies. We had great co-operation from big studios and were able to use their distribution networks ... Irie Productions was set up in January 1932. It caused a stir since I was the first female actor to set up a production company, there were mixed reactions” (Irie, 1957, pp.126-127).

Despite these reactions, Irie’s popularity and the business acumen of her advisors had sealed the deal with Shinko. This was convenient for both parties, as the studio could
present films starring the biggest actress in Japan and Irie could ensure distribution through Otani and Shirai’s Shochiku connections.

For his first Shinko/Irie project, Mizoguchi and a forty-man crew were sent to Manchuria to make the militarist film *Manmo Kenkoku no Reimei*, the creation of which was at the behest of high-ranking military official General Sugiyama. Because of the deal struck with Shochiku, it was important that the project remained secret. Saso notes that “when Irie went to Manchuria, it was thought the sole purpose of her visit was to meet the troops. However, the real reason was of course, to shoot on location” (2010, p.292-294). The content of the film, inspired by the Manchurian Incident, is difficult to judge as no surviving print remains. However, as LeFanu notes, the written description of the film “make it unlikely that it dissented in overall sentiment from the prevailing nationalist spirit of the time” (2005, p.153). Andrew and Andrew speculate about Mizoguchi’s own response to his Shinko debut, suggesting that the film “embarrassed him more aesthetically than politically” (1981, p.8). High considers that Mizoguchi’s reasons for making the film were motivated more by fear than interest after “suffering at the hands of the police as a ‘left-leaning’ muckraker”. In High’s view, this film was born of politics, not art (2003, p.34). This interpretation of Mizoguchi as a ‘left-leaning muckraker’ can be traced back to previous conflicts with the authorities. In a 1955 issue of *Sight and Sound*, Anderson and Richie note:

The director had already had severe censorship difficulties with both *Tokyo March* and *Symphony of the Metropolis* as well as the 1926 *No Money – No Fighting*, a satirical film based on a newspaper cartoon serial about a Chinese soldier who refused to fight until he was paid. In 1932 he had made what he has since called a
“policy” film in *The Dawn of the Founding of Manchuko and Mongolia*; he now decided not to co-operate any longer (1955, p.78).

In fact, as Keiko McDonald notes, his non-cooperation had already manifested itself during the post-production phase of *Manmo Kenkoku no Reimei* which Mizoguchi “abandoned” before editing was completed, and “refused to undertake any further work for six months” (McDonald 1984, p.27). Mizoguchi’s single-mindedness also dogged the planning stages for his next film for Shinko, *Taki no Shiraito*. This was a project where Mizoguchi put the importance of his art before both studio priorities and political pressure. The embarrassment and frustration that Mizoguchi felt after *Manmo Kenkoku no Reimei* seemed only to strengthen his resolve to seek perfection, which some construed as an unyielding stubbornness. The Manchuria experience made him more determined to fight for his own artistic integrity.

Mizoguchi made four films for Shinko between 1932 and 1934: *Manmo Kenkoku no Reimei, Taki no Shiraito, Gion Matsuri* (*Gion Festival, 1933*), and *Jinpuren* (1934). As with *Manmo Kenkoku no Reimei*, Mizoguchi was ordered by Shinko to make the last two films. *Gion Matsuri* was made quickly to coincide with Kyoto’s annual Gion Festival, and *Jinpuren* concerned traditional *samurai* families who opposed the modernist developments of the Meiji era. Again it is difficult to assess the motivation behind these films. Critics seemed to agree that they were little more than studied exercises in period recreation, noting that “the actors appeared to be performing in a museum” (Andrew and Andrew, 1981, p.9). Without doubt, *Taki no Shiraito* is the major work of Mizoguchi’s Shinko period. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, it is also the only one of his four Shinko productions that survives.
The origins of *Taki no Shiraito* reveal much about Mizoguchi’s creative struggles at Shinko. In late 1932, Irie’s brother-in-law screenwriter Kimura Chieo, who had worked with Mizoguchi previously on *Asahi wa Kagayaku* and *Tokyo Koshinkyoku* (*Tokyo March*, 1929), approached the director with an idea of an adaptation of Izumi Kyoka’s novel *Giketsu Kyoketsu*. Shinko, who were keen for the project to gain momentum, hurriedly set about arranging a meeting between director and author. Kyoka however had been disappointed with Mizoguchi’s 1929 adaptation of his novel *Nihonbashī*, and refused to meet. Shinko persevered and Kyoka was persuaded to make casting suggestions; he eventually yielded to Shinko’s requests and agreed to meet Mizoguchi. However, as Andrew and Andrew note the discussions between director and author were less than harmonious; Kyoka and Mizoguchi failed to agree on anything. Undaunted, Shinko commissioned a script which Mizoguchi also rejected. Indeed, the process of script development was equally fraught with conflict. In Saso’s manuscript of his forthcoming book on *Taki no Shiraito*, he reports that no fewer than four screenwriters were employed. The first script was written by the aforementioned Kimura Chieo. Still not up to Mizoguchi’s high standards, the script was then tackled by Masuda Shinji with assistance from Tateoka Kennosuke. Finally, the script was changed yet again, this time by Higashiboujo Yasunaga (Irie Takako’s brother).

Having himself prolonged the pre-production phase with these wrangles, “in desperation Mizoguchi began shooting without a complete script. Thus the film was made by increments, on a day-to-day basis, subject to change on the spot – changes that this director did not hesitate to make, much to the consternation of his actors” (McDonald, 1984, p.30). It was not only the actors who found Mizoguchi’s temperament on set difficult to deal with. Cinematographer on *Taki no Shiraito*, Miki Shigeru, described him as
“a demon when he worked on the film ... He would never compromise” (in McDonald, 1984, p.27). His ruthlessness on set was combined with an almost obsessive attention to detail. In the 1975 Shindo Kaneto documentary, Aru Eiga-Kantoku no Shogai (The Life of a Film Director), Irie Takako recalls that Mizoguchi “was so passionate about detail, down to the size of the buttons on the costumes”. The subject of the accuracy of period mise en scène was something that Mizoguchi spoke about to Kinema Junpo in 1952. As I have indicated earlier in this chapter, the director was not shy to reprimand his peers on the subject of style and technique. In discussing jidaigeki 時代劇 (period drama), Mizoguchi expressed the need for historical accuracy:

I let my tongue slip the other day when I met up with other directors. I told them that now Yamanaka (Sadao) and Itami (Mansaku) have died, the jidaigeki picture is finished. This caused a stir, but it is true of course. Take Ito (Daisuke) and Kinugasa (Teinosuke) for example, they stay in their shells. Perhaps it is because they are happy with being the veteran authorities in Kyoto and that’s not good at all ... Historically, these films are all over the place and detailed attention to costume and cultural accuracy is lacking. If you make a jidaigeki film, the least you can do is to research the period and the culture of that time. It is rude to the audience to present a film which lacks these elements (1952, p.42).

Mizoguchi’s fastidious attention to detail was matched only by his demanding shooting regime. On Taki no Shiraito, Andrew and Andrew report that Mizoguchi “demanded as much time for shooting as he needed, eventually consuming an unheard-of forty days in takes and retakes”. Yet they, with many others, agree that “The results of his stupendous labor stunned the critics and general public. Mizoguchi was from this time forward considered a master” (1981, p.9). There is strong evidence to suggest that where Mizoguchi had control over his subjects, the results were unprecedented. Taki no Shiraito
displays the first flowering of Mizoguchi’s mature stylistic and thematic traits. Yet despite this film heralding the arrival of a new ‘master’, Mizoguchi’s position following its success was by no means assured.

Although his output had been consistent Mizoguchi suffered at Shinko in terms of script originality and from studio demands regarding what he made. As noted above, the two films which followed Taki no Shiraito were critically maligned, and Mizoguchi left the studio in 1934 after shooting Jinpuren. Mizoguchi remembered that, “At this time the Tamagawa Studio [of Nikkatsu] urgently needed a director but nobody would go there. Makino Mitsuo was the chief producer. Nagata Masaichi was still getting along with Nikkatsu and he said I should accept the position” (1954, p.51). Taking Nagata’s advice, Mizoguchi rejoined Nikkatsu for his next film Aizo Toge (The Pass of Love and Hate, 1934) - another political drama which was based upon the true story of the Chichibu silk farmers’ rebellion of 1881. Much like Jinpuren, Aizo Toge warns of the dangers of uprising and dissent and is likewise in thrall to the prevailing nationalist sentiment in Japan, where rebellion and uprising is met with swift and severe treatment. However at this stage Mizoguchi needed a platform to fulfil the promise shown with Taki no Shiraito. Frustrated with being ordered what to make, and suffering also from a lack of quality scripts, he completed only one film on his return to Nikkatsu and soon sought a contract elsewhere, which would give him more artistic freedom. This came in the form of the film company Daiichi.

Set up and funded by Nagata Masaichi, who would go on to prove a key figure in Mizoguchi’s career, the studio was an important independent. Nagata was an
experienced ex-Nikkatsu employee who headed up the production and script department at their Tamagawa operation. He had left the company in 1934 after being irritated by a string of layoffs of the company’s veteran staff. New president Nakatani Sadatomo was ruthless in his decisions and no-one escaped rebuke; even Nagata himself was criticised over a script which he had written. Nagata also complained about the impossible demands of production schedules. However, Nikkatsu’s version of Nagata’s departure read rather differently:

Nagata had resigned because he had heard that the company was investigating the report of him having accepted a bribe. According to Nikkatsu it was later “proved” that Nagata had taken a twenty-thousand-dollar bribe from Shochiku to sabotage production at Nikkatsu’s new Tokyo studios (Anderson and Richie, 1982, p.81).

At the helm of Daiichi, Nagata was successful, as Shinko had been, in securing a distribution deal with Nikkatsu’s rival Shochiku. To make Daiichi work, Nagata had to employ trusted allies. He turned to former Nikkatsu colleagues Mizoguchi and scriptwriter Kawaguchi Matsutaro. Like Nagata, Kawaguchi was a prolific and well-respected writer who would go on to play an important role in Mizoguchi’s career. The pair were old school friends, and had found jobs at Nikkatsu before moving to Shinko, their first collaboration being Gion Matsuri. Nagata recalls, “I told Kawaguchi Matsutaro and Mizoguchi about my plans. They hadn’t been able to make the films that they wanted. I told them that they could only do that if they worked with like-minded people” (in Shindo, 1975).
Mizoguchi’s first projects for Daiichi were Meiji period pieces which came in the form of *Orizuru Osen, Maria no Oyuki* (*Oyuki the Madonna, 1935*), and *Gubijinso*. Workmanlike and unspectacular, the films were relatively unsuccessful, both commercially and critically. In *Kinema Junpo*, Mizoguchi later recalled that, “somehow, everything went wrong during this period” (1954, p.52). His views are compounded by critical reaction; in a review of *Orizuru Osen*, Kurata notes that Mizoguchi, “obviously expended great effort in expressing the historical period of the narrative of this film, but he appears to have failed to depict everything as well as he had intended” (1935, pp.115-116). Murakami goes one step further and in a review of the same film, insists that Mizoguchi is “one of the most established directors in Japan, one who has experimented with many kinds of subject matter and technique, though he has recently fallen into a rut of meaningless Meiji era films” (in Andrew and Andrew 1981, p.167). It is difficult to surmise why Mizoguchi returned to such films especially since Nagata at Daiichi had promised a fresh start and creative latitude. Some evidence about this may be gleaned from an interview with *Kinema Junpo*, where we can see Mizoguchi’s thoughts about his early Daiichi films:

*Orizuru Osen:*
From a novel by Izumi Kyoka … *Baishoku Kamonanban* … We had to change the title because it was a little too obscene. I tried to portray some women who live in the Bansebashi district. I worked very hard at it but failed to evoke the quality of the original work. I really liked the subject.

*Maria no Oyuki:*
A poor adaptation of Maupassant’s *Boule de Suif*. We converted it into a story about the Satsuma Rebellion. I didn’t do well on this one – maybe the script wasn’t good.
**Gubijinso:**

Ah yes from Soseki’s novel. Miyake played the main role. This one didn’t go right either. Also I wasn’t directing a large number of films. The war was just about to break out.

(1954, pp.51-52)

From these recollections, it is clear that Mizoguchi himself was frustrated. Devoid of any artistic challenges, he found himself directing generic pictures that were unpopular and widely criticised. As a director of over thirty pictures, such criticisms prompted - we may say shamed - Mizoguchi into a reassessment of his work. Andrew and Andrew note that “He decided to limit the risks by sticking strictly to areas of Japan he knew intimately, and so planned films on the cities of Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe” (1981, p.10). In fact the location of the third film of this particular trilogy was not, as Andrew and Andrew note, Kobe. Mizoguchi discussed the three films in a 1953 interview with Kinema Junpo, “After Naniwa Ereji and Gion no Shimai, I was planning to make a film set in Nagoya, because women in Nagoya are glamorous and sensual. I also wanted to continue filming Kansai films too” (Mizoguchi, 1953, p.44). This return to his own cultural heritage resulted in two landmarks of 1930s Japanese cinema, Naniwa Ereji and Gion no Shimai. But before returning to these it is worth speculating about other possible explanations for the unevenness of Mizoguchi’s film output in the pre-war period.

We have already seen how this uncompromising director was sooner or later frustrated by each of the different studio regimes under which he worked in the 1930s. And we have noted the spectre of political interference as a constant constraint upon creative freedom.
Nonetheless, the most successful and critically acclaimed films of this period display a remarkable level of accomplishment, often in spite of their production circumstances. One of the key factors in the emergence of Mizoguchi’s unique authorial style was his collaborations with other creative agents who offered both expertise and continuity. One such individual was Mizutani Hiroshi, who first worked with Mizoguchi on *Gion Matsuri* (1933), and thereafter *Jinpuren, Aien Kyo, the lost Naniwa Onna (The Woman of Osaka, 1940)*, and later *Saikaku Ichidai Onna, Uwasa no Onna* and *Chikamatsu Monogatari*. Mizoguchi’s reliance on such creative agents is apparent in an interview with Uchikawa Seiichiro, assistant director on *Yuki Fujin Ezu (A Portrait of Madam Yuki, 1950)* and *Saikaku Ichidai Onna*. Discussing set design problems on the latter, he recalls that:

Sixty to Seventy carpenters built the set at night. We were shooting the scene in which Oharu and the clerk are captured as they are eating at the teahouse. This scene should have been very simple. After rehearsing it several times, Mizoguchi called me over: “This is not good enough, the set is not properly aligned. Move the left side six feet forward.” I said to him, “Sensei, this is impossible.” However, Mizutani agreed with him ... Once we had calmed the carpenters down, they rebuilt the set as requested. The next day, we got up at 5am thinking we would be starting at 7am. We started to set up lighting and as we were about to start shooting, Mizoguchi called me over: “You know what? It doesn’t look right.” He said to move the right hand side back six feet, because it did not have the right dramatic feel. In cases such as this, he would call over his closest collaborators – Mizutani, Arai and me – and the discussions would begin, right in front of the actors! We never had these arguments in private. It was like a performance in front of everyone. Now, I understand: he was being like the manager of a baseball team (Shindo, 1975).
Mizoguchi’s relationships with his closest collaborators offer an instructive insight into the creative struggles which characterised his working methods. It is in this area that the pluralistic nature of his creative authorship may be best understood.

(ii) Creative Collaborations

Like Mizoguchi, Mizutani was a perfectionist; his striving for period accuracy was the result of dedicated historical research. This not only contributed to standards of authenticity at the level of mise en scène, but also favoured Mizoguchi’s shooting style. Andrew and Andrew observe that his “striking props and designs nurtured Mizoguchi’s development of the one scene/one shot strategy. Mizoguchi was loath to cut away from the décor to an actor’s face, loath to disturb the carefully integrated physical atmosphere” (1981, p.9). This collaboration with Mizutani allowed Mizoguchi to construct a dynamic visual field, balancing the vibrancy and personality of his characters with the authenticity and beauty of the social space which they inhabit. The orchestration of this fine balance between performance style and mise en scène was also enhanced by other significant creative partnerships forged at this time.

Another key figure in Mizoguchi creative practice was cinematographer Miki Shigeto (later Miki Minoru). Miki photographed much of the director’s work throughout the 1930s and the war years, up until Joyu Sumako no Koi (The Life of Sumako the Actress, 1947), most notably photographing both Naniwa Ereji and Gion no Shimai. Miki’s style is evident throughout the collaboration and in an interview with the author, Saso Tsutomu observed that:
Miki’s photography is very dark, sometimes you can hardly see anything on screen ... [In] *Aien Kyo* ... it is difficult to see even the actors’ faces! Of course, this is also down to the fact that Mizoguchi was a director who used long shots, but still, this is extreme. For example, while the actors are acting, you cannot make out their facial expressions whatsoever. However, although the screen is dark, you can of course hear the spoken lines and what is fascinating about this is that the emotion comes across so strongly, maybe more so than if you could actually see the facial expressions. There are other examples of this kind of lighting in ... *Maria no Oyuki* ... this is not a great film but you can see the affect that cameraman Miki had on the film (personal communication, September 20, 2010).

Miki’s idiosyncratic style was a key determinant upon the integration of physical performance within the *mise en scène* throughout Mizoguchi’s films of this period (Figures 11, 12 and 13).

![Figure 11](image-url)
The third element in this collaborative partnership between art director and cinematographer was the actors themselves. Although many scholars point to Mizoguchi’s relationship with Tanaka Kinuyo during his later career, in this period a young actress named Yamada Isuzu was arguably equally important. The provocative qualities that Yamada brought were youth and innocence combined with a razor-sharp tongue and an uncompromising attitude. Her fiery performances are in stark contrast to the world which she inhabits which is one of hierarchy, order and structure. Yamada’s skill lies within the realm of Mizoguchi’s aesthetic: his penchant for the long-shot, his long takes and careful orchestration of mise en scène. As Saso notes above, the effect could be said to detract from characterisation, such is the emphasis of the integration of the parts within the whole. Yet despite Miki’s subdued lighting, it is impossible to ignore Yamada; she can be filmed in long-shot, she can occupy a small part of the screen, she can be presented with her back to the camera (as she very often is), but her presence is always felt. Wherever Mizoguchi positions her, she has the ability to mesmerise. There exists in the Mizoguchi/Yamada films a unity of direction, design, cinematography and performance.
Yamada was only nineteen when she appeared in the great diptych of *Naniwa Ereji* and *Gion no Shimai*. For Yamada, these films were in effect a comeback following personal difficulties; after working with Mizoguchi previously on the films *Aizo Toge*, *Orizuru Osen* and *Maria no Oyuki*. At eighteen, Yamada had fallen pregnant out of wedlock, subsequently marrying actor Tsukida Ichiro who was a divorcé and eight years her senior. Her father publicly expressed his displeasure with the marriage and the pregnancy, and her husband demanded that she not work again. However, she felt obliged to Daiichi and Mizoguchi, so it was agreed that she would make one last film for the company, *Naniwa Ereji*. Yamada’s turbulent private life did nothing to inhibit her performance. If anything, the situation seems to have added an uncomfortable edge to her work. Angry, disapproving scowls and a petulant demeanour characterise her portrait of Ayako. It is almost as if she herself had nothing to lose.

Although the agreement was that *Naniwa* was to be her final film, Yamada actually went on to star in the follow-up *Gion no Shimai* as well as appearing in later films by Kurosawa, Ito, Naruse and Ozu. Her defiance of her husband was enshrined in her performance, as she herself recognised at the *Naniwa Ereji* première. In an interview for *Shuukan Shincho*, Yamada remembered that whilst she was watching the film she felt the same emotions that Ayako was experiencing:

> My on-screen character was breathing, crying, laughing, suffering, agonising, loving and in despair … In my long career as an actress, I have never felt such a sensation as I did at the *Naniwa Ereji* première. Everything had become clear, my eyes were opened and that night I realised the power that can be transmitted through acting (2003, p.63).
Yamada’s portrayal of characters Ayako in *Naniwa Ereji* and Omocha in *Gion no Shimai*, represent an alternative view of the Japanese female, one that is outspoken, brash and argumentative. Such radical female representations had not been seen in such an aggressive form previously in Japanese cinema. Feisty and headstrong females were given life through Yamada’s performances.

Through Yamada, Mizoguchi is offering a disturbing and unique perspective, not just on the plight of women but on society as a whole. In both *Naniwa Ereji* and *Gion no Shimai*, Yamada flouts expectation; she disrupts the social space which she inhabits and uses the men that are trying to use her. Hirano notes that Yamada played strong-willed "modern girls" (moga) who rebel against their environments, using their beauty and youth to take advantage of exploitative men, although they are finally vanquished by them. Yamada achieved powerful performances, even utilizing the Osaka and Kyoto dialects to project a heightened realism (in Pendergast and Pendergast, 2000, p.1314).

As well as bringing her personal experiences to the two films, Saso Tsutomu highlights the impact that Yamada had on Mizoguchi’s film style:

*Naniwa Ereji* is very harsh and portrays a woman in very difficult circumstances ... So I think he naturally adopted a method of film-making in which he could contemplate the plight of the woman in harsh social conditions. I believe that rather than deciding to use a certain technique before the film, Mizoguchi had certain themes in mind and whilst shooting these scenes, the long-take technique followed. Perhaps it happened because of an actress called Yamada Isuzu; her acting can withstand such long takes, she had that quality. Then of course, after this film, the style continued (personal communication, September 20, 2010).
*Naniwa Ereji* is also a landmark piece, as it sees Mizoguchi’s first collaboration with scriptwriter Yoda. Like the relationship with Yamada this proves to be a crucial partnership and one that featured throughout Mizoguchi’s working life. Yoda’s knowledge of Kansai is evident not just in the scripts of *Naniwa Ereji* and *Gion no Shimai* but in all Mizoguchi’s work set in the region. The attention to detail during these first collaborative efforts, in respect of accents and mannerisms, is flawless, providing an authentic recreation of the social milieu and regional culture.

In mapping the development of Mizoguchi’s directorial style during this period I have indicated the importance of a number of creative collaborations. In the previous chapter I cited *Naniwa Ereji* as one of the examples of a film aesthetic grounded in a specific cultural landscape. In the final section of this chapter I want to build on that analysis and to situate the film in its production and reception context, moving towards an interpretation which takes account of its contemporary relevance. We need in particular to address the paradox that whilst both *Naniwa Ereji* and *Gion no Shimai* were critically acclaimed on their release, neither film was successful at the box office.

(iii) **Naniwa Ereji and Gion no Shimai**

Following extensive research, *Naniwa Ereji* was shot on a small budget in just twenty days. However, the film failed to make any money for Daiichi, despite its modest means. Let us examine the overarching themes of rebellion and individualism and speculate about how their treatment might have affected the film’s reception.
As established earlier, Murai Ayako is a young telephone operator at the Asai Pharmaceutical Company who is embroiled in a constant battle with those around her. Her father, played by Takegawa Seiichi, is lazy and out of work after an embezzlement scandal, and her fiancé Nishimura (Hara Kensaku) is weak and unable to protect Ayako. Life at work is no better, as she is sexually propositioned by her superiors. Her demise, which the film charts, is precipitous and unstoppable. In a manner worthy of a modern Ibsen tragedy, Ayako’s decline exposes her emotional and moral frailty, with a dispassionate detachment. Mizoguchi’s narrative makes no explicit judgement of her but rather offers her example to the audience. Mizoguchi poses the question: just who is to blame for Ayako’s plight?

As we have seen, Ayako is the product of a modernising Japan; she is strong-willed and independent, and exhibits passionate desires without restrain. Mizoguchi deftly places her on the cusp of the old world and the new in such a manner that a contemporary audience would immediately recognise. Ayako experiences the frustrations of a modern female who is in conflict with societal expectations and rules. Her actions, especially during the latter stages of the film, would have no doubt agitated many older cinemagoers and her reluctance to conform would have shocked them. This is nowhere more striking than at the film’s climax. Having been rejected by her family, fiancé, lovers and the authorities (arrested and dismissed from court), she meets Dr. Yokou (Tamuro Kunio) on a bridge. Here we have a sublime but trenchant unification of direction, acting and script:

**Dr. Yokou:** Ayako, What’s going on? What are you doing here?
**Ayako**: I’m just a stray dog. I don’t know what to do.

**Dr. Yokou**: Are you ill?

**Ayako**: I guess you could say that. I have a serious illness called “delinquency”. Tell me doctor.

**Dr. Yokou**: What?

**Ayako**: How can a condition like this be cured?

**Dr. Yokou**: Even I don’t know the answer to that.

With the doctor’s answer, Ayako turns away and walks across the bridge, the camera tracking her left-to-right motion in profile. Closing in slowly, we then cut to a striking head and shoulders frontal shot of Ayako walking towards the camera. The camera’s reverse tracking stops, Ayako looms closer. In the final shot which is also the film’s only close-up, we realise who Mizoguchi is holding responsible for Ayako’s situation, as Yamada casts a defiant glare at the camera/audience. Matsumoto observes that this climax was a radical departure from the conventions of contemporary melodramas:

> It was not an ending with a heroine who just receives sympathy or pity, as previously seen in shima tragedies. There were no teary goodbyes, self-sacrificing death, or double suicides here ... The film ends with the face of a flesh and blood woman, who is expressing her tough and unbowed vitality (2003, p.78).

_Naniwa Ereji_ is a bitter and accusing examination of life in mid-1930s Japan. The year that the film was released saw Japan becoming increasingly totalitarian. Its unpopularity with audiences in this changing political climate is therefore unsurprising. Bordwell notes that films such as _Naniwa Ereji_ and _Gion no Shimai_ were not welcomed politically (2005, p.115). The Japanese authorities were encouraging themes of patriotism and unification.
(which Mizoguchi himself had been forced to endorse), which were the antithesis of Ayako’s rebellious individualism. The state censors confiscated the film and Mizoguchi was summoned to appear before the Ministry of Internal Affairs to explain his treatment of social issues, before it was allowed to be shown. From then on, distributors were wary of anything Mizoguchi made independently at Daiichi, as it was clear that by distributing the film they could be held accountable. Andrew and Andrew describe *Naniwa Ereji’s* resulting commercial failure:

> Although the censors let the film through, its delicate relation with the authorities prompted distributors to downplay it. Shochiku, Daiichi’s parent company, refused to advertise it; Nikkatsu would not put it on its circuit of theatres. Thus, the major companies banded together to protect themselves from any upstart independent producers (1981, p.11).

Realising that the authorities would scrutinise his next project in a similar way, Mizoguchi spared no expense in completing *Gion no Shimai*. Without any financial regulation, the picture bankrupted Daiichi and even though it was critically successful (named by *Kinema Junpo* best film of 1936), without full distribution few people could actually see it. As expected, the censors targeted the film, deeming inappropriate the themes of prostitution and geisha set in the bustling Gion. This time there was no reprieve for Mizoguchi, and the result was that 90 metres of *Gion no Shimai* were cut. Despite these difficulties, Dudley Andrew reports that both *Naniwa Ereji* and *Gion no Shimai* “caused a sensation among the critics and further secured Mizoguchi’s reputation as a powerful, if renegade, force in the industry” (2000, p.692).
Gion no Shimai marked the end of Mizoguchi’s Daiichi period, and the Nagoya project which would have completed the trilogy was never realised due to Daiichi’s collapse. Nonetheless, the legacy of the two Kansai films endures. Both films exude passion, hardship and the unrelenting quest of the individual. Both combine superb acting, vivid scripts and consummate direction. Daiichi’s demise resulted in Mizoguchi returning with Nagata to Shinko; Mizoguchi moved to Tokyo while Nagata remained in Kyoto. This time however, Mizoguchi commanded a great deal more respect as a result of his Kansai project. His first film back with Shinko was an idea which was conceived with Yoda and Kawaguchi, and saw Mizoguchi reunited with his art director Mizutani. However, these promising circumstances failed to fulfil their expectations. Based upon Tolstoy’s Resurrection, Aien Kyo prompted the same critical disapproval as his pre-Kansai Meiji era films had received. Iijima Tadashi points out that although the film displayed superb visuals and technique, Mizoguchi had regressed once again into the realms of shimpa melodrama (1937, pp.84-85).

As this chapter has established, Mizoguchi’s work during the 1930s contains a variety of genres and styles. Whilst this period gave rise to some important and innovative works such as Taki no Shiraito, Naniwa Ereji and Gion no Shimai, many others suffer from poor scripts, studio interference or just Mizoguchi’s own lack of enthusiasm. The unevenness of his output during these years must be viewed as an outcome of these factors combined. Furthermore, as I have noted, the rise of nationalism in Japan at this time hindered him. Cinematic creativity gave way to influence from political figures, such as General Sugiyama, whose interest in the medium was motivated by its nationalistic ideological potential. Film-makers, whatever their political leanings, could not escape this
kind of pressure. Mizoguchi’s own response to the authorities’ demands was characteristically idiosyncratic. Early in the decade he had fled Nikkatsu in pursuit of creative freedom at Shinko, which was quickly exploited with the Manchurian set military film *Manmo Kenkoku no Reimei*. Towards the end of the decade his return to Shinko was marred by another disastrous national policy film *Roei no Uta* (*The Song of the Camp*, 1938). Never comfortable with war-time themes, Mizoguchi turned this into one of his stock-in-trade *shimpa* 新派 style melodramas. High captures its mood in his own critical response: “The aftertaste of this film is dry vacuity. Yes its glimpses into the hearts of Mother and child bring tears to the eyes, but upon reflection, these very tears cause us to feel a twinge of embarrassment” (2003, p.184). High further suggests that “Mizoguchi’s attitude toward the war and the national authoritarian structure that supported it was, from start to finish, one of fear and dread” (2003, p.187). He concludes that Mizoguchi’s “retreat into ‘traditional arts’ (*geidōmono*) history pieces was probably less a protest against the war than an implicit statement that neither its reality nor its ideals held any interest for him” (2003, p.187). These remarks provide a compelling explanation for Mizoguchi’s response to one particular and growing set of creative constraints upon his work in the 1930s, and I shall return to this theme in the next chapter. Mizoguchi made only one more film for Shinko *Aa Kokyo* (*Ah, My Home Town*, 1938): a contemporary melodrama set in the Tohoku region about a woman’s response to industrialisation. The results were uneven and failed to impress the critics (McDonald, 1984, p.56). Disillusioned, Mizoguchi left Shinko for the major studio Shochiku whose planned production slate, aimed squarely at the popular female market, promised opportunities for a director whose interests in female characters was by now well established.
In this chapter our concern has been primarily with the nature and contexts of Mizoguchi’s authorship. I have already established that Mizoguchi’s *mise en scène* was, at its best, a dynamic visual field of considerable beauty and period authenticity. Although the creative impetus for these techniques of composition has been noted here in his earlier pictures, critical focus has tended to concentrate upon his later festival films of the 1950s. While the celebrated one-scene-one-take and long-shot style are indeed prevalent in the mature work, Noel Burch, in his seminal study on the Japanese Cinema *To the Distant Observer*, argues that such techniques are apparent in the 1930s in such films as *Taki no Shiraito*. Burch argues that these films in fact surpass those of Mizoguchi’s later career efforts, noting that: “The Mizoguchi of *Sisters of Gion*, *Tale of the Late Chrysanthemums* and possibly, too, other films of that period, is no doubt the greatest of all Japanese directors” (1979, p.246).

I would agree with Burch’s contention that the earlier works are just as focused upon composition; I would also agree with his observation that the later films exhibited a style which was “as supple and free moving as it had ever been before,” (1979, p.244). However, such debates risk descending into the realm of the facile in their attempts at precise demarcation. It is of no use to the film scholar to divide work into such categories. This chapter has shown that the creative determinants upon film style in the case of Mizoguchi are varied and complex and that this was as true for the post-war era as it had been in the 1930s. Film history must seek to relocate creative agency in its social and cultural context, taking account of industrial and political circumstances. And I have demonstrated that a more refined model of authorship is required in the case of Mizoguchi than that which the auteur theory can provide.
Conclusion

This chapter has offered a pluralist model of authorship as a more nuanced means of accounting for the work of Mizoguchi. It has been suggested that in order to appreciate more fully than hitherto the achievements of Mizoguchi’s finest work, it is necessary to adopt an approach grounded in the established methods of film history.

Firstly, it is necessary to take account of inconsistencies and variety in film output; we need to explain the lesser works as well as the masterpieces. Secondly, we must attempt to document the circumstances of production. Production history includes studio regimes and working practices, and situates film output in the broader context of social and political change. Tracing Mizoguchi’s pre-war career has enabled us to thoroughly contextualise the range of films he produced in this period. Thirdly, film history offers a model of authorship which addresses the collaborative nature of film production. All films are marked by the struggles which took place in production between the various creative agents involved. In this way, films cannot be seen merely as the product of individual creative authors. I have established that *mise en scène* is the site where the orchestration of the various creative inputs can best be identified. Mizoguchi was, supremely, a director of *mise en scène*. Finally, I have noted that film-making is never entirely a deliberate conscious process, but rather one which, by its nature, incorporates the unforeseen. Cultural influences may be absorbed and articulated by a variety of means. Film is a dense visual medium which does not simply present a window on the world. A culturally grounded account of Mizoguchi’s films – to which this work aspires – might allow us some further insight into the director’s intentions. This approach to
authorship also promises some understanding of the works’ significance to Japanese audiences, as well as their critical merit on the international stage.

In establishing the possibilities afforded by such a pluralist definition of authorship in this chapter, a number of points of creative tension have come to light. From the earliest surviving works from his silent period to the literary adaptations of his more mature work, Mizoguchi was always open to western cultural influences and cinematic practices, whilst also remaining irrevocably Japanese. Throughout his career, this proved to be a productive creative tension. Similarly, Mizoguchi lived through times of considerable social and political upheaval. I have addressed the tensions between his personal aspirations as a filmmaker and the need to satisfy the stringent demands of the authorities, and this pertained also throughout the 1940s. Finally, Mizoguchi’s relationships with his studio masters and his creative collaborators were also famously tense. Struggles at the site of production may also be seen as a form of creative tension. As has been noted above, the results of these struggles can be most clearly identified in the composition of *mise en scène*. It is to this important area that we turn our attention next.
Chapter Three
Mizoguchi and Mise en Scène

Introduction

A director presents himself predominantly through his visual style. Through a reading of his *mise en scène* we are able to engage with the specificities of a director’s visual language. However, as this thesis sets out to explore, it is not only what we see within the frame but how we see it. In the previous chapter I noted the tendency amongst western critics to resort to convenient labels: the *westernism* of Kurosawa or the *beauty* of Mizoguchi. It has already been argued that a more comprehensive appreciation can only come from a culturally informed analysis of *mise en scène*. Barthes (1968) asks: “Does everything in a narration have a signifying value?” (in Mead, 1978, p.132). Perkins (1972) also notes that “we cannot assess worth without indicating function” (in Mast et al, 1992, p.52). Close attention to *mise en scène* enables us to observe the way in which the individual creative components have been orchestrated. It also assists us in locating what we might call the cultural *unconscious* within a text. But where does this reside? It may be discovered in that which was unintended, the result of chance, or as Barthes terms it “the significance of this non-signification” (in Mead, 1978, p.132). Creative practitioners are steeped in their own milieu and express their own cultural competence through their artistic practice. Sometimes these influences are intentional; but equally sometimes they are unconscious. Being alert to these possibilities will, arguably, offer a more nuanced reading of *mise en scène*. The importance of this more sensitive approach to the analysis of *mise en scène* may be demonstrated in the following analysis of one of Mizoguchi’s finest surviving early works.
Taki no Shiraito

*Taki no Shiraito* featured two of Japan’s biggest stars of the era, Okada Tokihiko and Irie Takako, who played Murakoshi Kinya and Shiraito respectively. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the film was based on the novel *Giketsu Kyoketsu* (1894) by Izumi Kyoka (1873-1939), whose work Mizoguchi had previously adapted in *Nihonbashi*. As early as 1926 Mizoguchi had expressed his desire to bring Kyoka’s work to the screen: “I would like to go on and create something in a purely Japanese style for my next project. I would like to shoot something by Kyoka, whose stories are lavish, mysterious and sensual” (Mizoguchi, 1926, p.33). Mizoguchi also shared Kyoka’s passion for Edo culture. Inouye notes that Kyoka “came to depend upon the iconography of Edo-period fiction in order to give depth and resonance to his self-concerned (and in this sense, modern) vision” (1996, p.9). These were qualities in Kyoka’s work which seemed to suit the style and concerns of Mizoguchi, and he would go on to use Takashima Tatsunosuke’s adaptation of the author’s 1920 short story *Baishoku Kamonanban*, for another Meiji period drama *Orizuru Osen*. Despite the personal antagonisms between the two men, Richie suggests that privately “one of the reasons that Mizoguchi was fond of Kyoka was that his books gave him the opportunity to create memorable screen portrayals of women” (n.p, 1969). Perhaps Mizoguchi’s dissatisfaction with the several efforts to adapt *Giketsu Kyoketsu* for the screen, which I noted earlier, can be explained by his personal attachment: “Even before I had become a director, I had wanted to direct this story” (1954, p.51). In fact the story had already been the subject of a 1915 film, directed by Hosoyama Kiyomatsu, and had first been adapted by Kyoka for the *shimpa* stage as early as 1895.
Visually, the film mixes styles; Mizoguchi’s one-scene-one-take method is apparent, but interestingly, there are also segments with close-up shots, and rapid edits. Mizoguchi seemed here to be experimenting with ideas. The film is marked by a visual élan which highlights the diverse influences upon which he drew. Saso notes that “Mizoguchi was hugely influenced by world cinema ... and during the silent era was so eager to see foreign films, which were new to Japan” (personal communication, September 20, 2010). Even though *Taki no Shiraito* is broken up with inter-titles, the film’s dynamic visuals remain striking - a fact which is highlighted by Yoda who recalls that inter-titles were a major problem for Mizoguchi at the time: “For a filmmaker, it was a shame that these inter-titles interrupted flowing movement and expression. In order to continuously flow you want to avoid these interruptions as much as possible” (1970, p.44). However, in this case the film is so striking visually that the inter-titles almost seem redundant.

Before I embark upon a detailed analysis of the film’s *mise en scène*, it may be useful to summarise the plot. The travelling performer Shiraito falls in love with Kinya, a carriage driver whose family has fallen on hard times. Kinya is attempting to earn enough money so as to attend law school in Tokyo. Shiraito offers to pay for his tuition; all that she asks for in return is his love, a romantic trait apparent in many of the director’s female characters. As Bock observes:

Mizoguchi’s ideal woman is one who can love. This love however consists of a selfless devotion to a man in the traditional Japanese sense. She becomes the spiritual guide, the moral and often financial support for a husband, lover, brother or son. The prototype of this self-sacrificing ideal is Taki (sic) (1978, p.41).
During the two-year span of the narrative, the popularity of the travelling carnival decreases. We see Shiraito desperately wrestle with internal conflicts; her duty towards Kinya must be achieved at any price, resulting in a rejection of social obligation which sees her borrow money to fulfil her promise. She is then extorted by other performers and the carnival owner Iwabuchi (Sugai Ichiro) demands sex for her wages. In a struggle, Shiraito accidentally kills Iwabuchi and flees to Tokyo to see Kinya, but cannot face him. She is quickly arrested and returns to Kanazawa to stand trial. The prosecutor is none other than Kinya, her lover and the man whom she has supported financially. Upon admitting her guilt she takes her own life. Unable to live with the pain, Kinya returns to the bridge where their tryst began and commits suicide. The ending may seem to be unduly fatalistic in questioning how a woman who was loyal but betrayed could come to such an end.

Socially however, as Steven Heine notes, this dénouement is “a distinctive feature of Japanese society” highlighting the “eagerness to embrace various forms of voluntary death or suicide as legitimate, even positive, behaviour with a potentially redemptive value” (1994, p.367). Such sanctification is also seen elsewhere in the arts, particularly the plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon. In interview with Digital Meme, Sato Tadao notes that for the Japanese, Taki no Shiraito’s finale is an appropriate outcome: “The beauty of double suicide is frequently featured in Japan’s traditional plays. This film shares that same beauty” (2007). Sato reminds us of the need to locate our interpretation of the dénouement in terms of Japanese theatrical tradition. It is also a requirement to bring such knowledge to the analysis of mise en scène. Having outlined the narrative, let us now therefore turn to the visual style.
Taki no Shiraito makes prominent the visual details of its cultural milieu from the outset. This is the itinerant world of the carnival with its colourful mixture of the exotic and the tawdry. The camera of Miki Shigeru tracks slowly and purposefully, absorbing the busy jumble of side shows and stalls on offer. This is not achieved in one take, as the director uses fading edits to offer a kaleidoscope of impressions, as if from the viewpoint of a casual observer. The result of this montage, however, is not dissimilar to the one-scene-one-take technique in that each shot appears to move seamlessly to the next: frenetic carnival performances, lively crowds, busy stallholders. We light upon a table where monkeys are performing watched over closely by their trainers; a bustling crowd looks on as the backdrop curtain falls and then rises. The camera begins to pan left from a mid-high angle, past swinging lights and looks down on the passing attractions. What is clear during this initial segment is the feeling of continual motion. Richie notes that Mizoguchi “created atmosphere through his craft”, through fine attention to “camera viewpoint” and “camera movement” (1971, p.120). Mizoguchi guides us from sideshow to stall before finally stopping at the marquee entrance to the main attraction, Shiraito’s show. The fairground atmosphere of excitement and anticipation mounts as we arrive at the ticket seller’s booth. We follow the mass of people forward. As the camera reaches the front, a curtain rises and we are positioned at the back of a small theatre. Slapstick actors perform their routine on stage and the crowd applauds wildly. The camera moves on around the side of the stage to where, backstage, Shiraito is preparing for her show. The viewer’s sense of involvement in the carnival spectacle is created by the camera’s free-flowing movement, balanced against action within the lively mise en scène. Bazin notes that the “image is evaluated not according to what it adds to reality but what it reveals of
“it” (1967, p.28); this sequence is constructed as a series of revelations or visual clues leading to the introduction of the heroine herself.

A further aspect worthy of examination in Taki no Shiraito is Mizoguchi’s use of the metaphorical image in which the film is rich. An example of such technique can be seen quite clearly during the scene where Shiraito is reunited with Kinya. Here, the opening shot is a precursor of Mizoguchi’s later works, particularly Saikaku Ichidai Onna, where a beautiful female figure is in contrast against a backdrop of desolation (Figure 14). From the left of a long-shot, Shiraito emerges from behind what appears to be a rundown building which Mizoguchi has positioned front left, and which occupies almost a third of the frame. Irie, as Shiraito, gracefully moves into the centre of the shot and Mizoguchi, in contrast to the opening sequence at the carnival, is delicate. Camera movement and framing are in harmony with the sublime and purposeful movements of his lead actress. The camera fixes on Shiraito, there is no movement, nor is there any need for it. Pace is measured and deliberate with the focus firmly on Shiraito, who represents a beauty which is in stark contrast to the desolate and almost indistinguishable wasteland she inhabits. According to Martialay (1965), this is “a really audacious mise en scène that enters, without any
detour, in the interior life of the characters, with an astonishing sobriety” (in McDonald, 1993, p.141).

During this early scene, evidence of Martialay’s claim can be seen quite clearly. The mood is transformed as Shiraito steps from the shadows to become bathed in moonlight. As she undresses, a story card exclaims, “I’m all worn out. So tired!” Yet the image we return to exhibits none of this weariness. The graceful Shiraito begins to move away from the camera, receding into the gloom of Miki’s sombre lighting. Mizoguchi then changes the mood as Shiraito’s attention fixes upon a distant figure on a bridge. A simple cut promotes a sense of unease; the atmosphere immediately changes and the feeling of serenity Shiraito embodies becomes one of disquiet. The bridge is in silhouette against a bright moonlit sky and atop the bridge sits a figure, mysterious and shrouded in shadow (Figure 15). This is one of the key moments of the film as the meaning of the objects within the frame is transformed. A review of the original stage production in the Asahi Shimbun of December 11, 1895, claimed that: “Kinya’s encounter with Shiraito on Tenjin Bridge is the showpiece of the play. Both actors [Kawakami as Kinya and Fujisawa Asajiro as Shiraito] quoted verbatim from the novel, so that the dialogue straight from Giketsu Kyoketsu leapt from the page and into life” (in Matsumoto, 1980, p.204). The importance of this scene was not lost on Mizoguchi, and he recaptures
its theatricality in the film, though here it is achieved through imagery alone. The shot is constructed as if two paths have emerged for Shiraito. She can pass through the bridge opening into the beautiful moonlight or approach the darkness and uncertainty that the stranger inhabits. The implications of her choice will of course resonate throughout the rest of the film, as Mizoguchi cuts back to Shiraito using a mid-distance shot. As she exits the shot to the right, we realise that she is heading for the darkness, to confront the figure. As in the closing scene of Naniwa Ereji examined in the previous chapter, here the bridge functions metaphorically as a transitional space, a meeting point, where choices are made and destinies are settled. This is one of a number of emblematic spaces which are particularly resonant in Japanese art and literature – the boat journey across water is another – which Mizoguchi frequently drew upon for all their melodramatic potential. Water acts as a catalyst for change and, as Inouye notes, is a “transgressional barrier (and therefore a measure of transgression) between dreamer and the dream, between a man who is at one moment alone and at another moment transported to the presence of a transcendental female” (1991, p.49).

Although he was fascinated by the dramatic possibilities of Meiji period literature and especially its romantic qualities, the techniques Mizoguchi developed in order to transform aspects of the traditional Japanese arts into popular cinema were daring and experimental for their day. As I have noted, he was as interested in aesthetic developments in European cinema in the 1920s and 1930s, as he was committed to thorough historical research in the service of period authenticity. Arguably, Taki no Shiraito demonstrates the best surviving example from the 1930s of Mizoguchi’s stylistic eclecticism. Bordwell accords with this view of Mizoguchi’s early work:
Mizoguchi was exploring a range of techniques and story materials, so we shouldn’t be surprised that his films, [between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s] include flamboyant passages of rapid cutting, which look European or even Soviet in inspiration but which were by the late 1920s common in Japanese film as well (2005, p.99).

There are experimental elements in Taki no Shiraito which confirm Bordwell’s observation, such as the uncharacteristic montage of the opening sequence, a rare occurrence in a Mizoguchi film. The mixture of styles does not detract from the film. Indeed its eclecticism may be accounted for to some extent by recalling the chaotic circumstances in which the film was shot, as noted in the previous chapter. Filming without a finished script, on a day-to-day basis, Mizoguchi pursued his vision like a man possessed and this is evident in the film’s stylistic verve and élan. Perhaps because of this, the long-take, so much associated with Mizoguchi’s later work, is less frequently deployed in Taki no Shiraito. When it is used however, the effects are quite striking. Mark LeFanu examines the importance of this signature shot. He notes that “whether the long take is deployed consistently throughout a film, or whether it is used sparingly but intelligently, it seems to bring something to the possibility of cinema of which other forms of mise en scène are incapable” (2005, p.3). Mizoguchi’s development of this technique and its implications for our reading of mise en scène are issues which I shall proceed to examine further.

Japanese Cinema, Western Style

Several critics have identified a creative tension between western film style and Japanese aesthetics in Mizoguchi’s work. We need to address Noël Burch’s claim that during the mid-1930s Mizoguchi abandoned western film style for purely aesthetic reasons.
According to Burch, *Gubijinso* was a last attempt made by Mizoguchi to embrace a more western style of filmmaking: “It is as if Mizoguchi felt the need to give the western mode one serious, thorough-going try before striking out resolutely in his own, Japanese, direction” (Burch, 1979, p.224). There are several assumptions underlying Burch’s assertion that require examination. To begin with, it is unlikely such stylistic decisions were as conscious as Burch suggests. It is also a mistake, as noted in the last chapter, to imply that Mizoguchi’s break with western film influence was absolute. We know that following the critical successes of the Kansai films, Mizoguchi retreated once more into pedestrian Meiji melodrama, and was directed to make another nationalist propaganda film. These were hardly the efforts of a man “striking out resolutely on his own”. I have established that the unevenness of Mizoguchi’s output at this juncture in his career had much more to do with the changing political climate and studio constraints. It is in this context that we should situate debates about Mizoguchi’s choice of film projects and his developing film style.

*Gubijinso* is a surviving Mizoguchi work which does not receive plaudits, nor garner much attention. Set in the Meiji period, the film is a solid but unremarkable picture, comprising a functional visual style and an uninspiring narrative adapted from the novel by Natsume Soseki. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, it is important to address films which have been critically maligned or ignored where they may reveal important evidence of Mizoguchi’s stylistic development. One of the interesting questions, given Mizoguchi’s frequent recourse to historical sources and literary adaptations, is what distinguishes aesthetically, those period films which have been critically acclaimed and those which are regularly dismissed. *Gubijinso* is known for being one Mizoguchi’s many shimpa
melodramas. Shimpa was a new school of theatre which gained popularity during from the early 1900s and mainly explored contemporary social issues and the role of women in the Meiji period. The theatrical legacy of shimpa will receive more thorough attention in Chapter Six.

In Mizoguchi and Japan, Mark LeFanu labels Gubijinso “uninteresting” noting how its failure lies in the relationship between the two leading characters, Seizo (Tsukida Ichiro) and Sayoko (Okura Chiyoko), which “fails to set up any striking or psychologically convincing affinity” (2005, p.157). Such sentiments are echoed in contemporary reviews in Japan; Sawamura Tsutomu noted how poor Mizoguchi’s work had become, reflecting, “It is sad to see that this is a film of that dandy who made Taki no Shiraito. Everything is so tacky” (1935, p.134). At face value, this criticism appears justified. In the film Mizoguchi seems ill-at-ease with aspects of Japanese life with which he is not familiar. The middle-class setting of the picture appears claustrophobic and repressed, very much in the same vein as his later works set in this milieu, Musashino Fujin and Oyu Sama. LeFanu’s point about the characters lacking affinity is a problem also encountered by critics of the later pictures.

Burch suggests, as noted above, that Mizoguchi had been wrestling with two modes of cinematic representation, the western and the Japanese. Burch invokes an image of Mizoguchi sitting in crisis, attempting to choose either one or the other. In reality, the creative tensions on Gubijinso were more complex. Although Mizoguchi’s grasp of Meiji period detail was assured, the aspirations of the bourgeois characters and the western melodramatic mode do not sit easily together. Keiko McDonald attributes Mizoguchi’s
difficulties to his antipathy for the author Soseki’s prescriptive moral codes, despite Ito Daisuke’s effective adaptation (1984, p.34). However, she highlights the increasing sophistication of the film’s aesthetic style: “What is surprising is the extent of Mizoguchi experimenting with western devices like montage and close-ups in the final scene” (1984, pp.35-36). These stylistic innovations however, though a notable feature, should not be viewed either as a radical departure, or as Burch would have it, as a final fling. As I have noted, such techniques were also deployed effectively in Taki no Shiraito and, though sparsely, to dramatic effect in Naniwa Ereji. It is more useful perhaps to regard this as evidence of the ongoing dialectical struggle between Mizoguchi’s own cultural repertoire and his developing mastery of film technique. Moreover, these struggles cannot easily be disinterred, as Burch attempts to do, from their Japanese cultural context. For example, to equate montage uniquely with western cinematic innovation is to ignore Eisenstein’s preoccupation with Japanese theatre. As Wollen reports: “He felt that there was a kinship of principle between kabuki acting, the Japanese written ideogram, and his great discovery of montage” (1969, p.51). Wollen continues: “Eisenstein was fascinated by the use of conventions, masks and symbolic costumes in Oriental theatre”, and “he became interested in Japanese ideas of picture composition” (1969, p.51).

Although Mizoguchi’s gradual retreat from montage cannot be denied, his films from the late 1930s continued to reveal creative and stylistic tensions which were to be further destabilised by increasing political upheaval. The films from this point onwards exhibit a more powerful feeling of despair and tragedy - one that is enhanced by visual style but realised through a shift in thematic content which culminated in a new radical social commentary. As noted in the last chapter, Mizoguchi’s response to the growing
censorship crisis and the demands of authoritarian nationalism was expressed in his films hereafter in characteristically idiosyncratic manner. The development of his visual style cannot be interpreted in isolation from the social and political context.

**Commentator or Collaborator?**

It is important to contextualise this period in terms of politics and the rise of nationalism. This was a time of great political upheaval and social change. Increasing military influence on domestic policy and a focus upon nationalistic thought had a profound effect on the social role of cinema and the creative freedoms of film-makers. State control of film content became more prominent as military personnel began to adopt a propaganda role, requesting that films contain specific thematic elements and be shot in certain locations such as the recently occupied Manchuria. As a recognised director Mizoguchi did not escape these strictures. Cinema was seen as a powerful mode of mass communication, where the dominant political ideology could reach millions. The euphoric integration of all things western that had accompanied the country’s modernisation during the early part of the twentieth century had now given way to a much stronger nationalistic drive. Nationalism in the Japanese context of this period, however, must be carefully defined. The focus here relates to political, militaristic and state nationalism and is connected with the imperialistic attitudes of the time. This is in contrast to artistic or cultural nationalism as espoused by writers such as the Japanese historian Yanagida Kunio (1875-1962) or the realist novels of Shimazaki Toson (1872-1943). I shall return to the question of how Mizoguchi utilised cultural nationalism in his later works in subsequent chapters.
After a number of ‘incidents’, Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931. This was a military action over which the civilian government in Tokyo had no control. Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi immediately distanced his government from the invasion, even going as far as trying to secure support from Emperor Hirohito in an attempt to bring the Manchurian troops home. Inukai’s efforts however were fruitless, and his attempt to stand up to the might of the military resulted in his assassination by naval officers in May 1932. The situation in Manchuria would also affect Japanese standing within a world context. At a League of Nations summit on February 14, 1933, a vote of forty-two to one condemned Japanese actions within the region and prompted a walk out by Japanese diplomat Matsuoka Yosuke. At home the press were buoyant and approved this political show of strength. However, outside of Japan the consequences of these actions were beginning to manifest themselves through the popular press and cinematic newsreels. High reports that people returning to Japan from the west told stories of how newsreels were depicting the Japanese actions in Asia. Director Ushihara Kiyohiko, writing in the journal *Kaizo*, “described a show of U.S news films at a Paris movie theatre,” in which, “juxtaposed with footage of Japanese planes bombing Shanghai (‘the sounds of the explosions rocked the theatre, making all comment redundant’) was a huge U.S naval exercise, ‘with big guns belching fire and a squadron taking off from the carrier Saratoga’” (High 2003, p.51). Although there was little the Japanese could do to stop such newsreels, they had to find a way to counteract them. It was not that the Japanese were unfamiliar with propaganda; they had studied the techniques used by the British and the Germans during World War One. But here they were on the receiving end. They responded quickly and the government “commandeered several agencies concerned with propaganda. Along with the institutions that would eventually give rise to the Cabinet Board of
Information, the Japanese military ran its own separate media division” (Cull, Holbrook, Culbert and Welch, 2003, p.203).

As High reports, political influence upon the film industry was confused and desultory up until the establishment of the ill-named Film Control Committee in 1934, set up to debate the “entertainment – propaganda function” of cinema. Later the same year, the Greater Japanese Film Association was formed. The Association’s statement of purpose was to promote the production of quality films which would “1) Exalt the spirit of the nation, 2) Stimulate national industry and research, 3) Provide wholesome public entertainment” (High, 2003 p.61). By 1936, the Ministry of Home Affairs had taken over control of the film industry and made it “responsible for the national spirit of self sacrifice” (McDonald, 1994, p.60). Self regulation was finally brought to an end with the passing of the more draconian Films Law in 1939. Until then, according to Marxist historian Iwasaki Akira, most of the production companies were, “stuck in a mentality vacillating between non-resistance and non-cooperation” (High, 2003 p.62). And even with the introduction of stricter state controls and pre-production censorship by the end of the decade, many working in an industry often considered “vulgar” and “immoral” were paradoxically flattered by their new responsibility as “purveyors of public enlightenment” (High, 2003, p.74).

The prolific Mizoguchi historian, Saso Tsutomu, believes that as Japan changed politically, Mizoguchi’s perspective and film style altered to accommodate this. Furthermore, as Japanese imperialism took hold, the director’s focus shifted inwards, towards his own society and culture (2006, p.114). This description seems most logical: that Mizoguchi
began to see the effect that both militarism and imperialism were having on society. To exhibit western cultural influences became politically extremely hazardous, which may account in part for Mizoguchi’s retreat from western film style. His subsequent opposition to the regime would manifest itself filmically in the form of broken and beaten individuals, existing in an unfair and unfeeling society. Mizoguchi had to produce work which was totally in keeping with the themes that he was addressing. But he also had to disguise these themes through traditional and more ‘patriotic’ art forms. By drawing on traditional Japanese cultural heritage, he was able to develop a technique which was acceptable to the authorities. As High reports: “the authorities could gladly accept this and applauded it, even though Mizoguchi nowhere proclaimed the absolute superiority of Japan or the ‘Japanese Spirit’” (High, 2003, p.187). However, Mizoguchi was no mere conformist and his recourse to theatrical devices, to history, and to allegory, often provided frameworks which raised profound questions, and which evinced a new and sometimes radical self-reflexivity. Such radical critique of the Japanese social order had to be presented in forms which a popular audience could identify with, yet in which the deeper significance would not be lost. Film examples of this sleight-of-hand, such as Genroku Chushingura and Meito Bijomaru (The Famous Sword Bijomaru, 1945), will be considered below.

Saso explains how, as Japan became increasingly volatile under the banner of imperialism, society became artistically and politically repressed. Saso argues that Mizoguchi stood side by side with the Japanese people, and shared their concerns about the direction in which society was heading (2006, p.114). Saso’s point is crucial. Not only does it enable us to unify both Japanese film and society; it also allows us to view Mizoguchi as a director who examined the personal conflicts within the individual as well as the moral conflicts
and constraints of both family and society. In his first film for Shochiku, *Zangiku Monogatari* (*The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum*, 1939), Mizoguchi challenges the viewer by encouraging self-assessment and questioning social responsibilities. I would argue that to achieve this successfully, Mizoguchi had to develop a film style which embraced a more Japanese aesthetic at the level of *mise en scène*. Such a shift is not necessarily a conscious one, couched in terms of Japanese versus western film styles, but rather one where the director instinctively resorted to motifs and modes of expression rooted deeply in traditional Japanese culture. This response may be explained by two pragmatic strategies. Firstly, a retreat into residual cultural references was a way to please the authorities and keep working. Secondly, because residual cultural motifs provide a readily exchangeable currency, they can be subtly subverted and made to contain more ambivalent ideas.

Here, however, exists an historical anomaly. If, as Saso claims, Mizoguchi was a director of the people, highlighting their hardships, their concerns and giving them a voice through his work, how do we account for those views, including High’s, which suggest that the director was fearful of censure and aimed to appease authority? For example, Audie Bock suggests that Mizoguchi was “a disappointment to those who wanted to see him as the champion of the left” (1978, p.39). It is also fair to say that Mizoguchi seemed to be co-operative with the nationalist spirit of the period; he became a government advisor on the matter of relevant film themes, and openly promoted “the need for film practice to change with the times to express current political reality with the proper ‘expressive gesture’” (Andrew and Andrew, 1981, p.13). During the war years he continued to make propagandist period dramas such as *Genroku Chushingura*, and *Meito Bijomaru*. He also
worked on other government directed pictures such as *Miyamoto Musashi* and the joint directed *Hisshoka* (*Victory Song*, 1945). All of these films, to some degree, saw Mizoguchi referring back to the “proper expressive gesture” which he believed could be achieved “by adopting the spirit of Japan’s noble past” (1981, p.13). Indeed, it may be considered that the two positions are not mutually exclusive. In fact, Mizoguchi’s ability to remain on the right side of authority during this difficult period may well be explained by the fact that his own interests in Japanese culture happily coincided with the approved cultural ideology of the ruling regime. Adding weight to this pro-nationalist positioning of Mizoguchi in the war years is the well-documented account of his trip to Manchuria in 1943, to search for locations for a proposed Shochiku picture. LeFanu recounts this episode well:

> During this journey, Mizoguchi demanded to be treated like a general (he had already intended to go to China wearing a sword), and flew into a petulant rage when the company liaison officers in Shanghai accorded him with less respect than he felt was due (2005, p.180).

Therefore, as Mizoguchi was involved with the imperial government as advisor and as a director of appropriately themed pictures, it could be easy to label him as a mere marionette, the government’s cinematic stooge. However, let us examine this in context.

Firstly we need to take into account Mizoguchi’s political leanings; this proves to be a challenge as such an examination proves contradictory. In a 1964 *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview, lifelong friend and collaborator Kawaguchi Matsutaro noted that:
Mizoguchi was an opportunist. When, for example, Marxism penetrated Japan, he followed the fashion. Then, during the war, the communists were persecuted and so Mizoguchi veered to the right. Then came democracy, so he became a democrat (1964, pp.25-26).

This is a subject also tackled by Joan Mellen in *The Waves at Genji’s Door*. Mellen provides a wonderful analysis of *Zangiku Monogatari* observing that the film is not just a tale about warring actors but is in fact hugely critical of society. She considers it to be “one of the most brilliant satires of the Japanese family system” (1976, p.160). It is hard to imagine how a film which questions the hierarchal structure of society could be shown in such a tense political climate. But Mellen, in a significant observation, notes that this was achieved by a clever manipulation of tradition, to make a veiled contemporary social comment. She notes “Mizoguchi’s tactic of disarming the authorities with potboilers so that he might acquire some measure of space to do films in which he believed” (1976, p.160). According to Mellen, Mizoguchi’s films of this period included innocuous characters and theatrical settings as represented in this film by a *kabuki* troupe, in order to evade censorship. For Mellen, Mizoguchi used tactics of “subterfuge to confuse the militarists” (1976, p.160). LeFanu cites scriptwriter Yoda’s view that “Mizoguchi was ‘a man of the left’ whose single most defining character trait was an ‘undying hatred of oppression’” (2005, p.21). Finally, Mizoguchi’s assistant director on *Genroku Chushingura*, Shindo Kaneto, insisted in a recent newspaper article that, despite his excursions to Manchuria and his government projects, Mizoguchi was not a loyalist, and did not even understand loyalty (2009, p.16).
From such observations we can establish that Mizoguchi was not simply an opportunist, but a creative artist who was acutely aware of, and sensitive to, the political situation. Though evidence about his personal politics is somewhat contradictory, we can be assured that his pragmatic response was entirely motivated by the desire to continue making films. And in pursuing an informed analysis of his films in this period, it is possible to interpret their ideological frames of reference. While other directors such as Yamanaka Sadao were being drafted into the armed forces, Mizoguchi managed to continue working relatively unhindered.

**Genroku Chushingura**

Mizoguchi’s most famous wartime picture is without question his adaptation of Mayama Seika’s play *Genroku Chushingura*. Beginning in late 1701, Lord Asano (Arashi Yoshisaburo) is tricked into unsheathing his sword in the Shogun’s Palace, an action which is punishable with an order to commit *seppuku* 切腹 (ritual suicide) to which Asano’s loyal *samurai*, now master-less, holds Lord Kira (Mimasu Banho) responsible. Fourteen months after the incident, head warrior Oishi (Kawarazaki Chojuro) assembles Asano’s former *samurai* to avenge the death.

The various studies of this film in respect of the relationship with traditional Japanese art have been well chronicled. The most comprehensive study is found in the book *Cinematic Landscapes* (2008), where Darrell William Davis highlights the film’s stylistic elements as well as its social function. His fascinating in-depth study also offers the reader an insight into the artistic creation of the film, particularly the way in which it is constructed, so as to be ‘familiar’ to a contemporary audience, encouraging a certain way of seeing. The film,
as was the case with many pictures of this period, sets out to promote a feeling of
national identity and to inspire pride in the traditional arts. Davis observes that it was
made to stir emotion, and to infuse a nationalistic response:

This is the intended effect of the film, as a kokusaku ("national policy") project: a
nationalist promotion of the classical Japanese heritage to fire up the war effort.
Mizoguchi was not alone in the effort to render classical Japanese arts and ethics as a

The Japanese arts to which he refers relate to the Genroku period which lasted from 1688
until 1704 and saw a flourishing of art and literature amongst the chōnin. Although
utilised during the war years to promote a sense of Japaneseness, the Genroku period is
crucial in Mizoguchi’s work, and will be examined in greater depth later in the thesis. For
now however, let us concentrate on Davis’ observations. Beyond its nationalistic
propaganda function, the employment of Genroku culture also invokes the idea of a
specifically Japanese way of seeing. Davis observes that this is achieved by deploying a
wealth of traditional Japanese material:

Everything about *Genroku Chushingura* indefatigably emphasises the artistry in
Japanese architecture and design, costume and manners, paintings and gardens.
More than this the systematic patterns of decoupage invite a mode of perception
that reflects the serenity, decorum, and tenacity of the depicted historical world

Davis adds that because the story was well known, “Mizoguchi could take for granted a
familiarity with so many elements of plot, character, allusion and allegory” (2008, p.188).
Mizoguchi concentrated his creative energies into artistic composition. Mizoguchi’s
recourse to the traditional arts to inform his visual style was already long established but now with the backing of a government endorsed project, he was able to develop his production design on an ambitious new scale.

*Genroku Chushingura* marked a crucial point in Mizoguchi’s artistic development. As a director of over sixty pictures and despite his previous altercations with the censors, the Shochiku Company gave him a free rein over the film’s production. Such was the scale of the planned production, a satellite company Koa Eiga was established to manage it. Up until the war, Shochiku were known for their romantic home dramas. The government restriction on content however, resulted in these films being deemed inappropriate and, as a result, Shochiku were forced to cease production of these. Feeling the financial pressure, the company sought to gain favour with the authorities by setting up Koa Eiga, an off-shoot fully committed to government policy films. The propagandist intentions of Koa are clear in *Genroku Chushingura* on the front titles. The Shochiku logo is accompanied by two epitaphs, the first reading ‘Protecting the home of soldiers for East Asian Development’ 護れ 興亜の兵の家 and the second ‘Selected as a National Film by the Cabinet Intelligence Bureau’ 情報局国民映画参加作品.

Taking advantage of the production’s official support, Mizoguchi recruited his own veritable army of assistants and consultants. He enlisted the services of no fewer than four assistant directors, three lighting engineers, two art directors (including regular collaborator Mizutani Hiroshi), six set decorators and three historical consultants. He also appointed specialist advisors on matters as arcane as *shōji*障子 paintings, *noh* theatre, the accuracy of *bukezukuri* 武家造 (specially designed military accommodation),
traditional gardens and military arms. Filmed between June 1941 and February 1942, the production was mammoth enterprise. Running to over three-and-a-half hours, it was released in two parts each costing in excess of ¥500,000 (at a time when an average feature was turned in for around ¥100,000). Reaction to the film was generally favourable; who would criticise a film which so proudly endorsed the Japanese Spirit, especially at a time of war?

When viewing the film today, it is difficult to see how *Genroku Chushingura* could have been seen as a *kokusaku* 国策 (national policy) picture. Mizoguchi championed humanism over violence, and the film transcends its original purpose with its beautiful camera work and superb attention to historical detail. This radical aesthetic transformation of the source material and ideological remit is revealed at the film’s climax. The most celebrated scene in this classic tale presents the December snow battle between Asano’s forty-seven *ronin* and Lord Kira. This episode, seen countless times in plays and in literature, is the focal point of the story. However, in Mizoguchi’s film the climactic battle where revenge is meted out does not appear. In this blatant act of self-censorship, the director’s deliberate avoidance of this celebrated conflict may be interpreted as a tacit rejection of militaristic might. But equally, Mizoguchi was never an action director and his resolution focuses more characteristically on the female response, rather than the masculine show of violence. The director chose to have Lady Asano (Miura Mitsuko) and Lady Toda (Umemura Yoko) read the events of the battle from a delivered message. The reason behind the tears of the two women after the revenge plot has been realised is difficult to define; are they tears of joy or regret? Are they glad that revenge has been achieved or distraught that such an event had to happen? Both interpretations are plausible. It is
equally possible to adopt a contemporary interpretation, which aligns what may have been a predominately female audience’s sympathy with the grieving women receiving news of death in battle.

*Genroku Chushingura* is a visually stunning work which promotes both the elegance and beauty of Japanese art and design as well as human traits such as loyalty, honour and brotherhood. Even though the Japanese government presented the film as propaganda, it can be read as a strong rejection of violence. A meditation upon human frailty and weakness, it eschews the battle sequences and graphic fight scenes of its fabled source. This is in truth an examination of human reaction, especially in times of hardship and desperation, represented in the film by the ronin. It is especially interesting to imagine how a contemporary Japanese audience would have responded both to the manner of the film and to its humanistic message. Perhaps the film encouraged its audience to look beyond their expectations, to see beyond the celebration of Japan’s noble heritage. Davis echoes these sentiments: “*Genroku Chushingura* is a masterpiece because it brings drama into a perceptual realm that seems to have little to do with its overt subject matter,” adding that Mizoguchi “asks that we focus our attention on things that are not directly relevant to the story, which attenuates the narrative but concentrates the style” (2008, p.190). The film’s triumph of style over narrative serves to emphasise aesthetically the status which Mizoguchi accorded the spiritual power of Japanese cultural traditions. There were, however, those who were amazed that Mizoguchi had rejected modern cinematic styles. Sato Tadao notes that this highlighted “Mizoguchi’s rebellion against cinematic techniques such as montage, and his return to the simplicity of the emaki” (in Erlich and Desser 2008, p.170). In the next section I shall explore in more detail the
inspiration which Mizoguchi’s stylistic rebellion drew from Japanese traditional arts, and in particular the **emakimono**.

**Emakimono and mise en scène**

As I have highlighted, post-**Gubijinso**, Mizoguchi’s films adopt a more culturally-inflected *mise en scène*. The effect of this shift in style was twofold. For an audience it was a *mise en scène* of emotional empathy and recognition. For the imperial authorities, it provided useful propaganda. By drawing upon traditions of Japanese art and culture, Mizoguchi challenged the viewer emotionally, morally and spiritually. This was achieved through the reliance upon a recognizable visual aesthetic and realized through the influence of the traditional arts. Let us explore how this was achieved in some key examples.

I would suggest that the most important cultural source of Mizoguchi’s wartime pictures is the **emakimono** (Japanese picture scrolls). Not only does this present us with evidence of the director’s stylistic influence, but also highlights the desired effect upon an audience - to promote an emotional, moral and spiritual response. This example may provide us with valuable insights into Mizoguchi’s modes of transmission. The **emakimono** is one of the most important influences upon Mizoguchi’s visual style. It features throughout Mizoguchi’s work and performs a range of tasks in terms of the connotations it is able to carry. Firstly, let us examine this most traditional form of Japanese art from a historical perspective, before discussing its use in another of Mizoguchi’s wartime pictures: **Meito Bijomaru**.

**Emakimono** are painted hand scrolls which depict stories containing themes such as the supernatural, love, hardship, war and traditional folktales. Early incarnations of
the *emakimono* can be traced to the twelfth century; their purpose was “encourage the Buddhist faithful to lead a life worthy of interior illumination” (Gutiérrez, 1967, p.282). The scrolls are illustrated stories, which are read from right to left, at arm’s length, and are revealed as the reader winds the scroll, exposing the next section of the tale. *Emakimono* reveal an uninterrupted narrative, which unfolds at the will of the reader. It may be salutary to relate this narrative unfolding to the apparatus of cinema.

Of course, in a Mizoguchi film, an audience takes the position of reader but, it is in fact the director who is dictating the speed at which the plot unfolds. He may dwell on certain objects, conceal or reveal action at will, and orchestrate the manner in which events take place. Narrative manipulation thus conditions the emotional response of the spectator. Moments of revelation are witnessed from behind large obstacles or from a distance where we find ourselves peering thorough doorways or window frames. The field of vision may be obscured or confronted with an extreme close-up. Sometimes a viewer can be accorded an omniscient position; at other times they are rendered blind. And the measured tracking shot often mimics the very unrolling of the scroll itself. In this sense, for Mizoguchi, the *emakimono’s* form may be considered akin to the cinematic experience.

Mizoguchi delights in utilising the full space of the cinematic frame, his long-shot-long-take style rarely accords the camera the power to select and motivate specific objects within the frame. And the reluctance to cut into or cut away from close-ups from the master shot reduces psychological character motivation. It is as if these actors are figures in a landscape remote from the viewer. The distant framing of objects places the
responsibility of interpretation upon the viewer. Paradoxically, on occasion the camera lingers on seemingly insignificant objects; it slowly moves in and out of rooms and across obstacles which obscure our vision. Even for an audience familiar with the cultural landscape and the signifying language, the impact is spellbinding, the atmosphere rendered strange, the meaning obscure. The effect of such pictorial manipulation is discussed by Donald Richie who notes that “as an audience we are hushed, we are taken aback and we are moved” (1993, p.135) and by Keiko McDonald who refers to, “Mizoguchi’s gift for evoking mood” which she goes on to note, is achieved by adopting a style which represents “the same kind of rhythmic beauty seen in the medieval emakimono” (1993, p.5). However, the significance of emakimono is not limited to evoking mood or tone.

Mizoguchi’s reliance upon mood, pace and distance is not his only inspiration from the emakimono; it is important also to look at a technique known as tsukurie つくりえ. This painting method, which utilises every inch of space on a scroll, was mainly used for the style known as onnae 女絵, or women’s paintings. Onnae focused upon tales inspired by Buddhist ideology or - like Murasaki Shikibu’s most famous emakimono The Tale of Genji源氏物語 – centred around court life. The tsukurie influence can often be seen in Mizoguchi’s work in the manner in which significant details are often located in the periphery of vision or at the edges of the frame. Lingering on supposed emptiness, or on objects which appear insignificant, Mizoguchi encourages the viewer to look beyond the central object of the frame. Fine details are not restricted to areas of the frame which are the main focus of the story, but also to those which appear empty or insignificant and this is where the influence of the emakimono is arguably at its most significant. Mizoguchi is
able to highlight certain areas by presenting his work at such a pace, that even uninhabited areas of the frame demand attention. These apparently empty spaces or mu, are often crucial. Mu implies that the space between objects is just as important as the objects themselves, where emptiness exists in a specific area and carries a specific meaning. Having described the key attributes of emakimono let us now move to an analysis of its influence with a specific film example.

Meito Bijomaru

Meito Bijomaru, like Gubijinso before, is a film generally disparaged by critics. McDonald deems the film unworthy of detailed examination. She notes that when watching Meito Bijomaru “the viewer thinks ruefully of the Mizoguchi so richly inventive, elsewhere, of codas genuinely resonant with feeling and meaning” (1994, p.69). In Mizoguchi and the Art of Japanese Cinema, Sato Tadao asks “Is this what one expected of the master?” before going on to note that “among all his extant films, this is the worst in terms of quality of workmanship” (2008, p.86). Mizoguchi made three ‘propaganda’ films during 1944 and early 1945: Danjuro Sandai (The Three Generations of the Danjuro Family, 1944), Miyamoto Musashi and finally Meito Bijomaru. Although Danjuro Sandai is lost the other two films are still available; so this rejection of them, while not surprising, is somewhat curious. Perhaps this critical neglect may be attributed in part to Mizoguchi’s own recollections recorded in Kinema Junpo in 1954. Of Danjuro Sandai, Mizoguchi remarked that it was a “disgusting period”. He dismissed Miyamoto Musashi as a film he was forced to make: “I avoided the draft by making films like this”. When asked about Meito Bijomaru, he commented: “Nothing to say” (1954, p.53). Of course Mizoguchi’s own remarks may well have been coloured by post-war denial. However, I feel that a recent
re-assessment of *Meito Bijomaru* by Saso and Nishida, albeit brief, offers a welcome re-evaluation.

Saso and Nishida accept that the negative historical context certainly affects the film in terms of the subject matter. This is highlighted by contemporary reviews which point out the failures of *Meito Bijomaru*. This criticism is quite wide-ranging, but focuses primarily upon weaknesses of story and character. For example, a review from *Nihon Eiga* observed that in terms of character, the film is unconvincing: “It is very unfortunate that the ideals and spirit that Kiyohide tries to portray do not convince the audience” (in Saso and Nishida, 2006, p.112). However, Saso and Nishida find some redeeming qualities in the plot:

> When we look at the film today, the fact that the main plot of the film is less than convincing actually saves it. In the case of the previous film, *Miyamoto Musashi*, if you remove the outer frame of logic, the film has absolutely nothing, but in contrast, this film has a very interesting flavour (2006, p. 112).

I would agree with their evaluation of both films, especially *Meito Bijomaru* which offers us a valuable opportunity to explore the film-maker’s work at the zenith of government oppression and turbulent social condition.

*Meito Bijomaru* was made in response to government demand for pictures that inspired Japanese values, and portrays the story of famous Edo-era sword-smith Yotsuya Masamune. The film is set at the end of the Edo period, a time when the Tokugawa government’s two-hundred and fifty year reign was brought to an end. American
Commander Matthew Perry first arrived in Edo bay in 1853 and demanded that a letter from President Millard Fillmore be delivered to the Tokugawa bakufu (Tokugawa shogunate government). The letter requested that Japan open her ports to US naval vessels for the purposes of trade and that any American shipwrecked sailors who were stranded in Japan receive fair treatment. He gave the Japanese one year to decide. Upon his return, the Japanese had already agreed to the demands that had been set. The Japan-US Treaty of Amity and Friendship was signed on March 31, 1854. Similar treaties were signed with the British - the Anglo Japanese Friendship treaty (October 18, 1854) – the Russians – the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between Japan and Russia (February 7, 1855) and the French - The Treaty of Amity and Commerce between France and Japan (October 9, 1858). As well as external influences changing the country, there was also a feeling that, under a feudal system, modernisation could not be effective. Reformists felt that of all the problems facing Japan, the most important issue was that of stability. This could be achieved, as Reischauer notes, with an “assembly to represent the people. Adopting such Western institutions, they felt, would win them the respect of the West, which was necessary if Japan was to be accepted as an equal” (1990, p.118). Achieving this would not only assist in the modernisation process, but would also strengthen the bond between the people and their government. In 1866 Kido Takayoshi and Saigo Takamori's formation of the Satsuma-Choshu Alliance, directly challenged the ruling Tokugawa bakufu. Brought together by anti-feudalist Sakamoto Ryoma, Kido and Saigo were supporters of Emperor Komei, and among their demands was that he was to be restored to the throne. The period was volatile as the loyalists and the feudal armies
fought battles across Japan. Upon Emperor Komei’s death, Emperor Meiji succeeded the throne on February 3, 1867. However, the unrest continued throughout the year until, on November 9, Tokugawa Yoshinobu offered Taisei Hokan大政奉還 (the return of power to the Emperor). The next day the offer was accepted by the imperial court, and so began the Meiji period. As Yoshimitsu Khan notes, “The goal of what was in effect a revolution from above was to restore the more ancient ‘true’ relations between sovereign and subjects, asserting that the Kyoto Imperial court was the legitimate government of Japan” (1998, p.215). Loyalty to the emperor is the overarching theme in *Meito Bijomaru* as it focuses on the internal struggles between these two ideologies.

The famous sword-smith Masamune, named in the film as Sakurai Kiyone (Hanayagi Shotaro), creates a sword for the Kuwana clan’s top warrior, Onoda Kozaemon (Oya Ichijiro). However, during a procession to the Kuwana clan’s castle, the group are attacked by *samurai*. The prized sword is broken in battle, leaving Onoda helpless and unable to fight. Upon the group’s victorious return, they are congratulated by a messenger of their lord. However, Onoda is singled out; the words spoken to him are significant:

Today you fought bravely, but your broken sword prevented you from showing your skill and we are very sorry. We did everything we could so he would not know, but since you are the best of us, his anger is great. The soul of a warrior cannot be split. You are to be put under house arrest. It is tough, but this order cannot be avoided.

In the meantime, sword-smith Kiyone is wracked with guilt and offers to commit suicide, only to be stopped by Onoda’s daughter Sasae (Yamada Isuzu). To atone for his error, he
begins to hone his skill under the auspices of artisan sword-smith Yamatomori Kiyohide (Yanagi Eijiro). Meanwhile back at his estate, Onoda is visited by fellow Kuwana clan warrior Naito Kaname, who offers him a deal. He reveals how he feels about the severity of Onoda’s punishment and states that he will speak with their lord on his behalf. Of course this comes at a price, this being that he must allow Naito to marry his daughter. The offer is refused and, in a fit of rage, Naito murders Onoda before travelling to Kyoto to escape punishment. In the meantime we see Kiyone, alone and intoxicated in a bar because of the news of Onoda’s death and Sasae’s disappearance. However, Kiyone and Sasae reunite by chance and discuss a plan of revenge for the murder of Onoda. Sasae reveals that she knows that Naito is the murderer and that he has fled to Kyoto. Sasae declares that she will pursue Naito to Kyoto and requests that Kiyone forges a sword to avenge her father to which Kiyone obliges. However, during a reading of 神皇正統記 - Chronicles of the Authentic Lineages of the Divine Emperors written by Kitabatake Chikafusa - assistant blacksmith Kiyohide (Yanagi Eijiro) informs Kiyone that their master has been attacked by Tokugawa samurai. The pair rush to the master who is badly injured but begins eulogising about the famous fourteenth-century blacksmith family, Enju. In front of a Shinto shrine to the family, he begins his dialogue:

The Ashikaga Shoguns never got any swords from this family. The Enju Family, with their fortitude, were loyal to the Emperor. The Ashikaga’s had stolen the emperor’s power and the Enju’s forged the swords to destroy them all. The soul of the smith is the soul of the sword. A Japanese sword must always be forged with this spirit. I have suffered. I have lost my way as a blacksmith. I have spent days doing nothing, but I understand … I finally understand. We will forge a sword to avenge Sir Onoda, but it will be the last time. For two-hundred years, the clans of the shogun usurped power,
diverting the long, imperial lineage. And now, it is for these Tokugawa usurpers that I made swords. Shame on me Kiyohide!

Kiyone, assisted by Kiyohide, sets about his task mercilessly, never resting. When Kiyohide begins to wane through exhaustion, Kiyone is encouraged by visions of Sasae which inspire him to persevere. Eventually the sword is finished and is taken to Sasae who has been waiting in Kyoto. She finally confronts and defeats Naito. This ending is important: not only has Sasae avenged the death of her father but she has also killed Naito, who is revealed as a Tokugawa sympathiser. The last scene sees Kiyone and Sasae together, drifting peacefully down-stream in a boat. Kiyone hands Sasae the sword, which she slowly unsheathes. “This is the sword that saved the emperor”, he exclaims, before the pair finally express their feelings towards each other. In the last shot of the film the couple, seated back-to-back in the boat, cast a shy glance at each other before turning away (Figure 16).
Before we move on to the film’s representation of religion, I feel that the ending is worth brief examination. Of all of Mizoguchi’s surviving work, Meito Bijomaru’s closing scene is quite possibly the happiest. As Sasae and Kiyone gaze lovingly into each other’s eyes, we witness for once a finale which has a romantic closure: the loving couple are destined to be together. However, I also feel that considering the year of release, 1944, it would have been counter-productive for scriptwriter Kawaguchi to end the film in any other manner. Through the revenge narrative, they have carried out a duty to the emperor by killing one of his opponents. Their loyalty to the national cause is rewarded with a romantic and satisfying conclusion. Yamada’s performance here is also telling. In the previous scene she was exacting revenge for her father and honouring the emperor by duelling and defeating Naito. In this scene however, the white robes of revenge are replaced with an impeccably worn, traditional kimono. Her behaviour is also a far cry from the previous scene: she is now timid and shy, her demeanour a perfect example of the conventions of behaviour for a Japanese woman. Unusually for a Mizoguchi film, the dénouement marks a perfect resolution of social duty and personal happiness. The sentimental union of the couple is perfectly inscribed within its ideological framework.

Theatre as Temple

One of the most striking elements of Meito Bijomaru is the film’s continual visual and verbal references to Shinto, which was sanctioned as the national religion during the Second World War. Standish notes that Shinto was merged with Neo-Confucian teachings to create an “innate Confucian ethic that became the ideological mainstay of the Tokugawa hegemony, being re-appropriated by nationalist scholars such as Kita Ikki (1883-1937) in the 1930s and 1940s” (2005, p.177). Throughout the film we are reminded
of this re-appropriation. We constantly see shide 紙垂 angled paper decoration placed purposefully within the *mise en scène*. These shide are attached to either a piece of braided rope called shimenawa 注連縄 or a branch from the sacred sakaki 柿 tree known as tamagushi 玉串 (Figure 17). As well as the imagery, there are also sections of the film which include Shinto lectures, where the spiritual history of Japan is being preached (Figure 18). A contemporary observation of Shinto by Tomoeda Takahiko in 1930 notes that:

> Shinto is the national religion of Japan and the pivot on which the whole life of the Japanese nation revolves. We call Japan ‘the country of Gods.’ Shinto was the principle on which the country was founded at the beginning of time and which has been the guiding influence in Japanese national life throughout its long history of thousands of years (1930, p.343).

As well as the recourse to traditional arts, the military also promoted Japanese spirituality through national religion. They called upon on all of Shinto’s virtues, its connection to an ancient past as well as its indigenous spirituality. The most important factor in returning to Shinto was the manner in which the emperor was regarded as a deity. Until the
American-led occupation in 1945, he was seen as the living god Arahitogami, 現人神, a direct descendent of Amaterasu Oomikami, 天照大神 the sun goddess. He has the authority to decide the fate of the nation; to die for him, and the country, is the ultimate honour. Self-sacrifice, loyalty, frugality are characteristics of a part of Shinto called bushidō 武士道. Ponsonby-Fane describes bushidō as “a product of Shinto, though not a direct product”. He continues: “Bushido may be rendered as chivalry and loyalty, whereas what this country really owes to Shinto is patriotism, for no real Shintoist can fail to be patriotic when his sovereign is also his deity” (1931, p.3). During the unstable period of imperialism, the Japanese were told that if you sacrificed yourself for the national cause, you would be accepted into heaven. These martyrs were (and in some cases still are) worshipped at the Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社 as gods. State Shinto was used in such a manner that serving in battle was seen as religious duty. As Holtom notes: “every Japanese foreign war is holy because it is sanctified by the will of the divine emperor” (1945, p.29). Meito Bijomaru leaves the viewer in no doubt as to the purposes of the Shinto imagery and dialogue. By using these communicative devices the audience is being constantly reminded about their own place in the world, their responsibilities to state, emperor and their own spirituality. Visually and verbally the very essence of Japaneseness is being communicated through the myths and legends of Japan. To a contemporary audience, such reminders would have resonated deeply.

The ideological function of religion was important during the period 1944-1945, when there was an ever-growing strain on the Japanese people. This was due to a lack of food and basic necessities, the demands of the war effort and the increasing prospect of defeat. The film’s Shinto imagery and lectures offers recognition and promotes distinct models of
behaviour through a strictly religious vernacular. For example, the speech to Onoda after his sword shatters has a resonating effect; however poor your resources, you are ultimately responsible for their condition, there should be no waste, no excuse. From a militaristic point of view, such an edict would have sounded both timely and ominous.

At first glance, *Meito Bijomaru* seems vastly different from previous Mizoguchi films. The most striking element of the work is the uninspiring *mise en scène*. For example, where *Taki no Shiraito, Gion no Shimai* and *Zangiku Monogatari*, were atmospheric in their visual style, *Meito Bijomaru* is functional at best. Let us try to establish why this is the case. One reason, which I have already highlighted, is a lack of resources. Film during this period was not deemed a necessity, and raw materials were being put to 'better use'. However another, more realistic reason, would have been that talented set designers had been drafted. None the less the film is not without its merits. For example, the one-shot-one-take style is very much in evidence. We see this in one of the opening sequences, where Sasae and her father Onoda are practising *kendo*. Kiyone then arrives to present his master with the fêted sword. The length of shot here is, at 1m.33s, characteristic. This is not the only scene to involve such a long-take. For example, the scene where Naito murders Onoda is just under three minutes, and the bar scene, where a drunken Kiyone argues with other patrons, is two minutes fifty-five seconds. There are further elements of Mizoguchi’s familiar style which are apparent in *Meito Bijomaru*, such as the long-shot and the obscured shot (which I shall examine further in Chapter Four). However, for the moment, let us consider Mizoguchi’s use of camera position.
One example is the parade scene where Onoda and his fellow clansmen are attacked by samurai. We see the procession in long-shot, positioned between two large trees (Figure 19). Here it is almost as if we are crouched, spying on the parade. As the procession moves slowly from right-to-left, the influence of the emakimono is apparent. We are then placed directly in front of Onoda, who is walking in line, directly to the left of the lord. The stark contrast of the long-shot, then combined with a quick cut to deep within the heart of the procession, seems sinister. If there is to be some kind of confrontation, then Onoda seems to be the focus. However, we are reassured, as he glances proudly down to his side, looking at his newly-forged sword. His face then breaks into a confident and proud smile from which we can take comfort, knowing that he is protected by such a grand weapon. The camera now cuts to Naito, who is walking behind Onoda; however, his expression is focused and unemotional. Following a light-hearted scene between Sasae and Kiyone, our attention now returns to the parade, which we again view in long-shot. However, this time the perspective is more sinister. We view the parade head-on, as they come ever closer towards the camera. Our perspective is obscured as again, we are positioned behind trees. This time however, there is more attention on the foreboding shadows that they cast (Figure 20). Our fears are realised as, from where we are positioned, samurai appear from all corners of the shot, and set about attacking the procession. A fierce battle ensues, but Mizoguchi does not cut immediately to the action; he keeps the camera in position as if wary to engage. We are rooted to the spot, reluctant to intervene, watching helplessly as the two sides battle. What is the reason for this delay in joining the mêlée? Is this an ambiguity towards both the emperor’s army and the Tokugawa samurai? Or are we positioned as a rebel, opposed to the fruitless cause of the emperor? It is a fascinating scene. Mizoguchi eventually moves...
in, but then immediately focuses upon the destruction of Onoda’s prized sword. His visual
treatment of this act is stark and poignant. I suggest that he is using symbolism to create
a feeling of foreboding, implying political disillusion and military defeat. In one short edit
at the finale of the attack upon the entourage, Mizoguchi cuts to and dwells upon the
very essence of the bushido code, the katana, lying broken and dirty on the ground at
the soldier’s feet. The visual message is telling indeed: Japan, like the katana, is broken
(Figure 21).
This was to prove a prescient shot; Manila fell during the month of the film’s release and
Japanese cities suffered greatly at the hands of American bombers during the following
months. Reischauer notes of this particular period:

Cities lay in ruins; industrial production was grinding to a halt because of
shortages of raw materials from abroad and an insufficient labor force to operate
it; the nation faced starvation and the bulk of its forces were abroad, cut off from
the homeland because of lack of transportation (1990, pp.178-179).

Despite the critical debates about Mizoguchi’s war-time allegiances, this film suggests
that he was not a director to shy away from social commentary during times of upheaval
and unrest. This battle scene goes some way to confirming that even though he was
making films under the auspices of the imperial government, he still managed to include
visual elements which were appear strikingly subversive in their potent symbolism.

Finally, I would like to examine some of the experimentation with sound that Mizoguchi
used in Meito Bijomaru. Saso insists that throughout Mizoguchi’s work he used sound
ingeniously to create tension and atmosphere. Working with sound technicians such as
Mizuguchi Yasumi (Gubijinso, Naniwa Ereji), Sugimoto Fumizo (Zangiku Monogatari,
Genroku Chushingura) and Ootani Iwao (Oyu Sama, Ugetsu Monogatari, Gion Bayashi,
Uwasa no Onna, Chikamatsu Monogatari), Mizoguchi was as meticulous in his attention
to sound as he was to visual composition (personal communication September 20, 2010).
In Meito Bijomaru, there are a number of examples of innovative sound composition. In
the lengthy scene in which Kiyone attempts to forge the sword that will exact revenge for

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Onoda’s death, the painstaking pursuit of perfection is highlighted by the harsh sound of the tempering, which is heard with a constant one-two beat of unwavering pitch. As Kiyohide collapses with exhaustion, an overlay technique is used where we see a ghostly figure of Sasae helping to forge the sword. As each sword is tested and subsequently disregarded, the film’s pace gathers momentum. The sound of hammer on anvil however remains a constant aural reminder of their unrelenting commitment to the task.

Further examples are also evident. As Saso and Nishida observe “Mizoguchi cleverly uses diegetic sound without disclosing its visual source” (2006, p.112). During the scene in which Naito’s fellow clansman declares his wish to marry Sasae, a koto begins to play. At this point it is not clear if this sound is coming from another room, or if it is non-diegetic. We are given a clue, however, by the expression and body language of Onoda. He turns and faces the front left of shot, as if gazing to where the sound of the koto is emanating from. He is distracted from the present concerns about the prospective marriage and transfixed by the obscure compelling music. It is as if Onoda is in peace, sitting and listening to Sasae play. I would suggest that although we have had no indication that she plays the koto, her position in society would suggest that learning to master such an instrument would have been part of her upbringing. Although we cannot be sure if this is indeed Sasae playing, the set-up of the shot - Onoda’s body position and his attention focused upon an off-screen event - suggest that the sound of the koto is diegetic, the performance in another part of the household. It is a clever manipulation of the viewer’s attention. Through purity and elegance of Sasae and the koto, our thoughts are distracted, as Onoda’s are too, from the impending danger that he is in.
The final example that we shall examine is the chance meeting between Kiyone and Sasae. Here, as the pair begin their dialogue, a Japanese flute is heard. However, a reverse shot is utilised and as Sasae retreats into a mid-distance shot, we see the source of the music. Deep in the background, a musician is playing beneath a tree (Figure 22). Although this is a gentle scene between Kiyone and Sasae, the dialogue reveals Sasae’s motives of revenge. Saso and Nishida offer an analysis of this scene:

Mizoguchi spreads sound and characters in a way which offers an aural and visual balance. It makes this romantic scene full of atmosphere. Kiyone, Sasae and the flute player are positioned in the front, middle and at the rear of shot respectively. This then allows the frame to possess superb depth. Mizoguchi is very good at creating this sort of composition (2006, p.112).

It is also worth highlighting the juxtaposition of the sound and the visuals here. We hear the beautiful sound of the flute but this is counterbalanced by Sasae’s dialogue which is rooted in violence and revenge. Here, again, the sublime musical interlude is a harbinger of violence.

*Meito Bijomaru* can offer us some fascinating insights into how Mizoguchi responded creatively to the demands of the war-time authorities. The film incorporates a range of
religious and cultural signifiers, from *emakimono* art to *Shinto* symbolism, deploying them with a level of attention to detail which is hardly representative of “poor workmanship”. Despite the constraints upon the production, the film also reveals a range of significant techniques, especially in the orchestration of sound and visuals. These visual and aural techniques are certainly not created by a man who is indifferent to tonal issues.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined Mizoguchi’s creative practices in response to the constraints of social and political upheaval. By critiquing Burch’s idea that the films made after *Gubiinso* exhibit a more Japanese *mise en scène*, I have suggested that the evidence for the development of Mizoguchi’s visual style is to be found in his studied recourse to the traditional arts. No less importantly, I have also indicated that a further catalyst for this shift in style is directly related to Mizoguchi’s turbulent social environment, where he drew inspiration from the political tensions that encompassed contemporary Japan. This may be an explanation for his recourse to traditional Japanese cultural material.

Our examination of *mise en scène* has drawn upon the significance of particular traditional forms of Japanese art such as *emakimono*. The next chapter will advance this analysis by introducing *kakejiku* (Japanese hanging scroll). In Chapter Four I shall examine further how the director utilises traditional Japanese art forms, with a particular emphasis on the spectatorial relations they construct. The methods used to achieve this are calculated and complex, relying upon a Japanese audience’s awareness of the traditional arts and their cultural function within contemporary society.
Chapter Four
Ideas of Spectatorship

Introduction

So far, this thesis has proposed that a properly nuanced account of Mizoguchi’s work necessitates the recognition of his deployment of Japanese cultural references and topoi at the level of visual style. And it has argued that this rich frame of reference may be attributed to the cultural competence of the collaborative artists involved. This chapter will go on to highlight particular features of this cultural repertoire. However, before doing so we need to address one of the major questions central to this thesis: what demands does this cultural grounding make upon our visual competence as non-Japanese viewers? A culturally informed reading may allow us to see more clearly the intentions of a filmmaker, to aspire to the position of a film’s intended audience, and to appreciate the specific cultural tasks a film is being made to perform. We need to push the boundaries of cultural analysis and ask: what are the particular inflexions of film language and its idiomatic use? To what extent is it possible to identify in Mizoguchi’s work a specifically Japanese vernacular style?

In Chapter Three it was suggested that Mizoguchi’s recourse to Japanese traditional arts in his films from the mid-1930s onwards tapped into the residual culture in a manner with which contemporary audiences would have been very familiar. Harold Strauss indicates the importance of this issue. Writing in 1955, he notes that “no modern nation is as steeped in its own history as the Japanese. Whatever the present state of taste, even the humblest Japanese is familiar with the great aesthetic traditions of the past” (1955, n.p). In the previous chapter, the examples of Taki no Shiraito, Genroku Chushingura and Meito...
Bijomaru showed how Mizoguchi’s concentration upon mise en scène over narrative placed an aesthetic and emotive emphasis on elements of recognisable Japanese tradition. This chapter will offer further analysis of the ways in which Mizoguchi deployed emakimono and kakejiku in the mise en scène. It will be argued that these techniques established a distinctive set of spectatorial relations with the contemporary Japanese audience. When a filmmaker resorts to artistic and cultural tradition in such a sustained and conspicuous way, we can be sure that this is a response to a contemporary crisis in the culture. The questions we must attend to are about which aspects of the residual culture are deployed, why and how? This may well provide evidence of what we might call a vernacular style being used to stimulate and to re-assure a popular audience.

A Vernacular Style?

An example of the potency of the vernacular style and its ability to communicate powerfully and directly with a contemporary audience is offered by Donald Richie. Using the torii (an entrance to a shrine) as an example, he notes that:

A torii gateway is a torii gateway, recognizable. The connotative quality, however, is another matter. This is the meaning attached to the image. And it is often one that the foreigner cannot, for cultural reasons, decipher. The torii suggests a complex of associations not available to the foreign viewer without prior study (in Washburn and Cavanaugh, 2000, p.xvi).

That a non-native observer is excluded from an understanding of residual cultural topoi, with which a Japanese would be familiar, is unsurprising. Indeed, Barthes Empire of Signs is a sustained meditation upon the foreignness of Japanese cultural signifiers. However,
the task of recovering that “complex of associations” which the object generates for a native is more challenging. As I established in Chapter Two, this is a task from which the first generation of western critics of Japanese cinema shrank.

In his article entitled ‘Mizoguchi vu d’ici’, first published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1958, Rivette questioned the need for a cultural reading of Mizoguchi, asking: “Will wanting to approach it in terms of the national culture make us any the wiser?” (in Hillier, 1985, p.264). Rivette insists that “modern artists did not discover African fetishes through a conversion to idols, but because those unusual objects moved them as sculptures” (in Hillier, 1985, p.264). However, Rivette’s rejection of the cultural perspective is restrictive. Difficult as it undoubtedly is to recover the interpretations of a native audience of the mid-twentieth century, unless we attempt to excavate the cultural tasks which popular cinema performs at the time in which it was made, we shall be forever limited to a remote and only partial understanding of its significance. Dress, hair or make-up can indicate social class and spoken language (standard or honorific), and communicates an individual’s status and position within society. The decoding of such elements in the mise en scène is absolutely crucial. But moreover, the interpretation of more obscure traditional topoi rooted deep within the culture is challenging but vital to our task. Sato Tadao highlights this, noting that:

To understand Ozu Yasujiro you must understand the films of Ernst Lubitsch and King Vidor, to understand Kurosawa Akira you need to understand John Ford but to understand Mizoguchi Kenji you do not need to study film directors from Europe or America but kabuki, shimpâ geki, Noh and Nihonbûyô and how they were contained within different forms in Mizoguchi’s films (Sato, 2006, pp.420-421).
Kabuki, noh and shimpa theatres and the traditional dance Nihonbuyō 日本舞踊 are aspects of performance which will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Six. But Sato’s point holds good also for Mizoguchi’s use of traditional Japanese visual art. A good example here would be the deployment of kakejiku during the opening scenes of Ugetsu Monogatari. Let us briefly examine the history of the kakejiku before moving on to discuss just how Mizoguchi uses it.

Kakejiku

Japanese kakejiku were developed from China during the Kamakura period (1185–1333) and like the emakimono, they were created within the arts of early Zen Buddhism. These kakejiku were black-and-white landscape paintings, generally depicting sansui 山水 (mountains and water). During the Kamakura period, shoinzukuri 書院造 (Japanese-style house), were built for the first time. Within these buildings there was an area where the kakejiku 掛軸 could be hung, called a tokonoma 床の間 (Figure 23). This assisted in the popularity of the kakejiku, as every shoinzukuri contained a tokonoma. As mentioned, the first kakejiku depicted sansui, however this developed and soon tokonoma consisted of kakejiku which displayed Buddhist sutras and teachings, letters, autographs and portraits.
As noted by photographer Miyagawa Kazuo in Chapter Two, Mizoguchi’s films were very much influenced by the *sumi e* 墨絵 (ink paintings). His work was often composed of long shots of landscapes that a Japanese audience would immediately recognise as derived from *sumi e*, especially *kakejiku*. The beauty of nature is represented in a harmonious manner which offers a range of visual pleasures. There is a satisfying order in the composition and such scenes transport the viewer into an idealised natural landscape of permanence and tranquillity. However, within these natural surroundings Mizoguchi staged dramas of unrest, of human greed, lust and desire. Here, everything is in a state of flux and conflict. He utilised the splendour of Japanese natural beauty, represented in the *kakejiku*, as an ironic commentary upon the petty human struggles, their bitter rivalries and fleeting ambitions. This dramatic contrast is expressed in a tension within the *mise en scène* between the visual and performance elements. Let us examine this by looking at an example from the opening and closing sections of *Ugetsu Monogatari*. The vast landscape presented in these two scenes allows us to observe how the *kakejiku* style is used and to what purpose.

As the film’s opening titles are displayed, a background is shown of rolling hills with small houses buried deep within them. The scene is then inter-cut with a succession of close ups of native flowers – *kiku* 菊 (chrysanthemum), *ume* 梅 (Japanese plum), *tsubaki* 椿 (Japanese camellia) - before cutting back again to a mountain scene of balanced perspective, very much in relation to the first. The action unfolds with a slow, purposeful right-to-left-pan across a backdrop of rolling hills which dominate the small houses in the foreground. This technique combines the framing and composition of the landscape imagery of the *kakejiku* with the horizontal, right-to-left pan reminiscent of the
unravelling of an emakimono. This ushers the viewer into a familiar world of peace and tranquillity. The audience is at one with art and nature which offers both cultural security and visual serenity. As the camera continues across the mountains and fields, we see a poignant image. Buried deep in the shot is a farm-worker, dwarfed by the majestic mountains, a part of the bucolic charm of the pastoral scene. The camera continues in a right-to-left motion, behind a tree, and then focuses on a small village on the north shore of Biwako Lake.

This same image is also seen in the closing shots, where the sequence is reversed. The final scene sees the camera rise above the village and focus on the mountains. Superficially everything appears the same, but as the intervening drama has made clear, everything has drastically changed. And the device of repetition reinforces the ironic distance between the impassive landscape and the action we have witnessed. The opening shots elevated us: we were at one with nature, confident and safe. However, at the close of the film, after we have witnessed deceit, adultery, murder, war and human suffering, we feel diminished and vulnerable. For an audience the experience has been transformative. Throughout this narrative the audience has been rendered helpless and powerless to intervene in the personal tragedies which unfolded before us. Yet our endurance is not without reward. The last scene also offers reassurance and closure. It returns the viewer to a world unchanged, immutable, beyond the human drama.

The devices drawn from the kakejiku and emakimono frame the action beyond the narrative world and encourages an audience to see the whole and not to focus just on the narrative we have been presented. Robin Wood comments: “We are not allowed to
respond simply, with the immediate emotional reactions the event might provoke: we are encouraged to view the event within a cosmic perspective” (2006, pp.279-280). This transcendental function is arguably crucial. The relationship between the opening and ending of *Ugetsu* reveals that whatever happens, we are part of a bigger landscape, which encompasses the eternal relationship between humans and nature. It indicates that despite our ability to transcend the pain and struggle of life, we are insignificant when compared to nature which, as the two scenes reveal, is all-consuming and ever-evolving. If the narrative critiques the futility of human endeavours to change the world, its framing within the traditions of Japanese art serves as reassurance of the timelessness and immutability of nature beyond human control. A post-war Japanese audience could not help but draw comfort from this commentary on social and political upheaval. It pays tribute to their ability to transcend the pain and struggle of life. We may be rendered insignificant when compared to nature, yet nature’s beneficence and permanence is a model for our endurance. This relationship is key in Mizoguchi’s work.

*Tsukihanasareta Bōkansha* 突き放された傍観者 (*The Pushed away Spectator)*

I have examined the opening and final scenes of *Ugetsu* and noted that Mizoguchi used visual techniques derived from traditional Japanese art, to engage an audience in a particular relationship to the filmic world. I have observed that this relationship is never static and never entirely comfortable. Mizoguchi is unique in the manner in which his camera position, framing, and the arrangement of *mise en scène* place the spectator in a position of ambivalence. The observations made by Watanabe Masako in her work on narrative framing in the *emakimono* story *The Tale of Genji* (discussed in the previous chapter), provide a useful illustration of how Mizoguchi used *emakimono* to achieve this
emotional placement. Watanabe notes that Genji’s construction allows “the viewer to freely step into the drama inside the house through a removed fourth wall in the foreground, while keeping him or her beyond the beam as an impartial observer” (1998, p.133). In this example Japanese architecture, familiar in its design and proportions, is also a physical obstruction which delimits an audience’s perspective on the action. This is a technique that Mizoguchi used to great effect. This feeling of stepping into the frame is apparent in many of his films and relates back to his use of a tsukurie style of shot construction which was explained in Chapter Three. Examples of this tsukurie style, and the method of obscuring the spectator’s view, can be found in works such as Utamaro o Meguru Gonin no Onna (Utamaro and His Five Women, 1946) (Figure 24), Yoru no Onnatachi (Women of the Night, 1948) (Figure 25), Saikaku Ichidai Onna (Figure 26), Ugetsu Monogatari (Figure 27), Sansho Dayu (Sansho the Bailiff, 1954) (Figure 28), Uwasa no Onna (Figure 29).

After being drawn into the frame by lavish scenery and the full use of constructed space we are, as can be seen from the above shots, positioned behind objects, peering through doors and wooden frames. The spectator is denied the empowering position afforded by the master shot, viewing is restricted and our perspective only partial; we have become part of the drama, existing within the same space as the protagonists. Such positioning is uncomfortable; we are implicated in the action, yet paradoxically, we cannot intervene and are unable to prevent the tragedy unfolding before our eyes. In this sense then, we are forced into the role of a silent witness. It is an invitation into this world’s personal drama, but we are obliged to observe from a limited perspective. From this position we are like a voyeur, yet are powerless - a hidden spectator silently witnessing the sordid
settings and human misfortune as, for example, in the prostitutes’ clinic scene in *Yoru no Onnatachi* (Figure 25). I shall return to this film in more detail below.
Indeed, the voyeuristic tendency here does not fall into the secure, scopophilic voyeurism famously defined by Mulvey (1975). It does not imply a gendered view, empowerment or superiority; and it does not promise any kind of sexual gratification or eroticism. In fact such positioning has the opposite effect: the viewer is disempowered and inferior. Our position in the frame is marginal, our view obscured by the architecture. We stand on the periphery forced to confront the morality of the drama before us yet, like an eavesdropper, are fearful of exposure. Mizoguchi was crafting something complex with this technique. We are drawn in to a position of moral culpability, and then made to witness the tragic and harrowing events as they unfold.

Another segment from *Ugetsu Monogatari* will serve to illustrate this. In this distressing scene Ohama (Mito Mitsuko) has been brutally raped by foot soldiers in a Buddhist temple. After she exits the temple, cursing her husband Tobei (Ozawa Sakae), a more conventional film-maker might have used a series of close-up shots, highlighting her pain and suffering through facial expression and tears to illicit audience sympathy. Mercilessly however, Mizoguchi confounds expectation. He pushes us away, placing us at a distance, hidden and peering through overgrown greenery (Figure 27, above). Ohama turns away and the camera is at a low angle, almost as if the viewer were crouching so as not to be discovered. Bordwell notes that:

> In a culture of shame, people betrayed or humiliated will turn from the camera. They will retreat behind sliding doors and sink behind tables and chairs. More and more Mizoguchi built his *mise en scène* up to moments in which characters come together in misery but struggle to conceal their
Here Ohama is presented to the viewer in just such a vulnerable condition of self-disclosure. We are positioned in a situation of extreme intimacy with her plight, though unable to intervene either to prevent the atrocity or to offer comfort afterwards. The viewer is simply exposed to her unrelieved suffering.

Here the audience is a part of the cinematic world which has been created with its revealing, tsukurie-style construction, the open expanse of landscape and the enticing mise-en-scène. There are reminders of traditional art throughout the film, but in this scene, the emakimono technique is overwhelming: the distance shot, the viewer positioned behind obstacles, the low angle and the long take. We are overwhelmed visually and therefore emotionally also. Mizoguchi never leads us gently through proceedings; we are left, like his characters, to fend for ourselves. At no point is there any indication as to where our sympathies need to be directed; a moral ambiguity exists and emotionally, the response is solely down to the viewer. LeFanu contributes some useful thoughts to this area of debate. He draws attention to the “suspense and awkwardness that present-tense drama entails”. His reading highlights such sequences as this, when the viewer has the feeling that their participation can actually affect a character’s actions, giving “the sense that the outcome of the scene hasn’t yet been settled, that it is still in the air, and that we are somehow complicit in making it land rightly” (2005, p.3). Of course, in respect of character and plot, the film is not reliant upon the audience, but
LeFanu’s point is important in so much as it highlights the value of the long take in this segment particularly.

Let us endeavour to explain this spectatorial positioning from a more culturally-specific perspective. As we have seen in Mizoguchi’s films, the spectator is drawn into the drama, but effectively positioned at the margins of the action. There is a specifically Japanese term to describe the process of being first drawn in, and then pushed away from the action, which has its origins in the visual perspectives of emakimon: tsukihanasareta bōkansha. As we have seen this concept in Mizoguchi’s films is deployed as a function of framing depth-of-field, and composition of the mise en scène. Having been granted the privilege of intimate access to this world, the spectator is morally implicated, yet remains detached and helpless. Let us examine another example of tsukihanasareta bōkansha in action. Yoru no Onnatachi, a contemporary story based on an original idea by scriptwriter Hisaita Eijiro, focuses on the world of prostitution, highlighting the struggles for survival of women in post-war Japan. An important scene takes place in the family home of Fusako (Tanaka Kinuyo), her mother and brother-in-law Koji (Tomimoto Tamihei). The family has just learnt of the death of Fusako’s husband from an illness, following his long-awaited return from the war. News of his death from natural causes, after the heartache and uncertainty surrounding his return, precipitates Fusako’s descent into prostitution.

The scene begins with Fusako in the foreground, and her family seated at mid-shot and deep in the background. Fusako switches off a light and, all of a sudden, we are plunged into darkness. What was first a scene in which we felt a part of proceedings – close to
Fusako and in symmetrical harmony with the family – has now dramatically changed, and we have been excluded. Fusako then withdraws to the middle area of the shot, and sits alongside her brother-in-law. However, photographer Sugiyama Kohei’s camera remains still. From the shadows we are witnesses to a family in deep mourning. Saso and Nishida comment that *Yoru no Onnatachi* is a film which is reliant upon low-key lighting and deep shadow to convey “the darkness of the war” (2006, p.116). There is no relief as we are forced to sit, and watch the proceedings. Suddenly another tragedy begins to unfold as Fusako’s sick baby begins to suffocate. Panic ensues as Fusako and her mother-in-law cradle the baby and set off for the hospital. The camera remains static throughout, hiding in the shadows. The uncomfortable nature of this scene is highlighted by the spectator’s distance from the action, the encircling gloom and the unrelieved stasis of the camera. Once again the viewer is implicated as witness or eavesdropper. The scene is a perfect example of the audience as *tsukihanasareta bōkansha*, unwelcome in the dramatic world.

This technique is another filmic device related to the use of *emakimono* and *kakejiku*, which places the viewer in a position of awkward tension. These features may be said, together, to constitute a vernacular style in Mizoguchi’s work. The technique of distanciation, in particular, enables the director to create emotionally charged and socially challenging dramas which draw upon traditional elements of Japanese art. Recourse to this vernacular style (which draws upon traditional art or exploits traditional architecture), appears to have the function of rousing an audience to a sense of heightened awareness of the moral landscape and the dynamics of social change. Having looked briefly at a war-time example, let us now pursue this idea with reference to specific case studies from before and after the war.
In the 1936 film *Gion no Shimai*, referred to in Chapter Two, Mizoguchi’s frequent use of the one-scene-one-take and distance shot, provides further evidence of *tsukihanasareta bōkansha*, which shows that the technique was well established as part of Mizoguchi’s stylistic repertoire by the mid-1930s. Miki Minoru’s camerawork and Mizoguchi’s compositional framing conspire with Yamada Isuzu’s performance to unsettle the viewing perspective. As I have already observed, such perspectives are continually obscured: obstacles placed in our line of vision always deny the viewer a secure vantage point. We are enticed into the drama emotionally, but yet we are relegated to the role of passive onlooker, unable to act or interact. *Gion no Shimai* exhibits this technique repeatedly. For example, in one of the final scenes Omocha (Yamada Isuzu) is admitted to hospital. Initially the camera is directly in front of the door from which she emerges (Figure 30). We are positioned in the shadows as the camera tracks from right-to-left in mid-shot matching the speed of Omocha and her nurses. During these initial moments of the scene, the viewer is cast in the shadows as eavesdropper which creates tension. We fear exposure: it is as if we were witnesses to something we should not be seeing. As the camera tracks on slowly, welcome cover is
provided as a tree obscures our vision momentarily. As the camera emerges from behind the obstacle, it stops, then pans, following Omocha. Continuing on, the camera moves behind greenery before emerging, allowing us a last look at Omocha before she is carried into a room which is protected by kōshido 格子戸 (wood blinds). Finally, the tension is relieved as the whole party enters the hospital room and we are now peering through a wooden structure, trying to make out what is going on behind. Throughout this sequence the viewing position is compromised between being intimate with the proceedings but fearing exposure, and being moved to a position of safety which denies us access to the action. With a right-to-left motion, the pillar obstruction serves to break up the frame and, combined with the length of the take (over two minutes), places us again in the position of tsukihanasareta bōkansha.

Let us build on our awareness of this specific device to examine how it is deployed alongside emakimono and kakejiku as part of the vernacular style, working with architectural features and other elements of the production design. In the opening scene, the camera scrolls slowly from right to left, past rooms with scattered door panels into an area where a group of men are frantically bidding at an auction. The camera tracks on, through an empty room, past windows covered by wooden frames before finally embarking on a 180-degree pan into a fade and cut, to a room occupied by two men. We can still hear the shouting, indicating locale, and then realise, through the anguished expressions of the on-screen characters that the auction was forced, and we are in the company of a bankrupt merchant. Keiko McDonald notes how, during this scene, camera movement works in tandem with the building’s interior to give the audience information on both the profession of the owner and our location. McDonald notes that “Mizoguchi
takes full advantage of the typical architecture of a merchant’s house in the Kansai area: narrow in front and deep in back”, and adds that “the camera work piques our curiosity: we want to know what kind of merchant has gone bankrupt, and all the more so, since the single travelling shot has exposed us to the extent of his wealth” (1984, p.46). This is an important observation. She shows how interpretation relies on Japanese cultural and geographical knowledge to build a picture of the merchant’s situation. Already, the viewer is part of a narrative which unfolds through the lateral dolly-shot and recognisable architecture. However, the privilege of a culturally informed perspective is restricted by the relation in which the camera places the viewer to the action. The scene ought, through Japanese eyes, to be familiar, yet this establishing sequence is a process both of recognition and defamiliarisation. Keiko McDonald, as a shrewd Japanese commentator on Mizoguchi’s work, writes: “His vision is keenly observant and so expressive in subtle ways that the native viewer experiences a shock of recognition and of admiration for everyday nuances used with such art”. The “shock of recognition” to which McDonald refers is arguably a function of the tension which has been described above. She concludes that: “In this sense, I think of Mizoguchi’s films as being more challenging to my sense of the Japanese than, say, those of Kurosawa and Ozu” (1984, p.165).

Both the opening and closing scenes of Gion no Shimai deploy camera movement reminiscent of the unrolling of the emakimono. Yet the familiarity of this narrative device to a Japanese audience serves, as McDonald observes, to accentuate the “shock of recognition” of the “every day”. As Burch observes: “The pro-filmic organisation of architectural space is such that the passing lens produces successive tableaux which appear as both discrete and inter-penetrating. This is a major effect of the e-makimono”
(sic) (Burch, 1979, p.229). Incorporating the structure of the emakimono with the architecture of Kansai and the images of wealth, Mizoguchi constructs a dramatic tension between the familiarity of the subject matter and the distanciation of the viewing perspective. With due respect to McDonald, perhaps only a Japanese audience of the period would experience this dramatic disorientation to its full effect. Again the impact of these techniques through the mise en scène is evidence of Mizoguchi’s development of a distinctive vernacular style, which arguably reached it apotheosis in the early 1950s. Before turning attention to two post-war case studies, it is important to document the political and social changes which were attendant upon Japan’s defeat and the American-led occupation, and their impact on the film industry.

**Occupation and Liberation**

On August 15, 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allied forces but within a week, cinemas across Japan were re-opened. However, the problem, as Donald Richie notes, was that the theatres had no films to show:

No wartime pictures were to be shown at all, one of the first orders of the Allied Occupation having been that “national-policy” and military films were to be banned. To enforce this, a number of prints and negatives, including those of *Five Souls* and *Musashi Miyamoto*, were ceremoniously burned by officers of the Eighth Army Headquarters (1966, p.77).

As the occupation began to assert influence on Japanese studios, film-makers were again restricted as to what themes they could portray. On September 22, 1945, the Information Dissemination Section – from this date known as the Civil Information and Education
department (CIE) – called a meeting of all the film production companies in Japan. It was made clear to the assembled ranks of producers, studio heads, directors and officials that a set of directives known as the Film Production Policy Order 映画製作方針指示 were to be put into effect to govern the film industry. As with the edicts of the pre-war Nationalist Government, this legislation would have a strong bearing on the themes that the Japanese cinema would be able to tackle. The occupation forces – Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP) - strongly believed that the Japanese could be re-educated through the media, and that cinema had a crucial role to play. This task was put into the hands of the newly formed CIE, a department which, as Marlene Mayo notes had

the responsibility of making clear to all levels of the Japanese public the true facts of their defeat, their war guilt, the responsibility of the militarists for present and future Japanese suffering and privation and the reason for the objections of the military occupation of the Allied Powers. It was also responsible for keeping the Supreme Commander factually informed of public reactions to the occupation and rehabilitation program in order to ensure a dependable basis for program formulation and modification of policies and plans (in Hirano, 1992, p.34).

The severe restrictions which were imposed upon the industry was nothing new of course. The occupation’s mandate simply carried a different set of rules from those of the imperialists. As before, they were accepted by the film industry with little opposition.

Under the new regulations every script had to be translated and checked before filming could begin. Post-production, the film was checked again by the CCD (Civil Censorship Detachment). The occupation forces would see fit to deny production or release to any film that was:
1. Infused with militarism;
2. Showing revenge as a legitimate motive;
3. Nationalistic;
4. Chauvinistic and anti-foreign;
5. Distorting historical facts;
6. Favoring racial or religious discrimination;
7. Portraying feudal loyalty or contempt of life as desirable and honorable;
8. Approving suicide either directly or indirectly;
9. Dealing with or approving the subjugation or degradation of women;
10. Depicting brutality, violence or evil as triumphant;
11. Anti-democratic;
12. Condoning the exploitation of children;
13. At variance with the spirit or letter of the Potsdam Declaration or any SCAP directive.

(in Hirano, 1992, pp.44-45)

These directives changed the themes of Japanese cinema completely, as SCAP attempted to replace feudalistic mentality with democratic thought. Iwasaki Akira, an anti-imperialist and strong opposer of the 1939 Japanese Film Law notes that, for the industry, satisfying this demand was a major problem. Although the Occupation forces were inspired by enlightened ideals, “they could not understand how the Japanese felt during this period. Leading figures within the Japanese film industry had to try to come to terms with themselves and reflect about their part in the war. Before films could change these individuals had to change, and this required time” (1961, p.218). Iwasaki then goes on to discuss the films of the period, noting that it was a difficult task for scriptwriters and filmmakers to portray subjects which were completely alien to their way of thinking:

Films such as Tanaka’s *Hanzaisha wa Dareka* (*Who is the Criminal*, 1945) as well as Saito’s *Tokyo Gonin Otoko* (*Five Tokyo Men*, 1945), Matsuda’s *Meiji no Kyodai*
(Brothers of Meiji, 1945) and Ushihara’s Machi no Ninkimono (A Popular Man in Town, 1945) were made with respectable effort and are full of good intentions. However, they were immature, ideological ‘themed’ films which were not backed up by the film-makers’ inner passions. They just went ahead with these strange new ideas, dictated to them by outside forces (1961, p.218).

Izuno Chita observes that, for this reason, the early occupation films were widely criticized for their crude simplicity in which “the political ideologies are laid bare” (2009, p.125). Izuno identifies the prevalent tendency for the themes of democracy and female emancipation to be foregrounded at the expense of action and narrative interest. Difficult though these new creative demands may have been for Japanese film-makers, it is important to note that the Japanese did have a say in the manner in which these new ideas were introduced, and directors soon found themselves able to negotiate and to exercise a great deal more creative freedom than they had enjoyed under the Nationalist Government. James Brandon explains that:

> It was basic Occupation policy to leave Japanese institutions in place and to work through them to accomplish Occupation aims. And so Emperor Hirohito remained emperor and the Diet continued to pass laws. Considering that Japan’s military actions in Asia and the Pacific had brought about the deaths of twenty million people, this was a daring policy choice for the American victors (2006, p.6).

Respect for existing institutional and commercial organisation benefitted the film industry. In terms of film production, directors could now argue the case for projects in which they believed in. The notion of the film-maker questioning a decision would have been unthinkable during the period of Imperialist rule. Ray Moore suggests that “the Occupation should not be seen merely as the story of Americans doing things in Japan,
but as Japanese history, with Japanese participants, objectives, and ideas influencing events” (1979, p.723).

Mizoguchi’s own role in this new era for Japanese film was initially a formidable one. Now considered a senior director, he was encouraged to take up the position of union chairman at Shochiku’s Kyoto Studio. However, he was clearly unsuited to the task of representing workers’ interests and did not support their industrial action. His well documented address to union members betrayed his lack of interest in industrial relations: “I am now your union chairman, and therefore I will give you orders. Please be prepared to follow them” (in Yoda, 1970, p.131). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Mizoguchi resigned from the post after just three months.

Away from the political arena, Mizoguchi’s occupation period films (1946-1949) readily embraced the CIE’s desire for more democratic and reformist themes and issues. The women’s trilogy of Josei no Shori, Joyu Sumako no Koi and Waga Koi wa Moenu (Flame of my Love, 1949) strongly advocates female emancipation and the rights of women. Tanaka Kinuyo stars in all three, portraying socially aware, politically charged women. However, despite his evident commitment to the new order, this period was not a successful one for Mizoguchi. The reason for this can be attributed to the fact that as Japan was modernising and changing, Mizoguchi’s film
style remained unchanged, dominated by the one-scene-one-take method and carefully constructed *mise en scène*. A contemporary critic, Uryu Tadao, condemned *Josei no Shori* as “an absolute failure for two reasons: firstly, because of Mizoguchi’s utter ignorance of today’s world, and secondly, for the manner in which the film was ruined by his ‘famous’ one-scene-one-take technique, which has become tiresome” (1947, p.108). Mizoguchi’s established methods however, remained unchanged despite such criticisms. We shall examine the theatrical world of the film *Joyu Sumako no Koi* in greater detail in Chapter Six. For the moment, let us return to our consideration of the influence of Japanese art on his work, in one of Mizoguchi’s most interesting films of this period, *Utamaro o Meguru Gonin no Onna*.

**The People’s Painter**

Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806) is celebrated as one of Japan’s great artists. He was a painter, famed for a style known as *bijinga* 美人画 meaning ‘portraits of beautiful people’. He was a popular artist of the floating-world and his *bijinga* is generally regarded as some of the finest paintings of the female form (Figure 31).

Mizoguchi’s portrayal of the famous painter is arguably one of his most eclectic films, combining comedy, history, tragedy and eroticism. An adaptation of a biographical novel by Kunieda Kanji, the film is a homage to one of Japan’s finest traditional artists. However, Mizoguchi’s treatment of the literary source was widely criticised, notably by the author himself. Kunieda was dismayed at the film’s failure to emphasise “human freedom through the pursuit of eroticism” (in Hirano, 1992, p.97). Despite this, in terms of style and content, *Utamaro* sees Mizoguchi at his most relaxed. His trademark style, so
criticised by Uryu Tadao, along with the film’s use of language, ensures that *Utamaro* remains playful throughout. Saso and Nishida remark that “Mizoguchi finds humour in portraying the contrast between the fun-loving, lively commoners who say things like ‘*okuri itashiya shou*’ お送りいたしやしよう (I’ll see you out) and the serious, rigid *samurai*, Seinosuke (Bando Kotaro) who says things such as ‘*minimairo* 見に参ろう (I’ll come and see)” (2006, p.115). Yoda’s dialogue thus makes much comic mileage from the observation of manners and social distinctions of the Edo era in which the film was set. For example, a *chōnin* would only use the word ‘*mairo* 参ろう as a form of ridicule. The use of language defines a characters’ social code and modes of behaviour. The language used by the *chōnin* in *Utamaro* is brash and audacious. To publicly insult an upper-class *samurai* would result in death. However, Mizoguchi’s *chōnin* are subtle, their methods of ridicule confined within their social group.

*Utamaro o Meguru Gonin no Onna* was a film which challenged the CIE production code. Firstly, it was a *jidaigeki*; secondly, it features a suicide, that of Okita (Tanaka Kinuyo). Considering the film was released just fifteen months after the CIE’s film mandate, it is interesting to consider how Mizoguchi was able to make a film with such themes. In the first place, SCAP took a dim view of the *jidaigeki* film generally, seeing in these dramas “the seeds of feudalism and undemocratic thought” (Anderson and Richie, 1982, p.162). Also, other film-makers had already found their freedom constrained by the new regulations. Kurosawa’s *Tora no o wo Fumu Otokotachi*, (1945 – released in 1952) was made during the last days of the war and was refused release because it had not appeared on the official check list of films in production. Similarly, Ichikawa’s *Musume Dojoji* (1946) was banned because the script had not been submitted to the authorities.
for prior approval. But beyond the strictures of official red tape, many other films fell foul of the ideological imperatives laid down by the CIE. Hirano gives the example of *Machiboke no Onna* (1946), which was directed by Makino Masahiro, from a script by Shindo Kaneto:

The censor David Conde wanted him [Shindo] to change the characterization of the innkeeper to a negative one. Conde was convinced that all “boss” characters must be portrayed as villainous because they exploited their employees and were thus opposed to democracy. The surprised writer protested that, in Japan, one could not apply such a rule across the board. In small scale noodle shops, the proprietors had to work among their employees, doing exactly the same kind of work that they did. Thus not all “bosses” could automatically be portrayed negatively (1992, p.100).

The conflict between the ideological demands of the CIE and film-makers’ fidelity to Japanese cultural norms also affected Mizoguchi’s *Utamaro o Meguru Gonin no Onna*. The script was roundly condemned by the censors for its dubious social morality as a Komatsu work diary entry in 1946 reveals. George Gercke of the CIE stated that the scene in which Okita murders her lover was unacceptable, for “showing a character killing to avenge his failure in love was not desirable because it could influence young people harmfully, even though this particular story was not a contemporary one” (in Hirano, 1992, pp.75-76). But Mizoguchi insisted that “The common man loved Utamaro, he was a great cultural object … a pre-Occupation democrat” (Anderson and Richie, 1982, p.162). The director explained that Utamaro was the people’s painter, and he wanted to celebrate his rebellious spirit during the time when the bakufu were trying to strengthen their feudalistic policy (Yoda, 1970, p.150). Eventually, Mizoguchi managed to negotiate a
deal with the authorities which would allow him to proceed with *Utamaro* if he undertook to make a series of contemporary films which explored the social role of women, in line with official policy. *Utamaro* has received criticism from McDonald, who calls it a “mediocre work by a great director”, (1994, p.74) and Sato who concedes that while the subject matter was suited to Mizoguchi, the result “proved to be a poor film” (2008, p.94). But perhaps the most important claim in support of this film is made by Mellen, who states: “Utamaro opposes tradition” (1976, p.102). Mizoguchi’s *Utamaro*, played by Bando Minosuke is, like other artists such as Saikaku, Chikamatsu and Ueda Akinari, a bunjin 文人. He is a free spirited individual whom Anthony Chambers defines as a nonconformist, independent artist, typically a painter and writer, who, though not a member of the aristocracy, devoted himself or herself to high culture, stood aloof from commercial or political profit, and felt disdain for the “vulgarity” of contemporary society (2007, p.5).

*Utamaro* celebrates this spirit of free-thinking individualism and stands as an important exploration of the challenges faced when confronting the complexities of the social order. Utamaro the artist is at times overconfident, almost aloof to what is going on around him, driven only by his own passion for his art. Kevin O’Brien observes that “Implicit in Mizoguchi’s film is the problem of self-individualization, the issue of gender equality, and the theme of the artist as the person impervious to societal constraints or cultural imperialism” (1995, p.64). Utamaro also scrawls radical messages on his prints; this leads to Seinosuke from the Kano school, challenging him to a duel. The artist dismisses the challenge in nonchalant manner – artists have no time for violence - and proposes a
‘paint-off’ in which, with a few strokes of his brush, he brings to life Seinosuke’s tired portrait. *Utamaro* is a very different type of jidaigeki from the films which preceded and followed it. Production history serves us well here, and examining the social context in which *Utamaro* was made can illuminate the themes and ideas which Mizoguchi was exploring. O’Brien sees a parallel between the social situation of both Utamaro and Mizoguchi. He notes that:

The film transcends its genre by questioning the place of art, women, and the individual simultaneously in both Utamaro and Mizoguchi’s historical contexts. The artist Kitagawa Utamaro lived shortly before the Tokugawa period gave way to the Meiji Restoration; Mizoguchi made his film in 1945-46, just after the Japanese Empire had succumbed to the American Occupation forces (1995, p.64).

The similarity between the two periods is not the only link between the two maverick artists. There is also the relationship between Utamaro and his subjects. He treats his women as if they were otherworldly. His insistence upon precision and perfection is justified by the triumph of his sublime output. Mellen also sees a correlation between the two artists. She observes that of all the women that Utamaro paints in the film, the most captivating is Oran (Kawasaki Hiroko). What is the most important here is Oran’s social stature: she is not of the aristocracy, but a commoner whom Utamaro first sees among a group of female divers. Mellen explains that “Oran is not the daughter of a samurai. The secret of her vitality and beauty, and her value as a subject for Utamaro, lie in her origins among the common people. She is a person of the future” (1976, p.103). Through Utamaro’s paintings, Oran is elevated to a position far above her humble origins. In
transforming her, the artist gives her privileged access to the realm of the floating world. It is tempting to draw parallels here with Mizoguchi’s advancement of Tanaka Kinuyo.

Stylistically, *Utamaro* is in keeping with the cinematic devices I have previously mentioned. The one-scene-one-take method is prevalent throughout, as is the distanciation of the *tsukihanasareta bōkansha* viewing perspective. The latter is especially evident during the scene where Utamaro first lays eyes on Oran. She is one of Lord Matsudaira’s ladies-in-waiting, forced to swim for fish whilst scantily dressed. To inspire his art, Utamaro is taken to the beach where, from a safe distance and hidden in a house further up the shore-line, he watches transfixed as the women undress and begin to swim. Uncharacteristically, during this scene, Mizoguchi uses the close-up shot, framing the beautiful Oran. The only other close-up comes towards the films’ climax, and features Okita. The sparing use of close-ups makes their appearance striking. It is no accident that these shots are employed only in capturing the physical beauty of the two female protagonists.

In 1949, cinema in Japan began to change yet again following the loosening of restrictions regarding film themes. This was primarily due to a decision by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, General Douglas McArthur, who made radical changes in the manner in which the occupation forces ruled Japan. McArthur began to increase the power and autonomy of many Japanese institutions. Film companies were no exception, and as the turbulent decade drew to a close, many film-makers began exploring themes which had previously been deemed unsuitable. The occupation officially came to an end on September 8, 1951, when the San Francisco Peace Treaty was signed by forty-eight
nations. This marked the official end of war, as well as renouncing Japan as an imperial power. The Treaty came into effect on April 28, 1952. During this later stage of his career, Mizoguchi returned to traditional sources and historical settings which had been restricted during the early years of the occupation. His interest in the artistic milieu of the floating world, which began with *Utamaro o Meguru Gonin no Onna*, was developed with adaptations from Saikaku and Chikamatsu which inspired *Ugetsu Monogatari, Sansho Dayu* and *Shin Heike Monogatari (Tales of the Taira Clan, 1955).*

**Musashino Fujin**

As I have noted earlier, *Gion no Shimai* and *Utamaro o Meguru Gonin no Onna* utilise the long-shot and the one-scene-one-take technique with dramatic effect. However, Mizoguchi’s 1951 film *Musashino Fujin* is almost totally reliant upon these methods. He had resigned from Shochiku in 1950 after the studio had exerted censorious control over *Joyu Sumako no Koi*, and had refused to support Mizoguchi’s long term ambition to bring Saikaku’s classic novel *Koushoku Ichidai Onna* (1686) to the screen. Mizoguchi fled to rivals Toho where he made three ‘women’s pictures’ the last of which was *Musashino Fujin*. Critically, the film turned out to be one of Mizoguchi’s less popular offerings. A review by Futaba Juzaburo in a 1951 edition of *Kinema Junpo* notes that the original novel’s theme about a woman’s obsession with her family heritage in the Tokyo suburb known as Musashino becomes lost behind a cheap storyline about a married woman’s affair with a young lover. Futaba, goes on to describe the film as “unnatural”, and comments specifically on Tanaka Kinuyo’s poor accent and the script’s “grotesque” use of words (1951, p.81).
Regarding the plot, Futaba is accurate. Despite obtaining the rights to Ooka Shohei’s bestselling novel, *Musashino Fujin* is certainly not one of Mizoguchi’s better Yoda collaborations. McDonald suggests that this is because Ooka’s “Stendhalian” observations of human psychology, were “too far removed from the sensual, down-to–earth world of fallen women, among who Mizoguchi found his best subjects” (1984, p.99). However, I feel that *Musashino* remains an important picture. As in the cases of *Gubijinso* and *Meito Bijomaru* in Chapter Three, sometimes the lesser works reveal important aspects of film style and preoccupations. Despite its weaknesses at the level of script and plot, *Musashino Fujin* provides an object lesson in the development of what I have termed Mizoguchi’s vernacular style. Chapter Five will examine the film’s relationship with melodrama. But here, the focus will remain on visual style.

As with *Ugetsu Monogatari* (which he made two years later), here the exposition relies upon establishing a relationship between the human and the natural world. McDonald attributes this attention to detail to the director’s fine powers of observation. She notes that by maintaining a constantly moving camera and various shot angles and sizes, “Mizoguchi shows us individual parts of the *mise en scène* – tall trees, streams, narrow paths and the old hedge of Michiko’s house – in a way that brings the Musashino Plain to life” (McDonald, 1984, pp.100-101). This introduction is important because, as I shall show, Musashino’s natural surroundings are used to indicate the fate of the protagonists. *Musashino Fujin* contains emotional hardship and illicit love. Michiko (Tanaka Kinuyo) and Tsutomu (Katayama Akihiko) are walking together through Musashino (Figure 32). Michiko is in a loveless marriage and Tsutomu, her cousin, has returned from the war. Although she is seemingly oblivious to his romantic feelings towards her, the walk finally
reveals his feelings through images of nature and spatial distance. Here, Mizoguchi sets up a series of dramatic contrasts between the unfolding relationship and signs of foreboding in the surrounding landscape. As the pair walk, we are at first witness to polite conversation. However as they proceed along a path, again shot in emakimono style from right to left, we see a stream flowing quickly from left to right against the action. This is the first indication that Michiko and Tsutomu are following a course which is against the natural flow. In fact, all the elements of the shot are moving in opposition to the couple, from the leaves which gently move with the breeze obstructing the view at the top right of shot, to the washerwoman’s hand motion. Mizoguchi confirms this idea of opposites with a close-up of the river: the reeds in the water are streaming in the same direction, counter to their own progress.

Mason, in her study of the relationship between poetry, prose and narrative techniques of the emakimono notes that:

The most important attribute of a scroll is the leftward direction in which both the text and the illustrations are viewed. When analysing a short pictorial surface, we tend to see it as a whole and to forget the motions involved in normal scroll viewing, but in doing so we risk overlooking nuances of meaning (1980, p.23).
The emphasis throughout *Musashino* is upon movement established through a series of pans and tracking-shots which rehearse the process of unrolling the *emakimono* scroll. As in *Gion no Shimai*, here the utilisation of social space, the long take, the lingering shot, camera movement and pace, all define a specific and recognisable mode of apprehension. Again here, an effective tension is maintained between an audience’s emotional empathy with the characters and the perspectives from which their drama is viewed. Nowhere is this more powerfully conveyed than in the following scene.

The most poignant moment occurs when the couple cross the bridge onto a riverbank, overgrown with wild reeds. As the pair traverse the bridge, hand in hand, we can see their reflections. Michiko and Tsutomu’s social and moral constraints are momentarily represented by their reflection on the water’s surface, which of course disappear as they set foot on the bank. Their socially restricted and repressed selves disappear below the water’s surface. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the bridge stands metaphorically as a crossing-point from everyday existence, into a place that is unkempt, wild and chaotic. Michiko, as she steps on the bank, takes a long glancing look toward the other side of the river, in quiet contemplation of her past (Figure 33). From this moment on, life will not be the same,
especially for her. An audience’s understanding of their circumstances is writ large in the *mise en scène* well before they speak. However, nature here does not function in the manner of pathetic fallacy; rather, the landscape provides an impassive commentary upon their destiny. Indeed this is revealed by Tsutomu’s vain attempt to take inspiration from nature in declaring his feelings for Michiko: “Musashino is so natural and wild. But it is also gentle; it is free, spontaneous, unforced, bursting with health, full of life and unspoilt”. By using the word Musashino, Tsutomu is of course referring to Michiko and at last, in this wild and unordered landscape, Tsutomu’s feelings are revealed.

It is also important to note the physical distance between Michiko and Tsutomu. During the first segments of the ‘stroll scene’ we can clearly see that there is a significant gap between the pair. However, as they reach the riverbank, the distance has become significantly smaller. Michiko appears to be tentatively abandoning her past life for one of uncertainty and hardship with Tsutomu. Through the earlier imagery, Mizoguchi has given us a foretelling of such actions; we know that this relationship will have to contend with the natural flow and direction of life. As in *Gion no Shimai*, the viewer take up the position of *tsukihanasareta bōkansha*, and we are frequently positioned as eavesdroppers on the couple’s developing relationship, either watching from the opposite riverbank or from behind greenery.

**Conclusion**

With a complex array of camera movement and metaphorical images, Mizoguchi created work which is visually rich but at the same time deeply challenging. His mature work is such that the audience becomes so emotionally involved that the outcomes of his films
can leave one exhausted and drained. But, as I have argued, for a Japanese audience, Mizoguchi’s films take on an even stronger and more poignant meaning. By experiencing them from a perspective which is culturally inflected, his films transcend the simplistic notions of the sacrificial woman or the plight of the lower classes, and become works which examine and critique society. What we experience are a series of confrontational issues which force a viewer to take a moral position.

As I have noted earlier, this distanciation of the viewer is frequently countered by the emotional pull of the central relationships, often placing the spectator in a position of moral ambiguity. I have explained how the process of *tsukihanareta bōkansha* is structured through camera-work and framing inspired by traditional Japanese art. In the next chapter, we need to attend to the emotional appeal for contemporary Japanese audiences of the melodramatic form.
Chapter Five
Mizoguchi and Melodrama

Introduction

Thus far I have pursued an analysis which has identified the extensive and suggestive use of a range of residual motifs from Japanese visual art as elements of what might be called a vernacular visual style in the films of Mizoguchi. In the previous chapter this analysis has arrived at the suggestion that the development of this mode might involve a specifically Japanese mode of apprehension – a dominant viewing position which is determined by framing, camerawork and mise en scène, and by the tension established between the familiarity of certain cultural motifs and the defamiliarisation of the viewing perspective. In this chapter, I shall go on to explore some of the origins of this vernacular style. But I shall begin with an examination of what was arguably Mizoguchi’s most familiar form, melodrama.

On the face of it melodrama appears to be an entirely foreign influence upon Japanese film culture. In order for an essentially non-native cultural form to take root and grow it must find some fertile soil within the dominant culture. Catherine Russell proposes that “national identity in Japan has a particularly melodramatic structure”. What does she mean by this? She argues that melodrama “has deep roots in Japanese cultural history and may even be said to dominate Japanese cinema as a kind of metagenre” (in Dissanayake, 1993, p.143). Russell traces the origins of melodrama to the bunraku and kabuki plays of the Tokugawa Period, and shares the commonly held view that it, like western melodrama, was attendant upon the rise of the bourgeois class. By the time of
the Meiji Restoration, the melodramatic mode was firmly inscribed in literary culture. When Mizoguchi entered Nikkatsu Mukoujima studios in 1920, the influence of western melodrama had already been present since the late 1890s. Sato notes that the earliest literary melodrama *Hototogisu* by Tokutomi Roka (published in 1898), played a part in the development of the genre in Japan. He states that the book was important because although it still contained feudalistic values, it was one of the first Japanese texts to feature female worship and man’s ideal to devote himself to a woman, something that was not commonplace in Japanese society (2006, p.42). McDonald also notes that:

> The beginnings of Mizoguchi’s lifelong fascination with the sufferings of women also date from this formative period. The melodramatic Meiji novelist Kyoka was especially important, since he depicted male-female relationships in a sentimental yet consciously aesthetic style. His theme was the female heart’s devotion rewarded by unrequited love (1984, p.18).

By the early 1900s, under the influence of Roka and Kyoka, western melodrama was beginning to find audiences through translated texts and cinematic adaptation and gender roles in literature, theatre and cinema began to change. Here, as MacDonald notes, it was the contemporary novel and the growth of *shimpa* theatre during the Meiji period, which provided the conditions in which the melodramatic mode could flourish. And, as the cinema developed, its popular narratives found appropriate subjects in literary and theatrical styles of the period.

Mizoguchi, like his contemporaries, embraced the popularity of melodrama, which the film studios were keen to exploit. Yet Mizoguchi’s melodramatic mode, which was well established from a number of *shimpa* melodramas produced in the 1930s, became more
sophisticated in the post-war period, as a means of examining darker social themes. In films such as *Yuki Fujin Ezu*, *Oyu-Sama* and *Musashino Fujin*, his women are emotionally beaten, his men childish and self-obsessed, his youths petulant and impetuous; works such as these prove useful in assessing Mizoguchi’s development of the melodramatic mode in storylines and characterisation. However, before I proceed to examine Mizoguchi’s deployment of the melodramatic mode, it is worth pausing to consider further some semantic issues concerning definition.

Dissanayake warns:

> Although we may use the term melodrama to characterize some types of Asian cinema, it is well to remind ourselves that none of the Asian languages has a synonym for this word. Such terms as we find in modern usage are recent coinages based on the English word (1993, p.3).

Iwamoto agrees that “Melodrama is a foreign word and there was no connection with Japanese traditional art or culture before Meiji” (2007, p.34). How then, does this accord with Russell’s location of Japanese melodrama in the Tokugawa period? Although she admits that the *bunraku* and *kabuki* plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon “are not usually described as melodrama”, she identifies these as “narratives of great emotional intensity, heightened by music, gesture and *mise en scène*” (in Dissanayake, 1993, p.144). From this Russell defines the central dynamic of Japanese melodrama where “the unspeakable realm of desire is an emotionally charged expression of national identity that escapes realist modes of representation and is displaced into a discourse of excess” (in Dissanayake, 1993, p.144). In this way Russell claims that the form, if not the term, is
fundamental to the ethnocentricity of Japaneseness. Russell is right to identify some similarities which exist between the traditional arts and the melodramatic mode, such as over-dramatic acting or the emphasis of certain behaviour – the faint for example - which can be traced back to traditional theatre. Iwamoto also sees these connections, noting the “similarities with kabuki, in terms of melodrama’s composition, theme and stage structure” (2007, p.34).

**Early Melodrama**

Though few have survived, Mizoguchi’s earliest films from the 1920s were by all accounts an eclectic mixture of styles and genres. However, already the influence of shimpa style drama was evident in titles such as *Furusato no Uta* (*Song of Home*, 1925) and *Kamingyo Haru no Sasayaki*. As noted earlier, there followed the Kyoka adaptation trilogy: *Nihonbashi, Taki no Shiraito* and *Orizuru Osen* - three films where Mizoguchi’s melodramatic mode begins to take shape. This trilogy, along with other works of the time such as *Gubijinso*, offers a complex range of emotional hardships within a society which is changing structurally, but is still rooted in feudal thinking. Each of these melodramas works upon a dramatic tension between feudal tradition and the impact of modernity. This theme reached its apotheosis in Mizoguchi’s celebrated Kansai films of the mid-1930s, *Naniwa Ereji* and *Gion no Shimai*, which have been addressed in previous chapters.

The structuring principles of tradition, such as *sempai-kōhai* 先輩後輩 (relationships in a vertical hierarchy), *ryōsaikenbo* 良妻賢母 (good wives, wise mothers) and *bushidō* remained strong within Japanese society in the first decades of the twentieth century. Reischauer suggests this ideology was still prevalent due to the longevity of feudal rule. He
notes that this can be seen in the military traditions of the early 1900s, which assumed that military men were more honest than civilians and therefore had a right to political authority. He also goes on to remark of **sempai-kōhai** relationships that, “Even today there are survivals in the strong master-disciple and boss-client relationships to be found in certain areas of Japan” (1990, p.47.)

The popular cinema in which Mizoguchi forged a career drew upon melodramatic devices and romantic stories, which often employed traditional frameworks and characters but represented them in modern guises. The drama often arose from this clash of cultural values. For example, his narratives frequently challenge the traditions of **ryōsaikenbo**, as many female characters are caught between relationships, are unmarried, or inhabit sub-cultural worlds which are on the fringes of conventional society. Implicitly or explicitly such heroines struggle against the modern legacy of this feudal mentality, acting not out of duty for the collective values but individualistically.

An example of this feisty female protagonist is Osen (*Orizuru Osen*). She is rebellious; she uses and challenges men. Her place is not in the home and she is far removed from the Japanese ideal of **ryōsaikenbo**. However, this attitude only accounts for the first half of the film. Later she begins to soften and eventually sacrifices herself for a man, in the same manner as we saw with Shiraito, another outcast I examined earlier. Osen was outspoken, and her manner petulant. Yet neither her rebellion nor her devotion to Sokichi (Natsukawa Daijiro), whom she saves from suicide, are driven by passion. Indeed, her relationship is one of kinship rather than romantic love. At one point Sokichi tells her, “You are like my mother and my older sister”. Yet the comfort she offers only draws her
back with him into the underworld of crime and prostitution, which ultimately claims her life. The melodramatic vices of the film draw out the stories pathos effectively. Technically the daring flashback structure and the comparatively fluid use of close-ups elicit sympathy, and wring every ounce of emotion from the doom-laden narrative of decline and fall. And Yamada’s compelling study of vulnerability and stoicism culminates in a descent into syphilitic madness, which robs her even of the recognition of her own fate.

Mizoguchi’s leading women, whether they are submissive or rebellious, are invested with a moral dignity which is born of long suffering and endurance. Their personal tragedies frequently condemn them either to death, or to a life of resignation, conformity or monastic contemplation. Yet their expressions of self assertion often, if only temporarily, threaten the established order. Traditional hierarchies and codes of behaviour are challenged by their actions and the repercussions which ensue. The rise and often tragic fall of these women is charted in melodramas in which the heroines remain unequivocally centre stage. The director frequently portrays these conformists and rebels by emblematic contrasts. On one side exists the traditional stereotype and on the other the sexual predator, opinionated and impossible to control. Examples of this are to be found in Miyagi and Wakasa in *Ugetsu Monogatari* and Michiko (Tanaka Kinuyo) and Tomiko (Todoroki Yukiko) in *Musashino Fujin*. In both cases there exists a representation of the familiar female role through Miyagi and Michiko - loyal, subservient and conformist. By contrast Wakasa and Tomiko are overtly sexualised, driven by personal desires which let nothing stand in their way; these are characters of forthright manner in that they use their sexual power knowingly for their own ends, or as a means of survival. The melodrama’s power resides, paradoxically, in our emotional identification with the heroine’s rebellion.
and suffering, and our complicity with the society which ultimately condemns her for her transgression. Mizoguchi’s women, conformists and rebels alike, frequently end up desperate, lonely, guilty, disgraced or dead. Though often the agents of change, they alter nothing. They are damned irrespective of the lives which they have led.

**Japanese Melodrama**

Sato notes that the standard western melodrama usually featured characters who were aristocrats who, to a Japanese audience, were not socially recognisable (2006, p.50). But in common with cinema in Europe and America, early Japanese film-makers drew on nineteenth-century romantic literature for its wealth of popular narratives with emotional appeal, especially to women. The literature of the Meiji period under its own western influence adapted traditional Japanese and contemporary stories into melodramatic structures. By the time the Japanese cinema began to exploit the potential of these popular novels and plays, western melodrama had arguably been effectively assimilated into a distinctively Japanese cultural form. However, popular though the *shimpa* style films quickly became, film-makers had to tread carefully in their choice of subject and the manner of its treatment, for reasons of public decency and propriety. The glorification of romance, which melodrama relied upon, sat uncomfortably with some Japanese audiences. In Japan, traditionally a partner was chosen by parents or elders and it was accepted that one did not generally marry through romantic liaison. Therefore films which featured dramatic love stories would be seen by a typical Japanese audience as uncomfortable, unrealistic and immoral. They strongly believed that public expression of romantic feeling was immoral and should be confined to those lower orders of society, where it could be codified and controlled: especially the underworld of *geisha* society.
Thus Japanese melodrama usually featured characters that existed outside of normal societal constraints. In Japan, as in the west, cinema quickly became notorious for celebrating the escapades of those immoral under-classes.

Mizoguchi’s films, some of which I have already explored, are rich with these types of characters which can be seen in works such as: Gion no Shimai which features geisha, Zangiku Monogatari with its gēnin 芸人 (performers or entertainers), Taki no Shiraito featuring tejinashi 手品師 (magicians) and Joyu Sumako no Koi which features haiyū 俳優 (actors/actresses). The colourful characters who inhabit these circumscribed and carefully drawn demi-mondes are eccentric, comical, salacious, disreputable, criminal and impoverished but are all able to lead a life free from the strictures of social convention. They fall in love, are outspoken, swear, steal, gamble and are shocking and unashamed. But the entertainment provided by their earthy stories of human frailty could be enjoyed by respectable audiences without fear of taint or corruption, and this compelling other-worldliness which cinema presented was also capable of revealing deeper social concerns to those who might choose to look for them.

Melodrama emphasises the pressures and desperation of human life through the lives of other social classes or types, thus presenting its foolish or forlorn protagonists in emblematic relief. Its emotions are universal, its characters are recognisable yet comfortably remote, and its pleasures are vicarious. Melodrama’s moral schema is exploited for its emotional payoff. Its minor tragedies are propagated by human actions and small vanities: failed love, infidelity, family difficulties, death and illness are all the staples of melodrama. Therefore what is seen are universally recognised emotions.
displaced into situations experienced by unfamiliar social types. Within narratives such as these there must be a suffering protagonist and, unlike in high tragedy, both in the west and in Japan, this figure is usually a woman. Often suffering for her beliefs or honour, loyalty or steadfastness, the Japanese melodramatic heroine has one disadvantage. Convention forbids her to confront her problems with displays of violence or emotion: such expressions of individuality are frowned upon. This concept of suffering is, as Dissanayake observes, “pivotal to the discourse of film melodrama in Asian cultures” (1991, p.4). Examples of such behaviour can be seen in characters such as Shinano Yuki in *Yuki Fujin Ezu*, Oyu in *Oyu Sama* and Akiyama Michiko in *Musashino Fujin*. Each is shackled by society’s constraints and unwritten expectations, wherein conformity is achieved through suffering, and where self-assertion and rebellion result in exclusion. These inner struggles may be conceptualised in terms of Japanese values by the concepts of *honne* and *tatemae*.

**Honne** and **tatemae** are often considered a dichotomy, contrasting genuinely-held personal feelings and opinions with those that are socially approved. The terms are crucial in understanding why Mizoguchi’s women suffer in silence, and the concepts offer us an insight into a distinctive aspect of Japanese melodrama. **Honne** is an individual’s deep motive or intention, while **tatemae** refers to motives or intentions that are socially-attuned - those that are shaped, encouraged, or suppressed by social norms (Davies and Ikeno, 2002, p.115). As I have already established in examining the concepts of **giri** and **ninjō**, the dialectical relationship in Japanese society between behaviour which is socially approved and that which is inspired by personal feelings is an issue which Mizoguchi frequently explored throughout his work. *Taki no Shiraito, Naniwa Ereji* and
Saikaku Ichidai Onna for example, all feature characters who are expressive and emotional individuals. Their honne is ascendant, and because of this their fate is sealed. The choices these characters face could be read simply as whether to succumb to their emotional drives. Ultimately, however, the decision has deeper connotations in a society which does not forgive such acts of emotional individualism very easily. Lady Wakasa, Ayako and Oharu all choose their fate and it is at these junctures in the film’s narratives where their tragic trajectories are set in motion. Other characters are motivated more by the social obligation to conformity these females include Shiraito, Oyu and Michiko, however in Mizoguchi’s melodramas even women who observe the principal of tatemae are not immune to lives of hardship and injustice, at the hands of men and society.

The dramatic tension in character and narrative between honne and tatemae underpins almost all of Mizoguchi’s melodrama in this way. The western form has been incorporated into an essentially Japanese moral sensibility; melodrama becomes part of the vernacular style. It is important that we examine how this form is realised through performance by reference to some key examples. In the previous chapter, I looked at Musashino Fujin in terms of its visual composition, but it also provides a useful illustration of Mizoguchi’s mature melodrama.

Musashino Fujin

Previous films leading up to Musashino Fujin had seen Mizoguchi dealing with a milieu with which he was socially familiar - strong women, seedy nightlife and red light districts, ochaya and geisha. This was the world, critics agree, that Mizoguchi brought to the screen most effectively. By contrast, Musashino examines the destruction of a
contemporary middle-class family through deceit and lies. Through the character of Tsutomu, Mizoguchi explores topical generational issues relating directly to Japan’s recovery from the aftermath of war. Tsutomu plays a returning Burmese prisoner of war camp returnee who frequents western-style cafés, where he feels at home amongst the local teenagers and University students. The screenwriter Yoda notes that the director (by then in his early fifties), struggled to represent this modern world effectively and indicates how such scenarios were foreign to him: “He couldn’t capture or represent the characteristics, heart and feeling of the post-war young”. Yoda adds that “the world of Musashino Fujin is different. It is purer and Mizoguchi was not good at this kind of representation” (1970, pp.205-206). However, Musashino is the most politically aware of the trilogy of contemporary films about upper-middle-class women (adapted from best-selling fiction), which Mizoguchi made in the first two years of the 1950s. In a Japan coming to terms with the post-war settlement, the film explores fragmented relationships and the strains of behavioural conventions of young and old, in the context of changing social expectations and sexual taboo. The focus of these changes is the character of Michiko, a female protagonist torn between personal desire and the expectations of conformity.

The film begins during the latter days of World War Two, as we are introduced to the Miyaji family living in Musashino. Mizoguchi presents the key characters meticulously, the dialogue establishing early character and milieu. The opening is also crucial to the events that follow. These early sections allow Mizoguchi to rehearse established Japanese ideals. For example, through Michiko, the director is stressing the importance of tradition, of family values and of continuity of ryōsaikenbo. Michiko and Tadao (Mori Masayuki) are
married, and we first see them in a long shot walking away from the still-smouldering bomb damage of the Tokyo backdrop. Their distress is evident and the audience soon learns that they are moving back to Michiko’s family home in Musashino after their home in the city has been destroyed. We are introduced to Michiko’s parents, neighbours, cousin Eiji (Yamamura So) a munitions factory owner, and his wife Tomiko. Yoda’s script establishes the key relationships swiftly and economically here. On suggestion that a bomb shelter should be built, the family begins to construct one. Whilst digging however, a skull is found. Noting that this would be the skull of an ancestor of Musashino, Michiko’s mother declares that it is a bad omen. This discovery precipitates a chain of dramatic events and emotional turmoil, as first Michiko’s mother and then her father pass away, and the individual motives of Tadao, Eiji and Tomiko become evident. The parents’ deaths mark a turning point in the film and are the dramatic catalyst for the events which follow; Michiko is now alone, and the family’s Musashino home is her responsibility.

The parents’ demise is swift and unceremonious. LeFanu suggests that “we need to know more about how their deaths ‘hit’ Michiko than the movie allows” (2008, p.146). But here LeFanu overlooks the tendency for the expression of personal grief to be suppressed in Japanese melodrama. What the parents’ peremptory dispatch reveals is the need for the family to move on, in what may be read as an act of disavowal. We discover all we need to know about Michiko’s response from the scene where she is alone, mourning beside her father’s body at the butsudan 仏壇 (a Buddhist shrine usually found in homes). She states: “There are no morals anymore, but I will never forget what you taught me father. I’m doing my best to keep the Miyaji family going”. Michiko is denied time to mourn because she is quickly overwhelmed by her husband’s and cousin’s wranglings over money and
property at her Father’s wake. Eiji congratulates Tadao on the assumption he has inherited the family home. However, Tadao reveals, dejectedly, “Michiko inherited everything”. Already their motives are questionable; divisions, separation and self-interest are rife. Although Tadao insists that money and property ownership are not his concern, this Chekhovian scene offers the first glimpse of the social corruption beneath the surface of this refined milieu, and sets the tone for ensuing events.

When Michiko’s younger cousin Tsutomu returns from war, the story becomes more complex, and relies upon the viewer’s knowledge of what has gone before in order to pull the plot strands together. Tsutomu is infatuated by Michiko and though this is not openly declared, it is obvious through his body language and visual clues (as highlighted in Chapter Four). Such hints are sufficient indication to an audience that Tsutomu’s adulterous thoughts, in such a rigid society, have no place. Tsutomu’s love for Michiko and the sexual tension between them is, at times, almost unbearable. Michiko’s feelings for her cousin are only outweighed by social codes and conventions, such as loyalty to her deceiving husband, and the promise made to her dead father.

Musashino’s complex narrative, claustrophobic family struggle and exposé of social and personal morality, presents a useful example of Mizoguchi’s mature melodramatic mode. Of course, the relationship between Tsutomu and the much older Michiko could add strength to the argument for Musashino as a classic melodramatic text. Its tragic narrative of female self-denial finds echoes in Sirk’s All That Heaven Allows (1955). Indeed, as Russell notes, “western melodrama is an expression of latency and interiority, an eruption that takes place on the surface of discourse which points in its very excessiveness to
something that escapes representation” (in Dissanayake, 1993, p.144). By contrast Russell finds that “the ‘unspeakable’, or more precisely, ‘unseeable’ interiority of classical Japanese film melodrama may best be characterised as an ethnographic realm of desire” (in Dissanayake, pp.145-146). By rejecting Tsutomu, Michiko has not sinned against her husband, or broken the promise to her parents. Nonetheless she is still condemned for her liaison in the eyes of her family. They assume that she has had sex with Tsutomu thus breaking her marriage vow and dishonouring her husband. The rumours of the scandal soon circulate more widely and Michiko becomes a topic of gossip and whisper. The fact that we are privileged to know that there is no sexual relationship between the pair, does not diminish our sympathies towards Michiko. Her social responsibility, despite temptation, is honoured yet she is damned as a disloyal wife. It is useful to locate this melodramatic irony, as McDonald does, in the context of the changing views about adultery in Japanese society of the period: “The film is set in the heady democratic climate of post-war Japan, a time when a number of such crimes were taken out of the statutes, along with their feudal penalties” (McDonald, 1984, p.100). An audience appreciates that the judgments made of Michiko are unfair and harsh. Our sympathy for her is increased by her husband’s plan to elope with Eiji’s wife Tomiko who has, driven by money and greed, seduced Tadao and forced him to steal the deeds to the family home.

In the Mizoguchian melodrama then, thwarted desires and societal pressure are experienced to some extent by all characters irrespective of gender. We should not be surprised that melodrama was so popular with female audiences at the cinema in both the United States and Japan in the first half of the 1950s. The conditions under which melodrama may thrive depend upon the frustrations of female aspiration, in periods
when established social conventions are under threat. Arguably, the aftermath of the Second World War provided the catalyst for social upheaval in both countries. However, not only was Japan more devastated and traumatised by the conflict and the ensuing occupation; much more was at stake in terms of the deeply ingrained social conventions and gender divisions. Contemporary Japanese melodramas addressed these tensions repeatedly, not only in the mature work of Mizoguchi, but demonstrably in the films of Naruse also. Despite its critics, Musashino is the Mizoguchi film of this period which addresses these themes most conspicuously.

The contrasting representations of female desire in Tomiko and Michiko may be related back to the Japanese concepts of honne and tatemae are complex and diverse. As noted above, this is an example where the female characters are contrasted emblematically. In fact McDonald criticises Yoda’s script for this, complaining that “the characters come to represent moral positions more than actual human beings” (1984, p.100). In this way Michiko represents honour and loyalty, while Tomiko demonstrates greed and self-interest. Yet what McDonald identifies as a weakness actually reinforces the emotional power of the melodramatic mode. Indeed, the ultimate display of honour and self-sacrifice is made at the film’s dramatic climax, when Michiko takes the potassium cyanide pill which was given to her by the army in the event of US invasion. She changes her will and, leaving everything to Tsutomu, the Miyaji family name lives on. This melodramatic dénouement rehearses the principle of self-sacrifice for the honourable cause of respectability and tradition. To this end, Michiko accords with Haskell’s definition of the melodramatic heroine: an ordinary middle-class woman who falls victim to societal
pressures and prejudice. Pam Cook builds upon Haskell’s model, which offers four thematic categories for the melodramatic heroine:

Sacrifice (the woman must give up whatever is most important to her for the sake of moral order); Affliction (the woman is struck down by illness/misfortune as atonement for transgression - her own and other’s); Choice (the woman is faced with a choice between her two suitors, representing two different ways of life); and Competition (women compete for the attention/love of the hero, often discovering in confrontation that they prefer one another to him) (in Landy, 1991, p.252).

It is interesting to compare Cook’s categories with the model of Mizoguchian melodrama. The Sacrificial female character is most prevalent here with Michiko, Oyu and Shiraito, whilst the life of Osen is dogged by Affliction; but interestingly examples of Choice and Competition are rare. This must be attributed to the comparative subjugation of women in Japanese society where freedom to exercise choice or enter competition was rare, even amongst the sophisticated middle-classes of the post-war era. Moreover, as Mizoguchi’s contemporary melodramas make clear, the ideological purchase of the traditional concepts of *giri* and *wa*, and the social responsibility to maintain the balance of *honne* and *tatemae*, clearly privilege melodramatic modes rooted in notions of duty, honour and sacrifice. An understanding of the way in which these traditional values ascribed to Japanese personal conduct and social life serve to underpin Mizoguchi’s popular melodramas, is arguably more useful than specifically gendered readings usually provided. Sato indicates the deeply ingrained nature of these concepts within Japanese society. He notes that from childhood stories, Japanese children were taught that the *egregious home breaker* in romance was always the *baddie*, whose overt expression of feelings of love was considered *dirty*. Young people, and especially young women, therefore, had a lingering
memory of this childhood taboo. They were disturbed by such romantic melodramas and yet at the same time were excited by the possibility of liberation from feudalistic tradition which perceived this type of illicit romance as bad (in Imamura et al, 1985, p.26).

Clearly, female characters are at the centre of Mizoguchi’s melodramas and his interest in women as subjects has preoccupied many critics. Mizoguchi is reported to have had ‘difficult’ personal relationships with women. Audie Bock in her book Japanese Film Directors addresses some of the complexities of his relationships. As a child, poverty had forced his father to sell his sister Suzu, seven years his elder, to a geisha house. His mother died when he was seventeen and Mizoguchi parted company with his father, becoming closer to his sister upon who he remained financially dependent until well into his directorial career. In 1925, his Kyoto mistress Ichijo Yuriko attempted to murder him in a fit of rage at his drinking and neglect. He met his wife Saga Chieko in 1926 in an Osaka dance hall where she worked. Estranged from her own husband, she was connected with a Kobe yakuza who eventually granted permission for their union. But their relationship was plagued by difficulties, not least Mizoguchi’s drinking, long absences and alleged liaisons with prostitutes. In 1942, during the shooting of the second part of Genroku Chushingura, Chieko’s already fragile health (congenital syphilis) descended, like that of Mizoguchi’s Osen, into insanity. Devastated by her demise and bereft of her support, Mizoguchi moved in with her sister’s family. This lifelong pattern of emotional dependency upon strong women and the glamour of their underworld connections could easily be read into his filmic oeuvre, as an explanatory model. However, Saso warns us about the perils of such simple analogies:
If Mizoguchi bullied women in reality, well that is another story, but as a film director he always portrayed his stories from the perspective of an oppressed woman. Perhaps his upbringing had a lot to do with this theme ... For example, Mizoguchi would visit prostitutes regularly, and there are accounts that amongst them he preferred the lowest kind ... in other words he saw things from the bottom of the social scale ... I think you can see this perspective throughout his career ... Although it is difficult to separate the two, Mizoguchi as a man and Mizoguchi as an artist are not necessarily the same; we should be careful not to confuse them (personal communication, September 20, 2010).

Clearly from this, it would be possible to develop a psychological analysis to account for the contradictions and complexities in Mizoguchi’s views about women on and off the screen. But, as Saso suggests, such an approach risks eliding art and life in a manner in which is ultimately unproductive. Arguably, biographically-informed interpretations of his films may be as reductive as those accounts which apply feminist theory in a ham-fisted manner. Even contemporary reviewers questioned such interpretations. In a 1941 article on Mizoguchi for *Eiga no Tomo*, Hazumi Tsuneo wrote:

> It is undeniable that he is a master of portraying women. Some people say he is feminist, or in contrast that he is anti-feminist but I strongly disagree with both views. His films reveal that he is merely, though supremely, a keen observer of women (1941, p.138).

The preoccupation with Mizoguchi’s women also tends to detract from the male characters in his melodramas.

Mizoguchi’s men, although often misguided, selfish, self-serving, greedy and childish, also offer insights into codes of masculinity and Mizoguchi’s critique of the Japanese social
order. Melodrama serves perfectly to highlight gender divisions and this social critique. It works on multiple levels. For example, in *Musashino*, Tsutomu hides his feelings for Michiko until the moment when he attempts to force himself on her at the inn where the pair seek shelter from the rain. Here his motivations are ambiguous and his behaviour is characterised by an extreme emotional immaturity. Yet the suppression of his emotions up until this moment are determined by his situation. Michiko is his married cousin and socially *tatemae* demands that his feelings are kept hidden in order to maintain the *wa* within the household. His advances at the inn, where he finally gives in to temptation, mark a breach of the social order as he is unable to control his *honne*. He has, by expressing himself in such a manner, rejected *tatemae* in favour of personal gratification and self-satisfaction. Mizoguchi presents this sexual confrontation audaciously, with a salaciousness which is only tempered by Michiko’s principled rejection of Tsutomu. The result is a provocative critique of frustrated desires and repressive social conventions. In this way the melodramatic mode is incorporated by Mizoguchi as a way of exploring and critiquing contemporary Japanese society.

The difficulties in reading the intricacies of Japanese films have been referred to throughout this work. An awareness of deeply ingrained social codes and conventions is paramount in gaining a richer understanding of the Mizoguchian melodrama. The denial of desire is something that runs through many of his films of the post-war era, contemporary and period dramas alike. The themes of self-denial and sacrifice give the popular post-war melodramas an acute contemporary relevance. Characteristically, however, Mizoguchi resists either explicit moral condemnation of transgression or an uncritical endorsement of romantic rebellion. Rather in his most effective melodramas
(including *Musashino Fujin*), Mizoguchi identifies transformations in the social order as having a profound effect upon the behaviour of individuals. The upheavals of war, liberation, occupation, and the increased freedom of expression clearly had an impact upon traditional codes of behaviour in Japanese life. The moral dilemmas thrown up by such changes are arguably the real focus of interest in Mizoguchi’s best work in this genre. This is not because the melodrama is a graphically realistic form; on the contrary, *Musashino* in terms of its setting and characters does not give us a fully accurate portrayal of typical post-war Japanese life. What the melodramatic mode does give us, however, is an emotionally candid access to the moral complexities of the Japanese way of life at this time. Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro notes that, “In the film circles of post-war Japan, melodrama was associated with the lack of individualism and the denial of the self” (in Dissanayake, 1993, p.107). It is in this context that the melodrama was re-invigorated at this time, casting off its tired shimpa traditions, and engaging with the contemporary world, albeit in a coded and formulaic manner. We might compare this moment with, for example, the function of Gainsborough melodramas in Britain in the 1940s. As a popular form, melodrama provided a potent form of emotional displacement for contemporary desires and fears.

**Mizoguchi and the Floating World**

Mizoguchi’s films of the 1950s represent the mature phase of his career and his most consistent period of creative achievement, which gained him international recognition for the first time. This success can be attributed in part to his move to the Daiei Company in 1953, which reunited him with producer Nagata Masaichi who guaranteed him creative freedom. Here he continued his fruitful collaboration screenwriter Yoda Yoshikata and
formed a productive partnership with director of photography Miyagawa Kazuo. The best films of this period demonstrate the integration of a sophisticated *mise en scène* rooted in a Japanese artistic tradition, with a melodramatic rendition of stories which provide a candid commentary on Japanese life. *Ugetsu Monogatari, Uwasa no Onna, Sansho Dayu* and *Chikamatsu Monogatari* exhibit a *mise en scène* which is crafted in an almost painterly manner, and constructed with painstaking precision. In stark contrast, the characters that inhabit these worlds are troubled, displaying extreme emotional turmoil and inner conflict. Visually, these films present a stylistic counterpoint to their melodramatic narratives.

In this mature phase of his career, Mizoguchi showed himself to be almost as adept at handling *gendai geki* in works such as *Oyu Sama, Musashino Fujin* and *Akasen Chitai* (*Street of Shame, 1956*), as he was with the *jidaigeki* of *Saikaku Ichidai Onna, Ugetsu Monogatari* and *Chikamatsu Monogatari*. Now it seemed that Mizoguchi was able to relay narratives that spoke to audiences in the 1950s much in the same way as Makino’s ‘tendency’ films, such as *Sozenji Baba* (1928) *Ronin-Gai* (1928) and *Kubi no Za* (1929), related to audiences of the 1920s. Anderson and Richie note that these 1920s ‘tendency’ films were reflective of society and a reference to “the search for a violent solution to Japan’s economic ills”. They “sought to encourage, or fight against a given social tendency” (1982, p.64). Mizoguchi’s critique was presented by a very different film-maker for a different era, but was no less damning. In both cases the directors were addressing the fundamental issue of the individual’s relationship to society in a period of rapid social change. In order to understand how Mizoguchi effectively combined the vernacular style
of his *mise en scène* with socially-conscious melodrama, it is necessary to trace the origins of his source material and the manner of his adaptations.

Among Japanese sources I have already highlighted the important influence of Izumi Kyoka, who inspired *Taki no Shiraito*. But it is Mizoguchi’s admiration for the Edo period author Ihara Saikaku (1642 – 1693) which resulted in one of his most important films, *Saikaku Ichidai Onna*. As mentioned earlier, this was a project that Mizoguchi had long dreamt of realising. In a 1954 interview with *Kinema Junpo*, the director recalled:

> I had wanted to make this ever since I was at Shochiku in Kyoto but they wouldn’t let me do it. Things that I really want to do always come out well. Makeshift projects are never successful. It takes several years before a work of art can begin to take shape … I want to direct several other stories by Saikaku (1954, p.54).

This statement is revealing on several counts. Firstly, as I have already noted, Mizoguchi’s best work was achieved when he was permitted the freedom to pursue the projects closest to his heart. Secondly, it hints at the often strained relationships Mizoguchi has with his studio masters. Thirdly, it suggests that the projects which came to fruition in his later years had often taken root much earlier in his career. Finally, Mizoguchi is keen here to stress the importance of knowing one’s subject and milieu from life, as Saikaku did. As has been established earlier, Mizoguchi’s less successful films were often projects foisted upon him or whose subjects were unfamiliar or of little interest. On *Saikaku Ichidai Onna*, Dudley Andrew comments: “Artistically it ended a series of critical failures and indicates the half-dozen masterpieces that close his career” (in Pendergast and Pendergast, 2000 p.1044). This film drew heavily upon a style of Japanese art that had come to prominence
over 250 years previously during Edo (1603-1868). Before considering this film as a fine example of Mizoguchi’s mature melodrama, it is important to explore the nature of the artistic heritage that informs its vernacular style, and its historical context.

Japan in the 1600s, like Japan in the 1900s, was a society in transition. In 1600 Tokugawa Ieyasu won a decisive victory at the battle of Sekigahara and in 1603 took the title of Shogun. Up until this time Japan had been a country at war, but Tokugawa’s victory served to unify the country. Tokugawa restructured the country’s daimyō 大名 into han 藩 (domains) separating them based upon their relationship with the Tokugawa clan (allies in battle, relationships), as well as rice production which was measured in koku 石 (ten cubic feet). Although the daimyō 大名 made their own decisions and were autonomous, the Tokugawa bakufu 霸府 held control over them with restrictions on castle construction and army sizes. The bakufu 霸府 could also confiscate a domain for incompetence or if, for example, there was no suitable heir. In these cases everyone connected with the lord would move with him, including the army. As Reischauer explains:

The arbitrary moving about of the daimyo weakened their [the Tokugawa Bakufu] hold on the loyalty of the peasants they ruled but at the same time strengthened their control over their vassals and retainers. These military men had to move with the daimyo and, uprooted from their native soil, where their ancestors had once controlled both land and presents, they were forced to rely entirely on their bonds to their daimyo. In the process, they became close knit groups that presaged the business and other groupings which are such a predominant feature of contemporary Japanese society (Reischauer, 1990, p.72).
Such tight control was not restricted to daimyō lords and aristocracy. The Tokugawa bakufu also kept tight control over the population, ensuring that society was structured hierarchically and that the people within it behaved accordingly in a manner befitting their class. This is best explained by the term Shi Nō Kō Shō (士農工商) where Shi = Samurai, Nō = Farmer/Peasants, Kō = Craftsmen, Shō = Merchants. Samurai were at the top of the class system, and then came farmers/peasants, craftsmen and merchants. Kim Young-Chin points out the importance of this class system: “The Bakufu made strenuous efforts to perpetuate class distinctions, emphasizing the differences, superiority or inferiority of one class to another. The bushi or samurai comprised the ruling class and all other classes were subservient to it” (1961, pp.127-128). However, from Shi Nō Kō Shō emerged a social class called chōnin. Chōnin included the aforementioned craftsmen and merchants as well as other professions such as artisans, waitresses, entertainers and shopkeepers. Despite continual legislation, compulsory loans and property seizure (all aimed at restricting their wealth), the chōnin flourished in the large cities of Tokugawa Japan such as Edo, Kyoto and Osaka. In fact many samurai and peasants were in great debt to them, something which instilled unrest and resentment. These chōnin were responsible for many artistic developments of the period, which have not just served as inspiration for others, but also have remained an integral part of Japanese society. Under the Tokugawa bakufu of the Edo period, there was a cultural renaissance known as Genroku (1688-1704) which ushered in a new golden age. During the Genroku period, a culture developed which led to advancement in areas as broad as astronomy, medicine and agronomy. There were also new forms of artistic expression such as painting, ukiyo-e 浮世絵, haikai renga 俳諧連歌 (poetry including haiku 俳句),
erotic literature, *ukiyo zōshi* 浮世草子 (novels and short stories), the theatres of *jōruri* 浄瑠璃 (sung narratives) and *kabuki*. The use of *tayū* 太夫 (high class, educated courtesans) and *geisha* also emerged as part of this vibrant cultural milieu. Of all the art that flourished during Genroku, literature serves as the best source to ascertain the mood of the time. Takano notes: “Anyone familiar with the Genroku period, immediately associates it with poets and authors such as Matsuo Basho, Ihara Saikaku, and Chikamatsu Monzaemon ... These artists became popular because of the support from the common people” (2003, pp.88-89).

The celebrity of this group of writers can be attributed to their sharp awareness of social rifts. Hibbett notes:

> Tokugawa writers were able to examine and criticize their own society at the same time that they amused it; for the incongruities thus exploited were exactly what sharpened their sense of the reality of their own world. If their techniques did not lead toward the dramatic structure and individual characterization to which Western readers are accustomed, they did lead to a generalized but penetrating satirical study of contemporary manners (1957, p.73).

Thus, Literature’s popularity grew among the *chōnin*. *Kanazōshi* 仮名草子 (books written in kana) were more accessible than those printed only in *kanji*. As this readership grew, so did the desire for varying subject matter. Lane points out that “the emphasis of the newly written *kanazoshi*” was “upon love, travel and the supernatural” (1957, p.653), and these themes, which were so popular in the literature of the Tokugawa period, informed much of Mizoguchi’s later work.
Although drawing upon tradition, the bohemian culture of this ‘floating world’ was lively and innovative. Ivan Morris explains that:

Genroku culture reflected the extravagance, frivolity and mundane hedonism of the floating world. To a certain extent it can be regarded as a protest against the gloomy otherworldliness of mediaeval Buddhism and the drab severities of Tokugawa morality. The frivolous, hedonistic aspect often gave rise to bawdiness and eroticism, as seen for example in the “spring pictures” of the ukiyo-e artists, in the pornographic booklets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and in the general license that prevailed in the theatre (1969, p.12).

Within the Genroku, the ukiyo zōshi or ‘floating world’ (ukiyo 浮世 meaning ‘floating world’ and zōshi 草子 meaning stories) referred specifically to a strand of fiction which achieved lasting popularity from 1683-1783. These novels centred on red light districts, theatres, brothels and teahouses; they were erotic fiction written in and about the trade cities of Osaka and Kyoto. These localities and their colourful, hedonistic milieu provided inspiration for Mizoguchi and the screen adaptations of his collaborator Yoda. As already mentioned Yoda was from Kyoto and was able, in Mizoguchi’s Kansai films, to represent the spirit and personality of its people. One of the key features of the films set in these areas is the accuracy of the context in terms of accent, mannerisms and colour. This represented an interest in the vernacular derived from life, every bit as much as literature. But crucially also, for a film-maker, the ukiyo zōshi novels were, as Hibbett notes, remarkably visual:

Not only is Japanese literature especially rich in visual imagery, which yet may leave much to the imagination, but it often conveys with great subtlety effects of mood and
symbol – effects that are more easily recognised when translated into a different medium (Hibbett, 1957, p.67).

Let us now examine these influences upon Mizoguchi’s *mise en scène* in a case study example.

*Saikaku Ichidai Onna*

Arguably, Mizoguchi and Yoda tapped into the visual register of these traditional arts most strikingly in *Saikaku Ichidai Onna*. Mizoguchi’s talent for vibrant *mise en scène* and his relentless striving for visual perfection enabled him to transform the exotic bohemian life of the floating world into popular cinema of the 1950s.

*Saikaku Ichidai Onna* is a tragic melodrama which unfolds through painterly landscapes and graphic scenes. The narrative catalogues the life of Oharu, a woman who falls from court-lady to prostitute, and the hardships she endures. The familiarity of the film-maker and screenwriter with the world portrayed renders this melodrama a vivid, visceral experience. *Saikaku Ichidai Onna* is a melodrama, yet it is much more than that. Through the figure of Oharu, the film documents protest, surveys the drabness and severity of life and questions morality and society.

Mizoguchi’s intention with the film emulates that of Saikaku with his novel; to “evoke the atmosphere of that urban society: its iconoclasm, its fervid emotional tone, its spontaneous gaiety and exuberance, restrained chiefly by aesthetic refinement and an exacting code of manners” (Hibbett, 1952, p.411). This atmosphere constitutes what could be termed melodramatic realism, but we might describe its quality more carefully as an
evocative, almost poetic realism. This tonal quality or manner has frequently been overlooked by critics who have engaged at length with the more obvious issues of the treatment of the central female protagonist Oharu. We should exercise caution in abstracting this gendered reading from an awareness of the specific social world in which the character is located. One such reading is made by Cohen who explores patriarchy within the film, noting that: “Men become the controllers of the look and ... objectify women as passive objects”. He continues, “It is, therefore, hard to maintain the view that Oharu triumphs at the end of the film when to achieve this position she is kept passive in the discourse, denied a sexual identity at the end of the film, and made to assume the guilt of others” (in Noletti, Desser, 1992, p.35). This gendered reading, however, does not take into account the changing position of Mizoguchi’s heroine through the succession of social contexts she traverses. Oharu experiences her life through all classes as she drops from court lady to beggar. Indeed, her narrative journey proceeds from an initial decision she herself has made. To that extent, like a hero from classical tragedy, she sets in motion the grim trajectory her life followed by contravening the rules of her own society. I argue that this set of social restrictions constitutes the context through which her own strength, stoicism and endurance are understood. And the film’s melodramatic power is invested in Oharu’s tacit acceptance of the hand fate has dealt her, as a result of her initial transgression. Let us now examine Oharu’s narrative journey in more depth.

A Perilous Journey

Oharu’s story consists of ten stages, it is likely that Yoda’s screenplay was informed by Buddhist teaching on the Ten Worlds. He refers to these states in his book *Mizoguchi Kenji no Hito to Geijutsu* (1970, p.211). Significantly, Saikaku does not observe this
rigorous structure in the source novel. As Yoda explained “Saikaku’s Koushoku Ichidai Onna is composed of many episodes, and it features different women and therefore it does not tell a life story of the same woman” (Yoda, p.210). The decision of Yoda and Mizoguchi to unite this series of experiences in the life of a single woman appears to have been quite an important change. According to the Sōka Gakkai International (2011), there are ten stages which chart the spiritual journey from jigoku-kai to through to bukkai. The “first four states are referred to as the Four Evil Paths because of the destructive negativity that marks them”. With stages five and six (Humanity and Rapture), they constitute the six lower worlds. “These are all basically reactions to changing external conditions in which we experience a lack of real freedom and autonomy”. There follows what Buddhism refers to as “the Four Noble States which represent the effort to live with integrity, inner freedom and compassion”. Learning and Realisation are “sometimes referred to as the Two Vehicles, as people manifesting these states are partially enlightened and free from some deluded desires. But these worlds can be very self-absorbed, and in many Buddhist texts we find the Buddha admonishing the people of the Two Vehicles for their selfishness and complacency”. The last two stages represent the arrival at enlightenment. “For a person in the state of Buddhahood, everything—including the inevitable trials of illness, aging and death—can be experienced as an opportunity for joy and fulfilment. The inner life-state of Buddhahood makes itself visible through altruistic commitment and actions enacted in the world of Bodhisattva” (Sōka Gakkai International 2011, n.p). For the purposes of this analysis, each stage in Oharu’s journey is identified by the condition derived from Buddhist teaching. The descriptions are taken from Sōka Gakkai International. The tale is told in a succession of flashbacks – a classical melodramatic device. Through her telling, the redemptive Oharu promises salvation to
those around her; however the hand of fate intervenes on each occasion. Below I will highlight each of the stages but first, however, let us examine the film’s opening and the manner in which the flashback structure is established.

*Saikaku Ichidai Onna* opens with Oharu, head shrouded with a scarf, walking along a backstreet path. The respectful distance from which the camera tracks her progress from behind, conveys an immediate poignancy about this ageing heroine. Oharu observes a prostitute chasing a client, and stops to watch, her face still covered. Already, her social position as *yotaka* 夜鷹 (the lowest form of prostitute) has been established. The prostitute ushers the drunken man indoors. Oharu moves on, disappearing behind a large gate pillar. We then cut to the entrance with a figure standing motionless in the background. Oharu emerges from lower shot left, and is greeted by another woman who appears in front of her: “Oharu? You did not get any customers either?” to which Oharu laughs, replying: “It is hard for a fifty-year-old woman to pretend to be twenty.” Oharu continues and other women join her on her walk. Oharu begins to tell a story of a pilgrim who paid for her so he could warn his followers of the dangers of prostitutes: “I am nothing but a spectacle of an ill-fated woman”, she says, laughing. The prostitutes carry on and gather together by a fire below a temple.

This scene establishes the harsh realities of brothel life and presents Oharu as a ‘mother figure’, wearily resigned to her own aging, but also reflecting upon her own past with grim humour. The next scene separates her from her fellow ‘pilgrims’ and sets up the flashback. Oharu hears chanting; curious, she tentatively leaves the group to investigate. She ascends to the temple, where a monk is finishing prayer. Oharu enters and is
surrounded by Buddha’s Five-Hundred rakan 羅漢 (statues representing the disciples of Buddha) (Figure 34). The camera pans around the room, taking in the judgemental faces of the rakan. Oharu sits and focuses on one statue; a wry self-conscious smile illuminates her face. Then in the statue, another face appears, reminiscent, as we shall learn, of her lover Katsunosuke (Mifune Toshiro). Incongruously, Gagaku 雅楽 music begins to play, immediately providing a contrast of visual and aural signifiers. Gagaku is, as Terauchi notes “the oldest genre of Japanese traditional music ... only ever played in the rituals of court and aristocracy” (2007, p.51). As Oharu slips into her memories, the aural clue transports her and us back to the courtly status from which she has so tragically fallen. Drawing inspiration from the models of western classical tragedy, let us now survey the stages in her tragic decline in turn.
Stage One: Jigoku-kai 地獄界 (Hell) “A condition of despair in which one is completely overwhelmed by suffering”

Oharu’s journey begins with her first and most important decision. She is employed as a court lady, and our first view of her indicates that she is a woman of class. This is revealed in the type of kimono she is wearing, the veil that covers her face, the way she talks and the graceful manner of her movement. From this image her position within society can be established as nyokan 女官 (court-lady). Oharu’s introduction is represented by a long-shot, in which we see her walking across a courtyard. We then see her in medium-shot through the frame of a door; and at this juncture we can be in no doubt that she is an important figure within this setting, a woman of stature and confidence. The manner in which she is addressed by Kikunokoji (Shimizu Masao) also confirms her social standing.

He asks her about a poem, she had received from his friend Nishinotoin:

菊の小路：西桐蔭がそなたから歌の返しが来ぬというて気を揉んでおったぞ。
お春：西の桐蔭様は何でもおしゃべりになるのでございますねえ。
菊の小路：ずいぶんあつかましい歌を送ったらしいな。どんな歌じゃ。
お春：存じません。御免あそばせ。

Kikunokoji: Nishinotoin is worried because you haven’t sent a poem in return.
Oharu: He tells everything.
Kikunokoji: Tell me about the daring poem he sent you.
Oharu: Please, excuse me sir.

This exchange provides further confirmation of Oharu’s status. The upper classes would send waka 和歌, which were witty poems as billet-doux, to express the feelings of the sender, towards the receiver. In the world of the court, these were used as a sophisticated
way to initiate relationships. Oharu’s receipt of the poem and also her reluctance to discuss it, as well as her delay in returning the favour, displays an element of independence, suggesting her lack of interest in Nishinotoin. As this conversation is taking place, we see Katsunosuke, (Mifune Toshiro) in the background; his reaction is pained as he overhears the conversation. As Oharu disappears from the frame, Katsunosuke follows her longingly with his eyes. In the next scene, the wakatō 若党 (a young, samurai class servant/messenger) chases Oharu’s kago 簇 (carriage), and informs her that Kikunokoji wishes to meet with her in the Teramachi area of Kyoto City. This turns out to be a ruse, as it is Katsunosuke who desires the liaison. On her arrival, Oharu discovers the ruse and is irascible:

勝之助：お春様。ご覧下さいましたか。先日お渡し申した手紙。

お春：誰が読みますものか。お前のような若党風情のもの、少しも読まずに焚いてしまいました。

勝之助：私には歌を詠む才もなければ気のきいた洒落を操るとんちもありません。しかし私は真心を持っております。お春様は私の身分をお見下げにはなれても私の真心をお見下げになることは出来ません。

鞠や弓と同じように真心を言葉のもてあそびにしてそれを雅というのなら、私はそのような・・・

お春：お前等に雅の心など分かるわけはございません。上品な皆様のお趣味はお前には分かりません。

Katsunosuke: Mistress Oharu...Have you read the letter I gave you the other day?

Oharu: Who would read such a letter from a servant such as you? I burnt it without reading it.

Katsunosuke: I have no talent for poetry or witticism, but I have sincerity. You may look down on my class, but do not scorn my sentiments. If refinement is a game of kicking words of sincerity like a ball, then I am not refined.
**Oharu:** How can someone like you ever understand refined taste? You cannot appreciate the taste of noble people.

By social convention, this is a forbidden meeting. Katsunosuke is a *samurai* of low rank, and therefore of lower social status. Despite the fact that she has been tricked into this clandestine liaison, Oharu reveals her emotional turmoil; her true feelings for Katsunosuke are quite evident. The sexual energy between the pair during this scene is palpable, and although Oharu’s words reject his advances, her body language indicates her suppressed passion. Characteristically, this invokes the tension between *honne* and *tatemae*, the battle between personal feelings and social decorum. Oharu’s emotional frailty reveals a woman who believes in the possibility of personal fulfilment through romantic love. In this scene the film draws upon Oharu’s reflection in Saikaku’s original story:

> There is naught in this world so strange as love. The several men who had set their affections on me were both fashionable and handsome; yet none of them aroused any tender feelings in me. Now there was a humble warrior in the service of a certain courier. The fellow was low in rank and of a type that most women would regard askance. Yet from the first letter that he wrote me his sentences were charged with a passion powerful enough to slay one. In note after note he set forth his ardent feelings, until, without realizing it, I myself began to be troubled in my heart (in Morris, 1963, pp.124-125).

This revelation in the garden results in Oharu fainting with emotional exhaustion (Figure 35). At this point, we are given a clear insight as to the destiny of the two lovers. As Katsunosuke gathers Oharu into his arms, taking her back to the house, the camera angle lowers and positioned directly in the centre of the frame are a pair of *hiyokuzuka*, 比翼塚.
The camera lingers on these two stones for several seconds (Figure 36). This shot is important as *hiyokuzuka* are tombstones which mark the graves of lovers. They represent those who died for love. Even at this early stage of the film, we are aware of the fate awaiting Oharu and Katsunosuke. This scene is also crucial as Oharu’s private confession marks the moment of her transgression, the decision to break free of social convention precipitates her itinerant journey and fall from grace.

Unfortunately, the police arrive looking for evidence of prostitution in the inn where they are staying. Finding the lovers together, they are both taken away. Their fates are sealed as Katsunosuke is beheaded and Oharu and her family are banished from Kyoto. Before he dies Katsunosuke declares that he has a message for Oharu: “I wish you to find a good man and make a happy home. Promise me you will marry with true affection.” He is then asked: “is that all?” Katsunosuke pauses, his tone becomes more emotional as he shouts: “I hope the time will come when there is no social rank, when all may be free to love regardless of status.” Joan Mellen comments that “these words are inflammatory in their historical context; there is no such plea for justice in Saikaku” (in Phillips and Stringer, 2007, p.97).
Stage Two: Gaki-kai - 餓鬼界 (Hunger) “A state dominated by deluded desire that can never be satisfied”

A messenger, Isobe (Ogawa Toranosuke) is sent by Lord Matsudaira to find a suitable mistress. He meets with local Kyoto merchant Kahei (Shindo Eitaro) and explains the predicament. It is revealed that Matsudaira’s wife cannot bear a child and if an heir is not forthcoming, the clan will die. Kahei assembles a long line of women and we track the pair as they inspect the line-up. I have already established Mizoguchi’s skilful use of comedy in Chapter Two. However these two scenes – the meeting and the line-up – are among many moments of comic relief which punctuate this dark tragedy, in-keeping with melodramatic conventions. As a flustered Isobe busily goes from one prospective wife to the next, we hear him say: “No, her mouth is too big” or “Eww a mole”, “Feet too big”. These amusing judgements are accompanied by Saito Ichiro’s playful soundtrack. Isobe then sees Oharu who is practising Nihonbuyō 日本舞踊 (Japanese dance), in a nearby field. Struck by her graceful movements, he pulls her from the dance and examines her. Delighted to find that she fulfils all of the criteria for Matsudaira’s perfect woman, a deal is struck between Kahei and Oharu’s parents and she is sold for one-hundred ryō. However, Oharu is reluctant to leave: “How can I produce a baby for someone whose face I do not know … Katsunosuke would never forgive me”. In response, her father becomes violent: “Idiot! You are still my daughter, I will not allow you to do as you please.” And with this he drags Oharu back into the wood, pushing her to the ground. Unlike the first scene where personal choice dictated the outcome, here there is no reprieve and, fulfilling the duty to her family and the daimyō, she returns with Isobe to Edo, beginning her life as Matsudaira’s mistress.
The initial scenes at the Edo manor are fascinating. A procession brings Oharu into the
grounds. As she emerges from the carriage, her look is one of despair and dejection. After
a medical, witnessed by Matsudaira’s commanders, she is put into the care of Sasai
(Kusajima Kyoko), whose role it is to teach her etiquette and manners. During this scene,
the emotional turmoil displayed by Oharu is accentuated by the manner in which the
assembled clansmen are looking her up and down, inspecting her like a commodity. We
then witness a slow transition to a long-shot of Matsudaira’s wife (Yamane Hisako) who is
performing a tea ceremony apparently unaware of the arrival of her husband’s new
mistress. Sasai enters the room, disturbing the tranquillity of the tea-ceremony. Upon
informing Lady Matsudaira that a suitable concubine has been found, the mood
immediately changes from peace and serenity to jealousy and contempt. Sasai tells her
Ladyship that she “must endure everything for the good of the family”. From this
moment, we realise that she and Oharu are not so different; both have societal duties as
women that they must upheld, against their will. The viewer is reminded of the
importance of social conventions: the vertical hierarchy of the ie (家) system, honne, tatemae and wa. The melodramatic tension during this scene is palpable;
Lady Matsudaira rises and crosses the room to meet Oharu. The camera tracks her in
profile from a mid-long shot. The distance is crucial, a close-up could have revealed the
tensions through facial expression; but instead this is done through camera movement
eschewing psychological realism. As Lady Matsudaira walks towards Oharu we witness a
sense of trepidation; her movement is elegant and purposeful but she radiates betrayal
and jealousy. Having been introduced, Oharu is dismissed. As Lady Matsudaira watches
her leave through a hallway to the rear of the shot, Oharu glances back. Though a woman
in her position should not make eye contact, their gaze briefly meets. Oharu’s expression is one of sympathetic sadness which fleetingly bonds them as women (Figure 37).

We then cut to a bunraku performance being acted out for Lord Matsudaira. A tracking shot follows Oharu as she is summoned on arrival: “Do you miss your home?” Matsudaira asks: “Are you happy to see your local puppets in Edo?” For Oharu, hailing from Kansai, this entertainment would have been more familiar than in Edo. It is clear that the performance has been specially arranged for Oharu. The bunraku music highlights the tension in the court and Mizoguchi cuts between the bunraku dolls, Oharu and the Lord before settling at a three-shot from behind Oharu’s shoulder. The jealousy shown by Matsudaira’s wife is accentuated by both the camera, which holds her fixing glare, and the
play’s music which is tense and dramatic. Mizoguchi then switches to a shot from behind the bunraku performers, the composition of the mise en scène is telling as Lady Matsudaira is framed within a screen partition, which removes her from the scene.

The story then advances nine-months, as we hear a baby crying and learn that Oharu has given birth to Matsudaira’s son and heir. The court ministers decide that now Oharu has fulfilled her duty, she is to be sent home to Kyoto. It appears that Lord Matsudaira has grown too fond of Oharu: “Our Lord’s strength is being drained. The doctor says his concubine is a danger to his health”. We suspect the hand of Lady Matsudaira in this. Oharu’s return to her family in Kyoto creates more domestic strife. Her father has been using Oharu’s position to buy goods on credit and her dismissal threatens them all. Oharu’s father insists that she be sold to work in the Kyoto red-light district, Shimabara. Reluctantly, she obeys.

Throughout these early scenes, it is worthwhile noting the performance of Tanaka Kinuyo. Her acting, first at the field performing Nihonbuyō and then in the court, reflect perfectly the expectations and mannerisms of a woman in her position. An example is during the first meeting between Oharu and Matsudaira’s wife. The manner in which she addresses her mistress is astonishingly accurate. In the first stage, Oharu was overcome with emotion, giving into her personal desire. Here however, Tanaka ensures that Oharu’s actions and mannerisms are measured, graceful and above all an exemplary display of social etiquette.
Stage Three: Chikusho-kai - 畜生界 (Animality) “An instinctual state of fearing the strong and bullying the weak”

Stage Three is situated in the ordered and fascinating world of the tayū. Like so many of Mizoguchi’s films, this section of Oharu’s journey revolves around money. It begins in Shimabara, at a brothel located in kuruwa (a bakufu licensed red-light district). Shimabara offered exclusivity; the tea-houses were expensive and frequented by high-class members of society. However, at the beginning of this sequence, there is a cultural anomaly. Mizoguchi establishes this milieu as we follow a procession of tayū through the streets. As they disappear through a doorway, we are alerted to a character whose peasant clothes make him look out of place. He is bragging about how hard he has worked on the farm, and where he is from, without any sense of embarrassment. Such behaviour would be frowned upon, in an exclusive district such as this. The peasant (Yanagi Eijiro) is at the door, removing his shoes, still talking. The inn’s staff refer to him as Inaka Daijin 田舎大尽 (literally meaning rich man from the countryside). However, this is an ironic jibe since country-folk were considered uneducated and uncouth. The term is not used to his face, but always behind his back. Despite the doorman’s protestations, Inaka barges in, and empties a sack of money on the floor: “Is this enough?” he asks. The change in the staffs attitude is immediate and, amusingly, the house-master appears, introducing himself with a succession of fast, low bows, quickly repeating “arigatō gozaimasu” 有難う御座います (thank you very much).

Oharu is summoned, and in the next scene we see her dancing, ostensibly for Inaka. Clearly, however, Tanaka’s performance is for the camera. She is framed centrally in mid-shot and remarkably as her performance builds she stares directly to camera. The look is
purposeful and her manner and dance striking (Figure 38). Narratively this direct address is incongruous and may hint at self-indulgence on the part of the director. At the beginning of the 1950s, there was much speculation, fuelled by rumour, about a love affair between Mizoguchi and his leading lady. This most self-conscious of camera shots seems to be intruding voyeuristically upon a personal fascination. The shot is sustained for some forty seconds, before we cut away to the assembled crowd watching the performance, and reinstating the narrative world. Amusingly Oharu’s sublime performance however, is wasted on Inaka, who jeers: “No need for all that!”, before throwing coins dismissively. The small crowd rushes forward scrabbling for the money.
But Oharu remains still, dignified and aloof. “Why do you not pick it up?” Inaka asks her.

“I am not a beggar”, Oharu replies curtly.

The house-master is disgusted with Oharu’s surly attitude and immediately orders her home. However, Inaka sends a request that Oharu joins him in his room. This again elicits a comic \textit{volte face} in the officious house-master who, sensing profit, pushes Oharu up stairs. In private, Inaka reveals that he has come to Kyoto to find a wife, and insists that Oharu return to Echigo with him. The arrangement is quickly sealed without any romance. Inaka declares: “I’ll have you”, to which Oharu replies she will serve him faithfully. Inaka then begins to laugh and, holding the money bag close, brags: “Money, money! If you have money, the world is yours. When they see this, they crawl. Even the proudest woman smiles and draws near … Your fate is in this money.” With this statement, the door opens and the house-master appears with the authorities. “Forger!” he cries, and Inaka flees. A chase ensues and he is eventually captured in the inn’s courtyard. As the assembled inn workers watch Inaka being led away laughing, on the balcony above we see Oharu, looking down on them (Figure 39).
Stage Four: Shura-kai - 修羅界 (Anger) “A state characterized by an unrestrained competitive urge to surpass and dominate others and often a pretence of being good and wise”

Stage Four begins with Oharu back in Kyoto, placed into the service of Owasa (Sawamura Sadako) at the dry-goods store run by Kahei. Oharu is a maid. However, she has one important role, to style Owasa’s hair which has thinned since an illness. This is an important scene for Owasa and indicates the trust which she places in Oharu. During this period a woman’s hair was related to her beauty, recalling the Japanese saying ‘A woman’s hair is a woman’s life’ 髪は女の命. Trusted with Owasa’s secret, Oharu dutifully ensures that her hair is always prepared, whilst at the same time keeping the secret. All is well at the store; again there are light-hearted moments between Oharu and shop assistant Bunkichi (Oizumi Hiroshi). His flirtatious behaviour is continually resisted by Oharu.

During a visit by one of Kahei’s business associates, Oharu is recognised and ominously, her Shimabara past is revealed. This is followed by one of the most comical moments in the film. Owasa questions Kahei about Oharu, asking if he has had relations with her. All the while, Bunkichi is trying to give him a shave. Owasa becomes more and more upset, sporadically moving closer to Kahei. Every time she draws near, he retreats and the hapless Bunkichi is continually trying to catch up, mindful not to cut his master. The overdramatic acting by Sawamura is a welcome moment of light relief. Such comic interludes are clearly drawn from Saikaku’s original story. Indeed, as Hibbett notes: “The tone of Ichidai Onna is chiefly comic. One does find much that is sordid, related with
naturalistic candor, but somehow even these episodes usually take an amusing turn” (1957, p.68).

In melodramatic vein, Owasa’s mood changes in the next scene. Her histrionics give way to suspicion and spite. Like Lady Matsudaira before her, she is overcome with jealousy. She demands that Oharu cut her own hair proclaiming: “You have come here to steal my husband. I have heard what you are up to. How you have deceived me!” After cutting a small amount of hair, Owasa demands more. Oharu refuses and the pair fight. In a dramatic altercation, Owasa overpowers Oharu and proceeds to violently cut her hair.

Having heard the stories about Oharu, Kahei is now interested in her sexually. Whilst Owasa is visiting her ancestor’s graves, Kahei and Oharu are alone. The scene begins with Oharu preparing the Buddha shrine so that Kahei can pray. However, his thoughts are elsewhere and as he begins his prayers, his attentions turn to Oharu. Chiding her for her errant past, he declares masterfully: “I can have a woman without paying”. The final scene of this stage sees Oharu exact revenge for the cruelty she has endured at the hands of the couple. She is holding a cat to which she offers the scent of Owasa’s hair before ordering: “Fetch something which has this smell”. The cat crosses the house and pulls and tugs at Owasa’s wig, revealing her flaw and effectively removing her beauty. Distraught at this violation, Owasa runs through the house. A dramatic shamisen plays, sounding a cautionary note. Oharu, like a cat, sleeks away from the enraged Owasa.
Stage Five: Nin-kai 人界 – (Humanity) “Is a tranquil state marked by the ability to reason and make calm judgments”

This brief stage lasts only five minutes and thirty five seconds and consists of three cuts. The camera remains distant throughout, but Oharu is positioned at the centre of the action. Although fleeting, this part of the story provides some of the most emotionally turbulent moments in the film. Oharu marries Yakichi (Uno Jukichi), a local fan-maker who is aware of Oharu’s past, but is not concerned. We cut to Oharu making fans. For the first time in the film she seems content to play the loyal wife. In one of the film’s more touching moments, she sees her husband off on his deliveries. McDonald observes this change in mood: “The cold detached objectivity of the camera eye yields here to a warmly subjective feeling” (1984, p.109). Her husband’s social standing is confirmed during dialogue with a customer who praises him and the store. We then cut to the shop’s exterior where it is now nightfall. We witness a local man running towards the shop’s entrance. We follow, but stop short of entering, instead witnessing events through the store window frame: “Terrible news!” he exclaims, announcing that Yakichi has been murdered for money on the highway. Followers soon bring the body in and, as Oharu collapses sobbing over him, we hear *bukkyo shoka* 仏教唱歌 (Buddhist song), its valedictory note indicating a spiritual passage in the tale.

Stage Six: Ten-kai - 天界 (Rapture) “Is a state of joy typically experienced when desire is fulfilled or suffering escaped”

Bereft and disillusioned, Oharu places herself under the guidance of a Buddhist nun, Myokai (Mouri Kikue). During her stay at the temple, it is revealed that she is being supplied cloth by her old friend Bunkichi. However, his gifts have been stolen from the clothing store and his boss Jihei (Shiganoya Benkei) discovers that Oharu is the recipient.
Jihei visits Oharu at the temple to reclaim his master’s cloth. He tells her: “You have shamelessly cheated Bunkichi”, to which Oharu replies: “He discovered that I was here and he brought me some cloth”. However, Oharu informs him that the cloth has already been made up. Throughout this scene, Oharu remains dignified, welcoming Jihei with the words: “We know each other well enough to do away with formalities”. Unimpressed, Jihei demands recompense: “Formalities, I am not Bunkichi! How dare you speak to me like that, you whore!” Oharu snaps and begins to remove her clothes, throwing them at Jihei. Oblivious to her rage, Jihei assumes that she is willing to pay for the garments by sleeping with him. Oharu disappears behind a screen to remove the last articles of clothing. Jihei leaves the room, ushering his waiting assistant away to buy cakes and tea.

We then see Myokai walking towards Oharu’s room, she enters and is puzzled by the strewn clothing. Looking behind the screen, she retreats, shocked and disgusted.

Myokai shows no sympathy for Oharu and she is banished from the temple: “You have tricked and deceived me. What a disgrace. Leave!” As Oharu sits outside the temple, Bunkichi arrives and reveals that he has been sacked for his misdemeanours but has stolen money from Jihei as a parting shot. Disgraced, Oharu and Bunkichi run off together. However when they stop to rest at a teahouse, Bunkichi is recognised by Jihei and dragged away.

Stage Seven: Shomon-kai - 声聞界 (Learning) “Describes a condition of aspiration to enlightenment”

Alone once more, and reduced to the status of a common beggar, Oharu sits on the street playing her shamisen. A reminder of her past comes in the form of her son, now a young prince whose entourage passes by. Being in the presence of her son for the first time is
too much and, overcome with emotion, she collapses. She is helped by two yotaka and, after a meal, is convinced to join them. Tanaka recalls that Mizoguchi had said: “She’s not a normal beggar. Even as a beggar she must remain feminine. Femininity is what has reduced her to this.” (Shindo, 1975). Thus the imperative that she retain her womanhood is, ambiguously, both a matter of pride and a badge of dishonour. We then see Oharu as a common prostitute looking for business on the highway. She is a desperate figure as she hides behind walls, begging every passerby for business. She is finally taken by an old man who leads her to an inn. However this liaison is not as it seems and he parades her in front of a group of pilgrims: “Well, all of you take a good look at this woman”. He holds a candle to Oharu’s tired face: “Look at this painted face. Do you still want to buy a woman?” The pilgrims retract, looking disgusted. Their leader continues: “You are on a pilgrimage. If you want to learn about the transience of life, take a look at this goblin cat”. Oharu is summarily dismissed and paid off. Humiliated, her frustration is evident. Stopping at the door, she retorts: “You can tell them at home that you have spoken to a goblin cat!” She then rushes back into the room and imitates a hissing cat, shoulders hunched and fingers stretched like claws. Cohen reminds us of the link with the cat in the scene of Owasa’s humiliation: “The moment in both scenes thus represents Oharu’s castrating desire for revenge. The nervous laughter of the pilgrims in the inn signifies their half-realization of this threat” (in Noletti and Desser, 1992, pp. 40-41). Cohen is not alone in advancing a Freudian analysis of Japanese melodrama. Catherine Russell suggests that “the social forces responsible for the plight of melodramatic protagonists are contaminated by way of a challenge to realist representation; the intensity of suffering exceeds the codes of realism as well as the limits of the visible and the knowable” (in Dissanayake, 1993, p.143). Resorting to a Freudian interpretation of Oharu’s “goblin cat” as an example of “victory
over repression” (in Dissanayake, 1993 p.143), overlooks the folkloric origins of this term in Japanese myth. In common parlance the word ‘bakeneko’ 化け猫 (goblin cat), refers to older women who use too much make-up to make them look younger (in English we would say ‘mutton dressed up as lamb’). But bakeneko have a longer tradition in popular stories books and kabuki from the Edo era such as the plays Hanazumo Genjibiiki 花相撲源氏張胆 (1775) and Bakemono Ichidaiki 化物一代記 (1802). In these stories, bakeneko is usually a prostitute who, during the day took human form but at night would transform into a cat often eating their human (male) prey. In Japanese mythology, there are many animals that are thought to be able to change forms, such as the fox, the Japanese racoon, snakes, and cats and all have been represented in the arts. Thus it profits little to import a Freudian reading to a concept already inscribed in Japanese vernacular.

Stage Eight: Enkaku-kai - 縁覚界(Realization) “Indicates the ability to perceive unaided the true nature of phenomena”
At this stage, the narrative returns to the present. In the temple we find Oharu asleep, exhausted from her traumatic memories. She is awoken by her prostitute friends, who laugh at the statues’ faces, mocking their former potency. In a point-of-view shot, Oharu’s vision begins to blur. She tried to stand, but collapses in distress. Again, Cohen offers a psychoanalytical interpretation of Oharu’s swoon: “Her memory gains the force of a psychic trauma which triggers her fainting as a hysterical attack” (in Noletti and Desser, 1992, p.49). But again, recourse to Freudian hysteria delimits a more nuanced account. 
Saikaku Ichidai Onna is a film with Buddhist ideas at its centre. The revelation before the rakan is a moment of enlightenment which precipitated Oharu’s journey of recollection and reconciliation. Hibbett observes that the fainting scene in the temple was
a crucial element of the original novel and a key event in the “standard enlightenment scene of the Buddhist confessional tale” (1957, p.67).

Stage Nine: Bosatsu-kai - 菩薩界 (Bodhisattva) “Is a state of compassion in which we overcome the restraints of egotism and work tirelessly for the welfare of others”

After Oharu has collapsed, she is taken to a nearby room at the temple. In a surprise twist, Oharu’s mother arrives and informs her that Lord Matsudaira has died and that she has been summoned to the palace. Upon her arrival, Oharu is chastised for her past: “What a disgrace to lower yourself to a prostitute!” Because of her transgressions, it is decided that she is to be housed in Matsudaira’s domain, effectively under house arrest. But Oharu is determined to take advantage of the opportunity to be reunited with her son. This scene is highly dramatic. The koto soundtrack is urgent and full of foreboding. Oharu’s son, the new lord, walks the manor hallways. Oharu is to be taken away but approaches him regardless. The guards manhandle her away, but Oharu resists insisting: “I am his mother, I gave birth to him”. The guards then bow low at her feet, and again she is free to pursue her son. Oharu escapes the guards’ clutches and disappears into the palace grounds. At the end of the scene we see a closed carriage, stationary in the middle of the frame. Although we do not see Oharu, we know she is inside.

Stage Ten: Bu-kkai - 仏界 (Buddhahood) “Is a state of completeness and perfect freedom, in which one is able to savor a sense of unity with the fundamental life-force of the cosmos”

When Oharu is at the end of her journey, we see shots of her as a pious nun solemnly chanting, begging from door to door. This final scene is the pinnacle of her life and is possibly the most important part of the film. Dudley Andrew notes that it is during this
final scene that “she achieves nobility and wisdom” (in Pendergast and Pendergast, 2000 p.1044). This marks the arrival at the Buddhist state of bukkai. From the bitter struggles and harsh injustices of her life experience, Mizoguchi is representing a woman who has at last discovered inner peace in this humble life of contemplation. Finally, the Buddhist singing which opened the film also closes it. In keeping with Buddhist thought, Oharu’s journey has come full circle; she has navigated life’s hardships and has survived, and her salvation is assured. The use of this framing device also reminds us of the mountain scenes at the opening and the climax of Ugetsu Monogatari. This transcendental function, which I examined in Chapter Four, informs us that whatever has happened, we are part of a bigger landscape.

Is Oharu Free?

Cohen’s argument (in Noletti and Desser, 1992, p.35) that ultimately Oharu does not triumph misunderstands the nature of the journey that she travels. Naturally we sympathise with Oharu and her tragic course is the main source of the melodrama’s emotive power. However, Oharu is not defeated. By the end she has in fact achieved a serenity that transcends prescribed gender roles, and frees her from the shackles that have constrained her. To categorise Oharu as passive or weak is an easy assumption if one views her only as a victim. But as has been made clear, it is necessary to view her plight in the context of the social world she inhabits and the spiritual journey she undergoes. In these layered narratives, effected by the flashback structure, we follow the course of her exterior and interior life in tandem.
Her lack of self-assertion may appear to a non-native sensibility as a strange kind of defeatism. She seems to lack self-possession and the power to act; she is pushed from one dreadful situation to another and her protests are largely ignored. However, from a Japanese perspective she is quite the opposite; she is strong minded, has a will of her own and is not frightened to express her feelings. An example of this is when she tells her father she does not want to marry a man she does not know; socially this is a sign of an independent woman. Although she expresses her point of view, she still suffers; but this is necessary within the framework of the narrative. In this world wa must be maintained, and the ingrained Japanese concept of tatemae ruling honne must be upheld. As Russell observes:

Interdependent, symbiotic moral principles of exteriority and interiority, giri and ninjo, sometimes interpreted as restraint and emotion, are forever at war within the Japanese melodramatic psyche ... In Mizoguchi’s narratives ... It is above all a balance between these two principles that is desired and attained. Ninjo for Mizoguchi, is closely tied to woman’s desire, but it is neither suppressed by nor triumphant over giri (in Dissanayake, 1993, p.146).

Conclusion

In this chapter I began by establishing the importance of the melodrama as a form in Mizoguchi’s work. I was keen to draw a line under the shimpa-style, Meiji period melodramas, which were a popular staple of Japanese cinema in the silent era and which Mizoguchi later returned to, sometimes unexpectedly, at moments of disjuncture in his career. However the shimpa melodrama served to establish a specifically Japanese rendition of a western popular form. I have argued in this chapter that Mizoguchi’s mature, post-war films took the melodramatic mode to a new level of sophistication.
This development of the form in Mizoguchi’s later films has been attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, the creative freedom accorded him by Nagata at Daiei Studios. Secondly, the effective collaborations with key creative agents: Yoda, Miyagawa, and especially Tanaka. Thirdly, the self-confidence Mizoguchi gained from international critical recognition was arguably a contributory factor. Finally, it can be seen as the result of Mizoguchi’s move away from the contemporary critique of social manners, and return to the Edo period and Kansai milieu for which he had such an acute sympathy.

I have argued that in *Saikaku Ichidai Onna*, Mizoguchi’s orchestration of period *mise en scène*, rooted in artistic and literary tradition elevates the melodramatic narrative to a status worthy of classical tragedy. His deployment of a well-crafted vernacular style imbued the popular form with a new gravitas. But arguably, the emotional power of the film is grounded in the performance of Tanaka: by turns audacious, sensual, statuesque and stoical. Her charisma and poise carry the film beyond melodrama and into the realm of high art. The crucial aspect of performance style will be the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Six
Mizoguchi and Theatre

Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined the legacy of melodrama in Japanese Meiji period literature and shimpa theatre and its impact on the popular cinema. In this chapter I look at the influence of Japanese theatrical tradition on the films of Mizoguchi. In his book Japanese Cinema, Donald Richie assesses the place of the theatre in Japanese cinema. Surprisingly, Richie remarks:

One might think that in a country with some of the most developed theatrical techniques in the world, the influence of the traditional theater would be both natural and common. Yet this is not true, Noh has had no influence. Its use in a film like Kurosawa’s The Throne of Blood (with, the background music, the timing of the intimate scenes, the makeup) was both conscious and experimental. Likewise, kabuki has had small influence. Though some plays notably The Loyal Forty-Seven Ronin, are also screen favourites, the adaptations owe little to kabuki style. When some elements do appear, as in Kinoshita’s The Ballad of Narayama or Shinoda’s The Scandalous Adventures of Buraikan, it is a rare occurrence indeed. The influence of the shimpa is seen in many of the themes of the Japanese film, but of its technique there are few traces; in fact, overcoming the influence of the shimpa was one of the Japanese film’s earliest triumphs. Even Shingeki, the modern theatre (one quite analogous to that of America or Europe), had offered almost nothing to the Japanese film style (1971, p.xx).

Richie’s conclusions here seem strange, especially when watching the earliest films by actors such as Bando which appear to be directly influenced by the aesthetics of kabuki theatre, with its stylisation of movement, relentless action and its familiar plots. There are also problems with Richie’s reference to Kurosawa’s Kemonosu Jo (Throne of Blood, 1957)
where he insists the inclusion of noh motifs was both “conscious and experimental” (1971, p.xx). This assumption raises some significant questions. It could be argued that Kurosawa utilises noh not just for the stylistic value, but moreover to evoke a particular emotional response from his audience. For example, the scene with the witch is powerfully symbolic and her mask conveys a demonic menace that a Japanese audience would recognise from noh theatre. Yoshimoto agrees that “it is absurd to say that the discussion of noh is irrelevant for our understanding of Throne of Blood. That the witch in the woods first looks like the mask called yaseonna (old lady) and later appears with the face of the mountain witch yamauba is an important piece of information” (2000, p.253). McDonald also concurs: “The Japanese audience is quickly aware of the noh influence in Throne of Blood”, adding that “the use of the witch’s incantation is another parallel with noh, as themes of noh drama develop ideas such as the impermanence of human existence, man’s sinfulness, and the likelihood of retribution” (McDonald, 1994, p.129).

Richie’s conclusions about the limited influence of kabuki and shimpa are similarly wayward. As I have noted, shimpa devices were important to film melodramas of the silent era and their persistence was remarkable well into the 1930s. Let us now explore the legacy of these theatrical traditions in more detail.

**Theatrical Traditions and the Japanese Cinema**

The Japanese cinema, like its counterpart in the west, plundered its own literary heritage for source material and narrative devices. Among these literary models it was the theatre that was predominant, especially the contemporary theatre dramas of shimpa. Many novels were adapted for the cinema through the intermediate process of a stage incarnation, for example Kyoka’s Giketsu Kyoketsu, as noted in Chapter Three.
Traditional kabuki plays were often influenced by the earlier bunraku (puppet theatre). They also provided a wealth of stories for the early film-makers. A fixed camera would film scenes from the same perspective as a theatrical audience. In terms of both style and content, these films owed a huge debt to the theatrical medium. For example, film actors wore kabuki theatrical costumes, traditional make-up and conventionally female characters were portrayed by male actors or oyama 女形. The characters never made contact during fight scenes; when a character suffered an on-screen death, it was usual for them to perform a backward somersault out of shot. Another characteristic derived from kabuki was that when emphasising an important moment in the film, the action would freeze. These theatrical techniques, mannerisms and styles had a profound effect upon the emergent aesthetics of the Japanese cinema. In interview, Sawato Midori summarised the influence of theatre on the development of film:

In those days, period dramas (jidaigeki) were called kyugeki, there was also another type of drama called shimpa higeki (shimpa tragedy), and amongst this particular strand of drama, there was Taki no Shiraito, which Mizoguchi made into a film later on. In Japan … film succeeded the tradition of kabuki and other types of theatre and was influenced by them both …

Japanese films showed kabuki itself with no close-ups and with a camera shooting from a distance with the whole stage in shot. What is interesting here is because it is kabuki, the actors’ movements are very stylised. So, in the 1910s, while Griffith and other people were experimenting with montage or doing something new, in Japan, we still had oyama. The acting was not realistic at all, but very much akin to the kabuki style (personal communication, September 19, 2010).

Thus, for the first two decades, it pursued a path that was distinct from the trajectory of its western counterpart.
One essential difference was the development of culturally specific forms of narration. The western cinema’s dynamic fusion of image and inter-titles provided a coherent narrational mode which audiences quickly accepted. Narration in the early Japanese cinema was very different of the roles of the kowairo 声色 and the benshi. In order to transfer the explanatory system of kabuki theatre to the cinema and to preserve its familiarity, film screenings were accompanied by a number of performers called kowairo. These kowairo voiced the on-screen actors, effectively providing a live soundtrack to the moving images. Sawato notes:

> In the theatre people would perform a voice part for the actors. So when cinema began, take for example, Matsunosuke Onoue kyugeki or shimpa higeki, a voice actor would go up onto the cinema stage and perform the voice parts for the actors on screen. This is why at the early stages of cinema it was naturally accepted, because people were used to it in the theatre (personal communication, September 19, 2010).

By contrast, the benshi were essentially narrators who told the audience what was happening on the screen. They were different from kowairo in that they were not theatrically trained; their job was to comment upon, interpret and add character voices as necessary. It was not unusual for a benshi to include information about a particular actor halfway through the picture or adapt a story, narrating outside of the required field, thus occasionally detaching the audience, from what was happening on screen. Cousins writes:

> A benshi would usually stand behind a lectern by the cinema’s screen, explaining the events, commentating on the characters and sometimes making sound effects. Of course, the benshi had their western counterparts, but the role was retained longer in Japan than anywhere else (2004, p.40).
Gerow insists that this form of narration was important to cinema in Japan as “the cinematic image on its own was insufficiently meaningful without the supplementary power of the word” (in Washburn and Cavanaugh, 2001, p.7). Burch further notes that “the image on the screen was purged of speech by the benshi, and to an almost equal degree, relieved of narrative burden. In this sense the Japanese silent film was the most silent of all, if by silence we mean, as most people do when they are talking about that film era, the absence of speech” (1976, p.35). It could also be argued that because of the manner in which films were in effect ‘dubbed’, the Japanese silent film could be viewed as one of the most aurally stimulating. The role of the kowairo prepared audiences for the future of sound, by drawing upon the tradition of theatre. To understand the importance of the spoken word in visual art, we need to delve into Japan’s theatrical past.

For example, the endurance of the benshi role can be explained by these powerful traditional influences from kabuki theatre, in which the narrator was a central figure. Komatsu explains the effects of kowairo and benshi on the development of cinematic narration thus: “Responding to the meanings always provided from the outside, the narratives freely attach themselves to the images in these films. This open ended early Japanese cinema kept the western concept of fiction at a distance” (1992, p.240). However, some critics argue that the cinemas reliance on a strict kabuki narrative relayed the benshi, arguably had adverse effects. Many films were shot with benshi in mind, which, it has been suggested, suppressed the advancement of more sophisticated camera techniques and retarded the development of visual narration. In this way, Richie claims, that early Japanese cinema “lagged ten years behind that of the west” (1965, p.16). Modern-day Japanese benshi Sawato Midori takes issue with this view:
People who say that benshi was the cause of such a lag are coming from a western point of view; this is why I cannot agree. Japan had its own way of filmic development and we had our unique expression ... In foreign films such methods did not matter so much; they sought realism. In Japan we cared more about theatrical style; when you compare with foreign films of the period, the kind of expression that we had in Japan was unique ... Benshi performed on structured and unrealistic films which were based on a totally different concept to that of western films. There was also a band playing music. This kind of performance was probably exclusive to Japan at this time (personal communication, September 19, 2010).

As well as contributing to a radically different kind of exhibition experience, benshi also exerted a powerful influence on film production as it became industrially structured during the early decades of the twentieth century. In an article entitled Silent Films – Past and Present: The Benshi, the Matsuda Film Production Company offer us some valuable information:

Many famous benshi had strong input at the film-making level. At cinemas managed by large film production and distribution companies, it was common for benshi to be shown film scripts before production began, and they often demanded a re-write if they disagreed with any part. Thus, at this point in the development of cinema, it was the performance side that held greater influence than the production side (Matsuda Film Productions, para 12, n.d.).

Benshi commentary was not restricted to Japanese films and when western films were shown in Japan, it was the benshi’s job primarily was to explain and translate the intertitles. However this translation role was often augmented with disquisitions about western clothing, technology, the weather, or hairstyles, and these digressions often became of more interest to the audience than the film itself.
Therefore it can be clearly seen through the roles of certain players that Japanese theatrical tradition had a major influence upon early Japanese cinema with regard to the structure of performance. The manner in which films were shot (as a stage), the subject matter and the staff involved ensured that there was a strong relationship between the two media. Finally the storytellers themselves, the kowairo and the untouchable benshi effectively carried on the traditions established by the narrators of traditional theatre. These early examples assist us in pinpointing certain relationships between the theatre and the cinema in terms of production and presentation.

**Theatrical Adaptations**

Stage plays have long provided material for Japanese film-makers, and this adaptation practice has continued well into the post-war cinema. This set of practices includes not only films of specific stage plays, but also the filmic appropriation of stylistic conventions and theatrical devices. Besides Kurosawa’s aforementioned *Kumonosu jo*, notable examples of adaptations include: Mizoguchi’s *Chikamatsu Monogatari*, which was based upon Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s bunraku play *Daikyōji Mukashigoyomi*, the wonderful kabuki-inspired *Yukinojo Henge (An Actor’s Revenge, 1963)*, directed by Ichikawa Kon and adapted from a newspaper serial by Mikami Otokichi, and Shinoda’s *Shinju: Ten no Amijima (Double Suicide, 1969)*, based upon Chikamatsu’s play of 1721. What is fascinating about both the Ichikawa and Shinoda films is the direct links to theatrical tradition. Ichikawa explores the fusion of theatre and cinema, and tradition and modernity, in an eclectic style which owes as much to kabuki as it does to pop-art. Acquarello notes that “An Actor’s Revenge is a stylistically bold and irreverent satire that
seeks to reconcile the familiar, traditional elements of native culture with the modern vitality of Western influence in contemporary Japan” (2003, n.p.).

Similarly, this reliance upon traditional theatrical modes is also witnessed in Shinoda’s *Shinju: Ten no Amijima*. The references are more subtle than Ichikawa’s more experimental film, but are no less visible. As part of a self-reflexive staging device, the film includes several *kuroko* (theatre stagehands). They move scenery, assist in costume changes and play background parts where necessary. In *kabuki*, the *kuroko* would be dressed head-to-foot in black, but in *bunraku* they would wear clothing appropriate for the scene. In *Shinju: Ten no Amijima* the *kuroko* change scenery, costume and are a continual presence in the film. Shinoda’s deployment of *kuroko* clearly draws upon tradition, but also places the director in the role of puppeteer, controlling and manipulating the characters.

As I have suggested, such self-conscious incorporation of theatrical devices within cinema can be traced back to its origins. However, some in the nascent film industry reacted against the persistence of *kabuki* and *bunraku* traditions and sought to exploit the contemporary realism of *shimpa*. *Shimpa* (new wave theatre) troupes had begun to form during the early 1900s, and “made use of modern settings for a wide range of plays, with comedy and suspense among them. The shimpa mainstay, however, was melodrama, most often derived from domestic novels of unrequited love” (McDonald, 1994, p.24). McDonald further notes that the Nikkatsu company, formed in 1912, “became an early major studio thanks to a repertory of stereotypical tear-jerkers” (McDonald, 1994, p.24). Despite its influential position, Nikkatsu were, however, “slow to replace its female
impersonators with actresses”, which because a bone of contention for many film modernisers who had an eye on developments in the west. Drama critic Oka Kitaro complained “a film captures ‘reality’ … Props, costumes, and settings are all real, but the female impersonator we have moving against this realistic background is unreal, and out of balance with the rest” (in McDonald, 1994, p.25). Nikkatsu eventually only cast women in 1928, following the strike which precipitated the benshi demise. “Interestingly”, McDonald observes, “the rival Shochiku Company (established in 1920), [and] noted for its innovative approach for cinema, used ‘real’ actresses from the outset” (1994, p.26).

It was in the midst of these arguments about theatrical tradition and modernity, Japanese essentialism and western influence, dramatic artifice and screen realism, that Mizoguchi began his film career. In his first picture as director, Ai Ni Yomigaeru Hi (The Resurrection of Love, 1923), representations of adultery, illicit love affairs and suicide resulted in the film being considerably censored (Andrew and Andrew, 1981, p.43). He also reworked the noh play Dojoji as Joen no Chimata (City of Desire, 1923). This was a story based on Anchin, Kiyohime Densetsu and (The Legend of the Monk and Princess Kiyo), which appeared in several stories dating back to the eighth century. The play has been seen and performed through many artistic media including bunraku, kabuki, jōruri (bunraku narration), and cinema. Among the eleven films Mizoguchi completed in his debut year, he also made film adaptations of western literature such as Maurice le Blanc’s 813 (813: The Adventures of Arsène Lupin, 1923), Jack Boyle’s The Night (Yoru, 1923) and Hoffman’s Fraulein von Scuderi, (Chi to Rei, 1923).
As his career developed, Mizoguchi used theatrical scenarios, or scenes set in or around theatres, actors, performers or plays in a number of films such as: *Kyokubadan no Jo* (*Queen of the Circus*, 1924) which is set in a cosmopolitan circus, *Kyoren no Onna Shisho*, (*The Passion of a Woman Teacher*, 1926) with Sakai Yoneko playing the role of a drama teacher, and a number of shima melodramas at Daiichi and Shingo, including *Taki no Shiraito*, discussed earlier. However his move from Shinko Kinema to Shochiku Ofuna in 1939 heralded a trilogy of theatrical films which achieved considerable success.

**Zangiku Monogatari**

*Zangiku Monogatari* was based on a recent popular stage success which Mizoguchi, newly arrived at Shochiku, was keen to exploit. Based on a serial by Muramatsu Shofu and adapted for the stage by Iwaya Shinichi, this shima tragedy follows the lives of a kabuki theatre troupe. Mizoguchi’s old friend Kawaguchi produced the screen adaptation and Yoda fashioned the script. However, as McDonald reports, when it came to casting “he insisted that no one but the famed kabuki actor Hanayagi Shotaro could play the hero” (1984, p.56). This presented a considerable challenge for the seasoned performer since, at over forty, he had to play the twenty year-old Onoe Kikunosuke. Yoda reports that Hanayagi brought along to a Tokyo screen-test a photograph of himself in his twenties and said to Mizoguchi: “If you can shoot me looking like this, I will give you everything I have.” But no amount of make-up or costume could disguise the problem. Mizoguchi suggested his performance be shot from a distance. In a comment that says much about Mizoguchi’s preferred shooting style, he complained that “audiences are tired of the 50mm lens, why should we not shoot in wide-angle”? His regular cinematographer Miki Shigeto readily agreed. Yoda recalls that it was the necessity created by this conundrum,

In *Zangiku Monogatari*, the effect is to recreate the space of the stage on which to record Hanayagi’s vital physical performance. According to Yoda, Mizoguchi wanted to draw out the best of the actors’ talent which shone on stage, rather than make him struggle to act like a film actor. Above all, it must be kabuki. For Mizoguchi, it was only by capturing the intensity of Hanayagi’s performance framed in long shot that a harmonious *mise en scène* could be achieved (1970, p.96). Whilst the veteran actor had the experience to pull this off, casting his co-star to play the heroine Otoku, proved more difficult. Yoda observed that, “in general the film actors were so used to having many cuts, that this style of shooting tested their ability. They were not accustomed to acting continuously as you would on stage. This was especially true for actresses who had entered straight into film, because it was very rare that they had the kind of acting training required, since there was no tradition of them performing in theatre (1970, p.98). Thus, at least one audition for the female lead, that of Kitami Reiko, ended in tears under Mizoguchi’s characteristically exacting demands, before Mori Kakuko got the part. Yoda writes of the dismissed Kitami: “She was beautiful and had just a hint of sadness in her face” (1970, p.98).

The opening of the film sees Kikunosuke struggling to live up to the expectation of being the adopted son of the kabuki troupe’s leader. Behind his back the stage hands and his fellow actors complain about the incompetent performance. Honesty comes in the form of Otoku, a maid who is charged with looking after Kikunosuke’s baby brother. He
welcomes the revelation from Otoku and, impressed by her forthright manner, he falls in love. However, the rumour of this forbidden relationship spreads and Otoku is dismissed by the family. This opening section of the film is stylistically familiar. Mizutani’s trademark ‘dark scenes’ and the steadfast camera-work of Miki Shigeto are combined with the one-scene-one-take and long-shot. Donald Kirihara, in his valuable analysis of the film, notes that “The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum still engages viewer interest with spatiotemporal demands familiar from the earlier films of the 1930s” (1992, p.137). What is distinct here is the theatrical form. Kirihara points out that “few of Mizoguchi’s films exhibit a clearer reach for antecedents in Japanese tradition” (1992, p.137). I have already discussed the use of the long-shot in this film. However, what is interesting is the manner in which these shots are deployed. I would argue that Mizoguchi is revisiting the early days of Japanese cinema. The shooting of the kabuki performance scenes is shot in a style which is reminiscent of the early screen depictions of live theatre. The stage is shot with a fixed camera filmed from the same perspective as a theatrical audience. The camera’s infrequent movement is a reminder of early Japanese cinema.

After Otoku leaves the service of the family Kiku goes to meet her, expressing his devotion. On his return however, his father forbids the relationship. The idea of his son in a relationship with a lowly maid was socially unacceptable. Undeterred Kiku returns again to Otoku’s house, only to be told that he is banned from seeing her. It is evident that Kikunosuke’s family has spread word of the affair, encouraging this forced separation.

A year passes and we then see Kiku leaves to study his art with his uncle, Onoe Tamizo (Onoe Tamitaro) in Osaka. Low in confidence and working as a supporting actor, Kiku exits
at the stage door, just as the theatre’s lead actor is whisked away, pursued by his female admirers. Trudging off disconsolately, Kiku’s spirit is lifted by the appearance of Otoku, who reveals that she has been watching him perform for a while. The pair soon marry and this reconciliation with Otoku gives Kiku renewed vigour as he drives to study and master his art. However, Tamizo dies and the troupe decide that there is no place for Kiku at the theatre.

We are then informed by means of an inter-title that four years have passed, and Kiku, who we last saw full of life and hope, has been eroded into a tired, washed up travelling actor, living in poor conditions. The company is on the verge of collapse and Kiku becomes violent towards Otoku. The scene in which he demands money is in striking contrast to the caring and devoted character we saw previously. It is also strange how quickly Kiku reverts back to his earlier self. Otoku hears that his old Tokyo troupe is performing in nearby Nagoya. She secretly visits the troupe’s leaders and requests that Kiku be given another chance. This request is accepted, on the condition that if Kiku is good enough, then Otoku must end the marriage. Otoku returns to the modest hostel with Kiku’s old friend Nakamura Fukusuke (Takada Kokichi), who requests that he come and try in the Nagoya performance. Kiku is a resounding success and Otoku realises that they are no longer to be together. Kiku returns to Tokyo, but Otoku is not aboard the train and the troupe members reveal the deal that they had made. In ill health, she returns to their house, her sadness at their parting is tempered, characteristically, by her sense of satisfaction for the self-sacrifice she has made.
Returning to Tokyo, Kiku is a huge success and is welcomed back by his family. This acceptance from both fellow actors and audience is crucial in the world of theatre and central to kabuki performance. As Thornbury notes: “There are few examples in world theatre where role types are so central to the dramatic art and developed with such complexity as they are in Kabuki” (1977, p.35). The family troupe visit Osaka for the Tenjin Matsuri 天神祭, an annual festival held in Osaka. The highlight is the boat parade on the Okawa River (also known as Yodogawa), and this event opens their season of performances in the city. Before Tenjin Matsuri commences, Kiku is informed of Otoku’s whereabouts. His father overhears and tells him to go and fetch her, as his struggles and experiences have enabled him to mature as an actor. Kiku rushes to the bed-ridden Otoku. She explains why she abandoned him, and he replies that his father has accepted her as part of the family. Proud to call Kiku her husband once more, she sends him off to take his place in the procession.

As Kiku greets the onlookers amid festival music and cheers, Otoku passes away. At that very moment, the camera returns to a solemn Kiku, who bows respectfully, as if with the knowledge of her death. The ending solidifies the connection between Otoku and Kiku. Like many of Mizoguchi’s other male characters, Kiku is left to a life of contemplation. Saso views the ending differently however, noting that it is “cold, cruel and abnormal”. He suggests that these events reflect Mizoguchi’s anger towards the rigidity of kabuki society. If you look deeper at the scene, you could argue that this is Mizoguchi challenging everything that he had previously portrayed, including the lives of the characters. They have bowed to the pressure of tradition (Saso, 2006, p.107).
Zangiku Monogatari is a harsh critique of the social order which is amplified by its setting in the formulaic world of kabuki. As Sato notes, such rigidity is characteristic of rien (the closed world of kabuki):

Within the theatre industry, actors, who were generally looked down upon within society, created a rigid hierarchy of their own. A few prominent troupes monopolized the right to act in large theatres in the major cities. They made it almost impossible for the other actors, no matter how good they were, to take the leading role at established venues. In order to maintain this rigid system, they adhered to tradition, putting tremendous importance on the family or clan name (in Imamura et al, 1985, p.12).

As performers in the public eye, it is crucial that these unwritten laws of behaviour and expectation are maintained to ensure the future success and stability of the troupe. As is usual in a Mizoguchi drama, the film depicts forbidden romantic liaison between members of different classes, highlighting the difficult circumstances they must overcome and the sacrifices that must be made to keep order. Again, as is typical, the major decision is taken by the female of the partnership (in this case Otoku, who decides to give up her love for Kiku’s success). Characteristically, women are the catalysts of change. As with so many of Mizoguchi’s films, a beautiful woman sacrifices herself for her love. But through this sacrifice we are forcefully reminded of the ineluctable power of Japanese societal demands and of the Japanese proverb bijin hakumei (a beautiful woman does not have a fortunate life). The sacrifice that Otoku makes to ensure Kiku’s success is one which is rooted in the nature of the Japanese woman.
McDonald reports that Zangiku Monogatari won Mizoguchi an Education Ministry award and the chance to serve on the National Film Committee. Emboldened by this establishment approval, in July 1940 he set about a second film with a theatrical subject, in what was now planned as a trilogy (McDonald, 1984, p.60). Naniwa Onna (The Woman of Osaka, 1940) is about the life of a bunraku shamisen musician, who falls ill and is nursed to recovery by the daughter of his co-performer, Ochika, played by Tanaka Kinuyo. This was Tanaka’s first role for Mizoguchi and she brings to the character of Ochika, “a strong-willed wisdom and leadership” (McDonald, 1984, p.61). During the difficult scripting process which was a Mizoguchi original crafted by Yoda, commentators report that through draft after draft Ochika became closer in character to his own troubled wife, Chieko (Andrew and Andrew, 1981, pp.12-13). Sato further notes that “Ochika’s character appears to be inseparable from Mizoguchi’s own memories … someone who relies deeply on a woman” (2008, p.84). Naniwa Onna is a lost film, as is the final film of the trilogy Geido Ichidai Otoko (The Life of an Actor, 1941). This story, about the life of an illegitimate son of a kabuki actor, was considered inappropriate for wartime audiences. In a 1954 interview with Kinema Junpo, Mizoguchi recorded his disappointment, conceding that studio pressure restricted his freedom. The finished product was the best he could do under difficult industrial and political circumstances (1954, p.52).

Nonetheless, films set in the theatrical world not only drew upon Japanese traditions which were likely to gain official approval at this time, but also represent another of Mizoguchi’s microcosmic worlds circumscribed by its own accentuated practices, traditions, colourful characters and symbolic resonance. It has already been suggested that by representing haiyū in these films, a Japanese audience can feel detached from
these characters as they on the margins of society. Saso remarks that the theatrical world “is portrayed in a way which detaches the audience, they are in effect pushed away” (personal communication, September 20, 2010). As observed in our discussion of spectatorship in Chapter Four, the stylised devices and extreme codes of theatrical tradition are deployed by Mizoguchi as another means of distanciation. It may be argued that the technique of tsukihanasareta bōkansha works in this way against the emotional affect of kabuki and shimpa melodrama. Through this type of melodrama Mizoguchi is able to offer an audience a view much like the shimpa play. He is able to represent modern life and the struggles that accompany in a self-conscious manner.

Joyu Sumako no Koi
After the war, Mizoguchi returned to the world of the theatre in the 1947 film Joyu Sumako no Koi, which revolves around a shingeki 新劇 theatre troupe performing Western plays. The story was adapted for the screen by Yoda Yoshikata, and is taken from Nagata Hideo’s play, based on a true story, Karumen Yukinu, first published in January 1947 in the literature magazine Kuraku. Later the same year, the title was changed to Joyu Sumako and published in a selection of Nagata’s short stories. The film focuses upon the famous literary figure, stage director and pioneer of the shingeki movement, Shimamura Hogetsu. Born in Shimane Prefecture in 1871, Shimamura studied in Britain and Germany and, upon his return, became Professor of Literature at the University of Waseda. A contributor to the naturalist movement, he established the Bungei Za (Bungei Theatre Troupe) with Tsubouchi Shouyou in 1906. The troupe was responsible for some of the most famous adaptations of western theatre such as Ibsen’s A Doll’s House, which is represented in Mizoguchi’s film. Sumako is different from the other films which are
highlighted in this chapter. There is a new pro-western mode in this film which no doubt relates to the atmosphere of the American post-war occupation and it cultural policy as set out in Chapter Four. Stylistically the film also appears fresh. It begins abruptly, without a major establishing shot. In a bold head-and-shoulders shot, we first see Shimamura who, having just returned from Europe, is lecturing a class at the University of Waseda. This opening directs attention immediately to Shimamura’s address concerning the conflict between an honest life and the bitter social reality. Honesty to face desperate struggles is the essence of Ibsen’s modern theatre. For example, when Nora leaves shouting “A miracle has happened!” When Oswald shouts “The sun!” in Ghosts, we can see an unresolved life in a future of deep darkness. Therefore Ibsen’s dramas don’t end or solve anything. But I think that although life is full of trials, if, in order to escape them, we let ourselves go to futility, or if we live following a superficial ethic, we’re deluding ourselves. Life is full of conflicts and misery. But the one who lives honestly, without trickery, leads a truly free life, full of satisfaction. Then, great art can be created. We must also find a true ethic, free from past tradition. In fact, life is suffering.

Presented in this manner, it is easy read this polemic as Mizoguchi’s own self-reflection. The need to reject superficiality, to resist escaping into self-delusion, to confront oneself with honesty and integrity, and above all to suffer for one’s art – it is tempting to see this as a creed derived from bitter experience, rather than a critique of Ibsen. Other parallels between the lives of Shimamura and Mizoguchi might be drawn. With regards to his stage productions, Shimamura was, like Mizoguchi, a perfectionist and demanded high standards from his actors. In a scene from the film where Sumako is rehearsing her part as Nora in A Doll’s House, Shimamura demands that she repeat her lines over and over until he is satisfied. At one point he chastises her angrily: “It doesn’t ring true! You cannot
do away with your feelings. Control this intense emotion and then cast it out. Like violent waves, you need rocks on which to crash. Like waves on rocks”. We know that Mizoguchi similarly strove for perfection with his cast and crew and again, an autobiographical reading is invited by this scene. The intense professional relationship in the film between Shimamura and Sumako inevitably spills over into their personal lives. Then here again, it is tempting to draw parallels between Mizoguchi and his leading lady Tanaka Kinuyo.

Following her first film with Mizoguchi, Naniwa Onna in 1940, Tanaka starred in a further twelve films between 1940 and 1954, and their collaboration accounts for over a third of Mizoguchi’s entire output. The demands he made on his leading actors were revealed to Tanaka from the outset. In Shindo’s documentary, Tanaka Kinuyo recalls that for Naniwa Onna (1940), the preparation was extensive:

I really had to study this character before I felt I understood her. It took me by surprise. I first went to Kyoto and Ms Sakane, the lady director – She was a script girl then, came to the inn where I was staying the night I arrived, with a stack of books this high wrapped in cloth. She said, ‘Miss Tanaka, please read them. Mr. Mizoguchi asked me to tell you to study them carefully and absorb what is inside.’ I had already studied the script thoroughly, it was set in the world of bunraku puppet theatre in Ochika’s home, her husband’s dressing room, and onstage. Many of those books on Bunraku were meant for scholars. Not books that a person like me just sits down and reads from cover to cover (Shindo, 1975).

Tanaka had arrived in Kyoto in spring 1940, and because the film did not start shooting until the summer, Mizoguchi used this time to research and prepare for the film. Tanaka recalls that after he had her read the books, he then sent her to a bunraku play in Osaka, telling her to “drink in the atmosphere, and feel the rigour of that world in a way the
script could not convey.” Tanaka finally adds that, “learning everything was an ordeal” (Shindo, 1975). As Mizoguchi began to rely more heavily upon the traditional Japanese arts, such research was crucial to his work and demands made of his collaborators.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the platonic nature of his love for Tanaka did little to quell speculation about their relationship. In a revealing interview, Tanaka was pressed on the matter by Shindo Kaneto:

**Shindo:** I was close to him, and I believe that when he was alive, he was in love with you.

**Tanaka:** Well, you have given me an excellent chance...an excellent chance to respond to those rumours.

**Shindo:** Well, he was very serious about this. You mentioned earlier of how, during the filming of *A Woman of Osaka*, that at the beginning of filming he had said, ‘nice to meet you’ and then at the end ‘thank-you’ but he said nothing in-between. He was very shy, very self-conscious. Although he may never have confessed how he felt, you were the love of his life.

**Tanaka:** There you see, you exaggerate. Everybody made a big deal out of it.

**Shindo:** No, no seriously. In the course of working with you Miss Tanaka, I believe that he truly came to admire you. You visited him in hospital just before he died, right?

**Tanaka:** Yes, of course.

**Shindo:** You must have known then how much he adored you.

**Tanaka:** Well, this a good chance for me to tell everybody, that we were, in a sense, in an on-screen marriage. In its own way, that is a kind of marriage. When I said before, that I knew nothing about his private life you probably thought that I was being elusive, but I really knew very little. If he really had such feelings, they were not for Tanaka Kinuyo, but for the characters Oharu and Ochika. That is what I think. He was not in love with Tanaka Kinuyo. I played roles which embodied a certain image of women, an image that he loved. He was in love with them. I have no doubt about that (Shindo, 1975).
Joyu Sumako no Koi, was Tanaka’s sixth film for Mizoguchi, and is arguably the most revealing in respect of their personal relationship. Through Shimamura, Mizoguchi’s feelings for her find their most sensitive realisation in Tanaka’s Sumako: a headstrong, passionate and determined woman. Arguably in Tanaka, Mizoguchi idealised womanhood. Shimamura does the same; he moulds the inexperienced Sumako into a liberated, charismatic and temperamental actress. Through the intensity of his personal relationship with Sumako, Shimamura is able to create his ideal theatre.

However, in another autobiographical revelation, once Shimamura and Sumako becomes lovers, he ignores his personal responsibilities, spending more time with Sumako and staying away from home with the theatre troupe. Crucially, he misses his daughter’s omiai お見合い, (the day when she meets her future husband and his family). This growing relationship between Shimamura and Sumako has not gone unnoticed. He is reprimanded first by his daughter Haruko (Asagiri Kyoko), who thinks that his behaviour will affect her marriage prospects. He is then confronted by the manager of the theatre company, Tsubouchi (Tono Eijiro), who is concerned about any illicit affairs within the troupe and the damage it will cause. Finally, he is questioned by his mother-in-law who not only attacks him about Sumako but also over his profession, threatening to write him out of her will. His emotional and artistic convictions however are too strong to heed these warnings, and he abandons his family to be with Sumako. In turn they both leave the troupe to start a new art theatre. Over the course of a year, the art theatre begins to struggle as a result of the growing tensions in their relationship. Dedicated but overworked, Shimamura becomes ill and during a rehearsal, Sumako is informed that he is dying. At the funeral Tsubouchi tells Sumako to devote herself to art, just as Shimamura
had. Sumako follows this advice and pursues Shimamura’s own obsession with artistic perfection, applying exacting standards to the actors in rehearsal. Significantly in preparing for a performance of *Carmen*, Sumako rehearses her death scene repeatedly. LeFanu observes that her obsession for perfection drives her irrevocably towards a total embodiment of her role: “Nothing, it seems, can meet her demands – unless it is the real thing itself” (2005, p.134). This is prescient since the next day the cast are informed that Sumako has committed suicide on an empty stage. In order to realise the ideal performance, Sumako has fused art and life in a tragic unity.

Aesthetically, *Joyu Sumako no Koi* builds on the theatrical mode as used in *Zangiku Monogatari*. Significantly however, the post-war settlement under American occupation encouraged the substitution of the traditional *kabuki* theatre (much praised by the national government), with a decidedly western frame of reference. This development enabled the popular *shimpa* form to be elevated to the moral seriousness of Ibsen or Chekhov, and it also allowed Mizoguchi to develop bohemian characters whose freedom of personal expression contested the restrictive value-system of Japanese social convention. As in the earlier film the one-scene-one-shot set-up is prevalent here. The viewer is positioned as if seated in a theatre watching a play, this is not, however in the service of authentic *kabuki* recreation, but rather adds as a self conscious device to heighten our awareness of the artifice laid before us and to invite its scrutiny. The camera rarely moves, focusing upon individuals who tend to remain in shot. The spirit of the theatre is indeed prevalent throughout, in narrative structure, acting and *mise en scène*. *Joyu Sumako no Koi* is a deeply personal and autobiographical work. The use of theatre within this film allows Mizoguchi to subtly represent himself and his feelings in what is
arguably a candid, through never self-indulgent manner. The theatrical model enables him both to intellectualise his creative philosophy and to confront his own demons in a melodramatic form which is ultimately cathartic.

*Ugetsu Monogatari*

While *Joyu Sumako no Koi* addresses the theatrical in a quite modern, radical and self-conscious way, the use of traditional Japanese theatre is equally striking symbolically *Ugetsu Monogatari*. As I observed in Chapter Four, the film draws extensively on traditional *emakimonon*, *kakejiku* artistic forms. It also owes as much to the theatrical traditions of *noh*, as it does to the Sengoku period in which it is set. This period is historically important as it marks a time when Japan fell into a state of civil war as the Ashikaga *bakufu* gradually lost control. Noted *noh* actress Oshima Kinue notes that the film’s historical setting is a crucial element of *Ugetsu*:

> When you consider the historical context, it is clear that Mizoguchi was a director who really thought about and used Japaneseess, in a time where the society around him was erring towards western ideas and thoughts. He uses *noh* just after the war; this is very interesting because when *noh* was established during the Muromachi period (1336 to 1573 approx), it was also a chaotic time. So, he may have been connecting these two periods, even though there is a huge time difference. Both periods experienced great wars and many died. People were trying to build a new era and both were periods of transition (personal communication, September 19, 2010).

Although a time of conflict, this period is also known for its great artistic achievements and is recognised by its own name, the Higashiyama Age 東山時代. Arts and crafts such as painting were made famous by the Buddhist imagery of Mincho, by Tosa
Mitsunobu’s *yamato e* 大和絵, and by Sesshu, who was the foremost exponent of monochrome *suibokuga* brush paintings as well as Kano Masanobu, who was the founder of the influential Kano school. The *cha no yu* 茶の湯 (also known as *sadō*) or tea ceremony also flourished during this period, as did the art of Japanese flower arrangement, *ikebana* 生け花 (also known as *kadō* 華道). Most importantly however, the *noh* theatre found its roots during this time; it performed a ceremonial function for the military classes and was strongly encouraged by the aristocracy and the Shogun himself. It is quite remarkable that in a country ravaged by war that arts such as these flourished. There are strong reminders of this in *Ugetsu*: the craft of the potter, and the dance of Wakasa, which are portrayed against a backdrop of desolate, war-ravaged landscapes. Indeed, Russell suggests that:

> The peasants’ pot making ... is represented as a more “sincere” craft than the classical arts associated with the aristocratic Lady Wakasa. In 1952 Japan, *kokugaku* [nativism] is for Mizoguchi a non imperialist, pacifist mode of traditionalism through which “Japaneseness” might be resurrected after its censorship during the Occupation period (in Dissanayake, 1993, p.148).

*Ugetsu* is divided into two distinct parts. The first concentrates on two principal couples, Ohama (Mito Mitsuko) and her husband Tobei (Ozawa Sakae), and Genjuro (Mori Masayuki) and his wife Miyagi (Tanaka Kinuyo). Genjuro is primarily a farmer, but runs a side business creating pottery, in an attempt to support his wife and small child. Tobei is an aspiring *samurai* whose dreams are scoffed at by Ohama. Although the men are similar characters - both being dreamers - it is the contrast between the women that fascinates as the strong Ohama and the subservient Miyagi both wish the same from their men.
The first part of the film is a realistic period tale depicting a country ravaged by a civil war and the village in which they live overrun by soldiers. When Tobei and Genjuro arrive at the market in Nagahama to sell Genjuro’s pottery however, a change takes place. Mizoguchi transforms the whole essence of the film in one scene. We are introduced to the bustling market where the villagers are buying and trading. Genjuro is busy selling his wares when from a distance, we see a woman approaching who, when compared to the villagers, is markedly different. Lady Wakasa (Kyo Machiko) is purposeful, graceful and noble in both movement and manner. Even before she speaks a Japanese audience would recognise her as a figure from noh theatre. Her demeanour and deportment indicate something more than social status. She approaches Genjuro’s stall with her nurse Ukon at her side, matching her step for step. It is almost as if the shite, the masked principal in a noh performance, has entered the stage, shadowed by their stage attendant.

Although prior to this, there is a distinct absence of a visual noh aesthetic in the first part of the film, the introductory music to Ugetsu Monogatari, is evocative of noh style. To a Japanese audience the opening title sequence would have conjured the spirit of noh which thus far the realist narrative has confounded. This, however, is misleading as any notions that the story would be theatrical, diminish during the opening sequences. Now with the arrival of Wakasa, this aural reference makes sense. With the introduction of Lady Wakasa, Mizoguchi strikingly re-invokes noh on a visual level. As the second part of the film unfolds there is a cumulative increase in signifiers associated with traditional theatre. As Eric Rhode notes: “Mizoguchi depends on the Noh theatre, both for his type of plot and for the style in which he composes his images” (1962, p.99).
Wakasa represents the intervention of the mysterious. Her *kimono*, *kasa* (veiled headwear), beautifully arranged hair, shaved eyebrows and dutiful attendant are all indicative of someone who is not simply out of place socially here, but is otherworldly. Immediately her presence sparks curiosity. Why is she there? Why is she, a woman of such high status, buying pots from a merchant such as Genjuro? The mystery is heightened as Wakasa’s face remains shrouded by her *kasa* only glimpsed fleetingly as Ukon orders Genjuro to deliver the pottery she has purchased. After his day’s trading is done, Genjuro looks at a *kimono* at another stall, thinking of his wife and child whom he left in war-torn Omi. His thoughts of home are broken as he is confronted again by Wakasa and Ukon, who offer to accompany him back to Kutsuki Manor. The *nō* rhetoric here is recognised in the way in which Genjuro is summoned to follow them. Mizoguchi uses typical tropes to garner an emotional response to this spiritual calling. The unveiling of Wakasa’s face for example, is performed ceremonially as it would be in *nō* theatre (Figures 40 and 41). Wakasa’s appearance is strikingly similar to the *magojiro* 孫次郎, a *nō* Mask representing a young girl originally made by Kongo Magojiro in the first half of the sixteenth century. The connotations are all important here. Washburn notes that: “We discover the true identity or purpose of the *shite* during his/her exposition ... Once the true identity of the *shite* has been learned, the true form of the *shite* is also revealed” (1990, p.44). Thus as Wakasa reveals her face her identity is confirmed and, with it, the implicit danger that Genjuro now finds himself in. Lamarque explains:

The concentration of focus in a performance on the abstracted inner spirit of a character, centered on one poignant incident, encourages not a cognitive but an effective response. The *shite*’s use of mask and stylized gesture keeps the audience from being distracted by a realistic surface and guides the imagination away from
mere factual reconstruction. The personality of actor and character must be invisible. In this way, human interest and attention are channelled directly into the emotional core (1989, p.165).

There are also familiar noh signifiers seen within the *mise en scène* upon Genjuro’s arrival at Kutsuki Manor. He is led into the manor by Ukon through what is reminiscent of a hashigakari 建掛けり, a walkway which leads onto the noh stage. Although it appears that Genjuro is simply led through a corridor into the manor, the actual meaning is a lot more sinister and reveals itself as a most poignant event. Mizoguchi’s use of this hashigakari is inspired directly by its form and meaning within both noh theatre and Japanese culture generally. Oshima explains: “In Japan we perceive bridges as somewhere where you would meet ghosts. Or you would walk across the bridge to travel to another world … the character in *Ugetsu Monogatari* did not know this and unknowingly went there” (personal communication, September 19, 2010). The hashigakari has two purposes and characters that enter the stage through it can do so in two ways. The first is by using
the walkway to portray a long journey, to indicate that time has passed whilst on this journey, usually represented by walking slowly. The second, and most important in the context of the film, is the meaning of the hashigakari as a bridge between the mortal world and that of the dead, of spirits, ghosts and demons. The theme of spirituality relates heavily to noh drama. Sato notes that, “ghosts are one of the most important topics in Japanese traditional drama. Especially in noh, the majority of the better works have a ghost meeting a traveller of this world and recounting his life and death with regret” (in McDonald, 1993, p.163). In this way, Mizoguchi purposefully and methodically includes noh elements in Ugetsu to evoke these spiritual associations. Having established Wakasa as a sinister character with the unveiling of the mask and having Genjuro cross from the living to the spirit world, the dance and song that Wakasa then performs provides a direct link to theatrical influence. There is nothing experimental about what Mizoguchi is setting out to achieve.

There are other noh signifiers in this scene also. In noh theatre three matsu 松 trees are spaced evenly along the hashigakari. At these positions the noh actor will stop to deliver lines or to perform actions. Although in Ugetsu these matsu trees are not present, the director has the manor’s servants, like stage attendants, light three candles at the positions where the matsu would stand. Also in the noh theatre the performers, musicians and attendants are arranged so that every noh stage is the same. At the rear of the noh stage there will always be a painting of a matsu tree on the kagami ita 鏡板, a wooden board at the back of the main stage. The shape and size of the painting differs depending on the theatre. The roots of this tradition relate back to a noh performance at the Kasuga Shrine during the Nara period (710-794 AD). This shrine is located in Nara, in
Kansai. Noh was always performed outdoors and during this particular piece Kasuga Myojin, a deity who was said to be the protector of the Fujiwara and Nakatomi clans, descended into a matsu tree during the performance. Therefore the painting exists to welcome the spirit of Kasuga Myojin if he descends during a performance. This is also why noh actors rehearse separately, so as not to invoke the spirit during rehearsals. Oshima explains further:

In noh, the matsu tree symbolises the spirit of traditional arts that came before. The matsu is a tree which attracts spirits, so that gods can descend to a physical space. It is not the only object of this kind, but it is the most well known. You perform facing the tree. Of course, as you know, at the back of the stage we have a painting of a matsu, but this is supposed to be a reflection. Originally the matsu tree was in front of the Noh stage, where the audience sit today. The performers would always keep in mind that they sing or dance for the matsu tree, for the god, spirits or demon, that descends into the tree ... That is how we always think when performing. And also, the spoken sound of the word ‘matsu’ has a double meaning in Japanese; one is of course matsu as in tree and the other is ‘wait’. So, we are waiting for something that belongs to another world to materialise (personal communication, September 19, 2010).

Significantly, both Genjuro and Ukon pause at the entrance of the manor to remove their shoes. Although in this scene there is no matsu tree on rear wall, Mizoguchi deliberately places a tree prominently at the

Figure 42
front of the shot, on the right (Figure 42). As Genjuro enters this potent *mise en scène* the
ominous nature of his situation is confirmed. Even the branches of the tree, which cover
almost two-thirds of the shot, appear to be reaching out to Genjuro, enticing him into the
manor. Genjuro is now leaving behind his material past and entering another world, the
world of spirits. The tree which is conventionally represented only in a painting here,
takes on a malevolent, living form. Of this inclusion, Oshima has no doubt that Mizoguchi
was reliant upon noh’s cultural and spiritual meanings:

There is definitely an intention here. I don’t know if it is the reflection of the *matsu*
tree on a noh stage, but considering what the *matsu* represents, and the spirituality
which exists on a noh stage, I would say that the *matsu* is acting as a conduit to
allow a connection with the spiritual world (personal communication, September
19, 2010).

Wakasa is presented unlike any other character in the film. Apart from her stylised
costume and otherworldly demeanour, she is also overtly sexual; siren-like, she entices
Genjuro into her inner-sanctum. Praising the craftsmanship of his pottery-ware, she
begins an elaborate, erotic seduction, displaying a submissive tendency whilst at the
same time remaining in control; she is playing a game and Genjuro, blinded by her
beauty, is oblivious to this. Wakasa then dances for Genjuro in slow, noh-inspired
movements. The song that she chants tells of the transience of mortal things and how the
living body fades. This performance is heightened dramatically as darkness descends and
we are confronted with a close-up of a *samurai* helmet. A deeper male voice joins in the
chant in a tone of doom laden foreboding. The descent of the spirit is confirmed in the
form of Wakasa’s father, but who announces his presence not in the beauty of the *matsu*
tree but through an image of violence, a samurai helmet. In characteristic fashion, Mizoguchi resists any alignment with character viewpoint; we witness Genjuro’s entrapment as tsukihanasareta bōkansha through Mizoguchi’s detached perspective and the subdued lighting. The scene is as bewildering to us as it is to Genjuro. As a viewer it is difficult to become a part of the world, even during these sequences, such is the distance of Mizoguchi’s camera. However, again the uncomfortable feeling of helplessness towards Genjuro and the fact that he is indeed alone in the spirit world only serves to heighten the anxiety felt by the spectator. The opening section of this scene is interesting. Before entering the room where Genjuro, the servants and Ukon sit awaiting her arrival, Wakasa pauses, reminiscent of a noh actor meditating in the gakuya (dressing room) before a performance (Figure 43). Wakasa’s pause is important. Immoos points out that the purpose of this mediation was to “absorb the divine powers”. The ritual was a pivotal part of noh performance: “Actors did not enter the stage before real ecstasy had been achieved” (1969, p.410). In an almost hypnotic state, Wakasa enters:

The dancer makes his appearance in great, majestic movements or in a whirl of excitement. Even in a modern audience that has gone through all stages of demythologizing enlightenment, one can still feel some of the awe, the supernatural power emanating from this figure (1969, p.410).
In this transformatory sequence, Mizoguchi deploys a range of signifiers from *noh* theatre in richly suggestive ways, conveying to a Japanese audience familiar with such traditions the full resonance of the mythical associations and their spiritual potency. At the film’s climax the malevolence of the spirit world is laid to rest by the priest who warns Genjuro of Wakasa’s intention to take his life. He marks his body with sutras as a protection against her. As Jones relates, in *noh* theatre: “A difficulty is resolved, a sin is atoned for, a harmony is restored usually by the sympathetic intervention of a Buddhist priest” (1966, p.57). With her hold over him broken, Genjuro returns home only to discover his that his wife has been murdered by passing soldiers in search of food. His now empty house is haunted by her ghostly presence.

**Uwasa no Onna**

As we have seen, Mizoguchi manipulated such theatrical elements not just for stylistic but also for narrative purposes. As *noh* is representative of Japanese culture, so its people are aware of the spirituality that surrounds it. A feeling exists for *noh* which cannot be recreated by an audience that did not recognise its value. There are other Mizoguchi pictures which also use a theatrical aesthetic, and although the deployment of such devices elsewhere are different from the spiritual feeling of *noh*, they do allow characters to behave in a manner which is outside of normal Japanese society. These elements work in two ways. Firstly they act as a comfort for an audience. For example, in unfamiliar settings *jidaigeki* (theatre which acts as a constant for the Japanese), is a comforting and recognisable element. Secondly, Mizoguchi uses these theatrical genres (*noh, kabuki, shimpa*) to heighten emotion, whether the effect be transcendental (*noh*), stylised (*kabuki*), or melodramatic (*shimpa*). Moments of revelation in films such as
*Uwasa no Onna* (1954) and *Naniwa Ereji* take place in theatres. The theatrical elements of *Uwasa no Onna* for example are used as part of a sequence of self-realisation by the lead character Hatsuko (Tanaka Kinuyo). The film is a good example of theatre as a device for both advancing the story, as well as revealing the inner conflict of Japanese social expectation represented by *wa*, *honne* and *tatemae*.

Hatsuko is the *okami* (mistress) of Izutsuya, a respectable brothel in the Shimabara district of Kyoto which had been run by her family for generations. Her daughter Yukiko (Kuga Yoshiko) was in Tokyo but is brought home after a failed relationship and apparent suicide attempt. Hatsuko requests that her daughter is examined by the novice but trusted Dr. Matoba (Otani Tomoemon) who, despite questions, gets very little information from Yukiko. In a later conversation between Matoba and Yukiko we learn that the reason behind her relationship breakdown was due to her connection with Izutsuya and the activities therein. When Matoba informs Hatsuko about this, she is both shocked and saddened that her business and the profession of her recent ancestors have caused these problems for Yukiko. Hoping to finance a local practice for Dr. Matoba, it is revealed that Hatsuko has been saving money, hoping to finance the surgery and become his wife. Problems begin to occur however as Hatsuko already has a suitor, Harada (Shindo Eitaro). However, for Hatsuko a marriage is not a possibility and we witness devotion and at times blind obsession with Matoba. The theatre scene adds to this uncomfortable element of the picture. Upon receiving tickets to a *noh* performance from one of her patrons, Hatsuko, Matoba and Yukiko attend the theatre along with many of the customers from Izutsuya. Throughout the film, Matoba and Yukiko have become emotionally closer. Mizoguchi represents this in an understated manner. Although at this
Hatsuko is still oblivious to the feelings between the two, in a familiar example of dramatic irony, the audience is privileged to know already, hoping she will not discover their growing relationship. Like the theatre scene in *Naniwa Ereji* which was examined in Chapter One, Mizoguchi here utilises the location for a moment of revelation and heartbreak. And this is one of the most powerfully intense moments in any of his pictures.

At the *noh* theatre the first words sung by the performers on stage are:

“My tears flow when I think of the sadness in this world. In the dark waters near the edge of the marsh I can see reflected the lights of the fireflies. I cannot pledge myself to you as a life together is not possible for us”. During these last words, the camera pans from the stage across the audience to Hatsuko who is sitting alone at the back of the theatre. As we watch her, the performer’s words become a narrative commentary on her life. She casts a concerned glance over her shoulder to where Yukiko and Matoba’s *zabuton* (floor cushions), are vacant, with a theatre programme discarded on each. Hatsuko herself leaves and on her way out she hears the pair talking in the theatre foyer (Figure 44). They are discussing moving to Tokyo. Hatsuko’s learns that her plans for a clinic for Dr. Matoba have been rejected in this abrupt *volte face*. He reveals, “I’ve changed my mind, I want to finish my research thesis.
There would be more possibilities for me if I had a doctorate”. Yukiko replies: “I’d definitely go to Tokyo if you were going to be there”

This scene is uncomfortable for three reasons. Firstly Tanaka does not speak; her desperation is transmitted through her facial expression and body movements; we almost see her soul drain from her body. It is an exquisite piece of acting captured by the camera which remains withdrawn at a discreet distance from both the couple and Hatsuko. As she sits on a chair behind a wall to continue her eavesdropping, the realisation strikes her that not only is this a rejection from her lover, but that she is also losing him to her daughter (Figure 45). The two people whom she cares for most are the ones betraying her. Secondly, the scene is accompanied by the diegetic sound of the noh music from the play taking place in the main theatre. As Yukiko and Matoba’s conversation continues the music speeds up to match perfectly the movement of Tanaka, who shifts uncomfortably, pondering a way to resolve this. Without realising, she has become a part of the play she has gone to see - a helpless victim of the deceit which is being played out before her.
Thirdly, because of where the camera is positioned no moral judgement is made of Hatsuko’s eavesdropping, since by implication the audience is equally guilty (Figure 46). Indeed, maybe the audience feels culpable because we are witnesses to Hatsuko’s heartbreak as well as Matoba’s plan. It is important to address the fact that Matoba is typical of a Mizoguchi male protagonist, both selfish and oblivious to the suffering he is about to induce. He instigates the relationship; it is obvious that Yukiko is ignorant of her mother’s involvement with him. As the conversation ends so does the noh play, and the applause acts as an ironic commentary which brings Hatsuko back to reality. Mizoguchi pursues the emotion of this scene to an almost unbearable pitch. There is a callousness in Hatsuko’s self-realisation. As the intermission finishes, the protagonists re-enter the theatre where the kyōgen (comic relief which is played out in the interval of the
main noh performance) is playing. In this scene we witness the performance of *Makura Monogurui* 枕物狂 (*Pillow Mania*). Interestingly, the most recognised performance of this play involves an old man, who has fallen in love with a younger woman. He is the object of ridicule by his grandsons for his emotions towards her. Mizoguchi subverts the play cruelly as the old man is replaced by an old woman played by famous kyōgen actor Shigeyama Sengoro. The comic dialogue on stage acts as a bitter commentary for Hatsuko’s situation. Two young men are discussing a conversation that had been conducted with an old woman:

“Listen to me, did the old woman ask you what it was like to be in love?”

“Yes she did indeed ask me that but I didn’t know if she was being serious.”

“It would certainly provide her with comfort in her old age if she were to fall in love.”

“How did you respond to her?”

“I told her that I was too young to know.”

“It must be love!”

Already the relationship between the old woman of the play and Hatsuko is established. Hatsuko’s inner conflict is being played out comically, her personal thoughts revealed. Is her love for Matoba genuine or is it the fear of being lonely which encourages such feelings?
The image of a decrepit old woman then appears on the hashigakari and is greeted by laughter from the audience. This image is steeped in noh cultural sensibilities. Carolyn Haynes notes that in traditional performances of Makura Monogurui “the old man resembles the kyōjo 狂女, women deranged by longing for lost children or lovers” (1984, pp.261-262). Mizoguchi realises the deep significance of the original meaning. Here, the old woman in the kyōgen has one kimono sleeve displaced and is carrying a bamboo branch. These elements act as a crucial signifier within the film’s context. Discussing parody within the original kyōgen performance, Haynes explains:

One sleeve of his outer robe is slipped off his shoulder and he carries a branch of bamboo. The branch is reminiscent of ancient shamanic traditions, where it served as the vehicle through which spirits descended to possess a medium. It remains in noh to indicate the possessed or obsessed nature of a woman crazed by grief (1984, p.262).

As the old woman slowly enters the stage, the young men burst into song, not just teasing the old woman of the play, but by implication, also Hatsuko:

“She’s head over heels, head over heels in love.”

The old woman then speaks words that Hatsuko does not want to hear.

“I’m so ashamed, I’m so ashamed. Such feelings of love are fine when you are nineteen or twenty years of age, but when you’re an old woman of sixty like I am then it’s just shameful. Even carp know better than to fall in love at this age!”

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The camera cruelly cuts back to Hatsuko, Yukiko and Matoba, with the former looking horrified. What is being expressed on the stage is a lampooning of her reality.

Figure 47

She shifts uncomfortably, solemnly looking on whilst the couple are laughing at the old woman (Figure 47). However the old woman then begins to sing and Hatsuko begins to realise the uncomfortable truth of her situation:

“One tried to sleep but all one can do is toss and turn at night. One cannot deny love, there is nothing one can do. It is the fault of love. One can find no rest, no rest at all. All there is, is madness. One shifts one’s pillow here and there across the floor. One tried to sleep with the pillow here, and then there.”

The song ends and the two male actors run from the woman exclaiming:
“Look over there, it’s the old woman in the throes of madness!”

The audience cry out with laughter as Mizoguchi cuts back to Hatsuko. Looking drained and desperate, she stands up and walks out of the theatre and into the foyer. Ueno remarks on how Mizoguchi uses the recognisable elements of human frailty and theatrical discourse to represent the plight of Hatsuko. In a contemporary review of the film, Ueno notes:

The portrayal of the ugliness of love in old age reveals a true part of human nature. The scene at the Noh theatre, where the mother’s heart was harshly hit by the kyōgen played in front of her is quite outstanding (1954, p.52).

As in *Ugetsu*, the noh elements here not only provide an emotional counterpoint to the human drama, but also convey a spiritual message to Hatsuko. They warn her of the helplessness of her situation, as well as ridiculing her for her feelings towards Dr. Matoba: it is ludicrous to fall in love with such a younger man! The scene is both desperate and chilling; the viewer is witness to Hatsuko’s realisation of what is playing out around her; she has indeed become the old woman of the play, desperate for attention, companionship and love. This emotional charge is exacerbated because it takes place in the theatre, and the way that Mizoguchi shoots the scene and tells the story highlights a dramatic irony, encouraging pity from the audience. There is however no such sentiment from the director, and all that this scene serves to do is to hurry Hatsuko into obtaining the money for Matoba’s clinic. A warning has been served however, and the method in which it was delivered is dramatic and desperate. Mizoguchi again, as in *Ugetsu*, is
manipulating both feeling and the familiar to convey to a Japanese audience a stark message through one of the most recognised theatrical aesthetics.

**Conclusion**

To suggest, as Richie does, that the theatre has not had a discernable influence on filmmaking in Japan is especially contentious in the case of Mizoguchi. As this chapter has established, the theatre has had a prominent role on many levels. The three detailed examples show that Mizoguchi explicitly drew upon the rich and diverse heritage of Japanese theatre in a number of ways. He references theatrical forms, employs dramatic symbolism and incorporates stage devices at the level of film style, theme and narrative. The recognisable tropes of the theatre serve both to heighten the emotional intensity of his melodramas, and to promote a self-reflexive engagement with his social critique. In this way, his theatrical allusions serve as an important technique in elaborating a heightened, melodramatic *mise en scène* which is the cornerstone of his film art.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has highlighted many significant problems encountered when researching and writing on Japanese cinema. It proceeds from an awareness that Japanese film history has largely been written from the outside. That is to say that it has developed from a tendency to caricature Japan culture as essentially unknowable. This perception has caused western scholarship to adopt a variety of positions, none of which is entirely satisfactory. Descriptive, industrial surveys are limited in their attention to aesthetics, while formal analyses tend to be informed by the misapplication of western critical theories and concepts. This thesis has engaged with critical debates about Japaneseness as well as offering a new way to look at Japanese film which takes into account industrial, political and cultural influences and concerns. The view of Japan as a blank canvas or, as Barthes would have it, an empty signifier, has fostered readings of key directors like Mizoguchi which are partial, and elide many of the complexities apparent in surveying his oeuvre. This thesis has argued that a cultural studies re-appraisal of Mizoguchi’s work might offer fresh ways of relocating the film-maker’s work within the rich cultural context of Japanese history. This revisionist approach has not eschewed western critical approaches (how could it?). Rather, it has applied critical theory and the approaches of film history judiciously, in order to re-examine Mizoguchi’s legacy within Japanese cultural discourse. The argument follows that by offering re-readings of Mizoguchi’s work from more culturally-informed and historically-located perspectives, it is possible to regain something of the range of cultural functions his films performed, beyond the level of mere aesthetic appreciation. During the process a number of critical, artistic and theoretical viewpoints have been explored. I am now in a position to offer some
conclusions drawing upon the main findings, and to make some suggestions for further study in the field.

This investigation began by considering some problems endemic to approaching foreign films, in respect of both visual and verbal language. Having isolated the challenges of ‘foreignness’, I then moved on to consider the strategy of avoidance which posits film language as universal in terms of its visual codes and conventions. Because of the problems of language and cultural otherness, it was argued, western scholars of Japanese cinema have tended to rely upon such universal, formalist approaches. The study of Japanese films has rarely been inspired by the need to understand the encultured significance of visual language, but has more often relied upon the abstractions of theory or ‘pure’ aestheticism. I posited an alternative view - a culturally inscribed semiotic reading which allows us to discard our own cultural shackles and to explore the world of ‘the other’, locating film language within an interpretive signifying system. By exploring the roots of semiotic analysis, and moving beyond Barthes’ philosophical cul-de-sac, Chapter One presented a taxonomy which might be utilised in textual analysis of the visual field. The film examples here demonstrated a coherent procedure from an analysis of the film titles to decoding spoken Japanese, body language and gesture. Even from a short scene in each of the three films covered, I was able to advance to a level of interpretation, which, without a culturally informed approach, would have been impossible. It was essential to begin this study with an approach grounded in applied semiotic theory. The decoding of signs must always be an enterprise dependent upon an understanding of their cultural connotations as well as their specific filmic anchorage. Such an approach, it was argued, is vital to the task of interpreting Mizoguchi’s films
within a specifically Japanese frame of reference. By exploring the cultural signifiers which are embedded in Mizoguchi’s *mise en scène*, I have offered a way of analysing Japanese film as an inevitably encultured medium. Such an approach is vital to our historical understanding of cinema’s power and influence.

In Chapter Two I began by considering the reasons why cultural significance has been relatively ignored by western critics in accounts of Japanese cinema. I highlighted previous scholarship, emanating from the French *Cahiers du Cinema* critics of the 1950s, and ‘La Politique des Auteurs’. Whilst acknowledging the impact that these debates about film authorship have had upon international film scholarship, I argued that to gain a fuller understanding of Mizoguchi’s work, it was necessary to think differently about the role of the creative director. In the first place, at a theoretical level, a structuralist conception of encultured authorship follows from Bazin’s emphasis upon the primacy of *mise en scène*, and Barthes’ necessity to locate authorial renditions (parôle) as products of the signifying system (langue). Secondly, at a practical level, it is important to remember that a film is a cultural product of collaborative artistic labour, involving creative inputs from a number of personnel whose contributions are orchestrated by the director, who himself operates only within the constraints of a studio, a budget and the determinants of political controls. In this way, creative agency must be seen as a pluralist concept; a film must be interpreted as the result not only of the combined cultural competences of the crew, but as the outcome of creative struggles and accidents which mark the finished text. Another omission in prior scholarship on Japanese cinema in general, and Mizoguchi in particular therefore, has been due attention to production history, and the determinants of social
and political change. These aspects, it was argued, are vital to a gaining a fuller understanding of film authorship as an encultured set of practices.

As a way of locating these practices historically, I explored a case study of a lost film which has been reassembled from stills, Chi to Rei (1923). This analysis revealed evidence of influences from European cinema, from Japanese modern art and longer cultural traditions upon the emergent film style of Mizoguchi. But it also demonstrated another important factor in surveying his oeuvre: the need to take into account work which has been lost, and the need to attend to lesser works as well as the celebrated masterpieces in considering his career as a whole. With a prior understanding of these factors, I am able to offer a more balanced, culturally informed appreciation of the director’s work.

The semiotic approach advanced has focussed attention upon the importance of visual style and the primacy of mise en scène in textual analysis. Chapter Three majored on this theme and applied this mode of analysis to one of the director’s earliest surviving films, Taki no Shiraito (1933). Taking into account Kirihara’s authorship model which restricts film style within varying cultural constraints, this analysis not only demonstrated the important benefits to be gained from a culturally informed reading of visual style, but traced something of the creative struggles which informed the look of the finished film. In building on the pluralist conception of film authorship and the importance of production history highlighted in the previous chapter, here we were able to consider those aspects of creative investment which are unplanned, the result of struggles, interference or the play of chance. Exploring a film’s genesis in this way may help us to locate what we might call the cultural unconscious of a text, which is a sublime
manifestation of the conditions of film production. This chapter highlighted these issues and advanced a more nuanced reading of Mizoguchi’s *mise en scène*.

In the course of mapping Mizoguchi’s developing film style and practice, this chapter also discussed the question of Mizoguchi’s supposed rejection of the western style of filmmaking, which manifested itself from the mid-1930s. This chapter took issue with the overly prescriptive views of some critics on this matter, arguing that this decision was neither necessarily as conspicuous, nor as conscious as some have argued. Rather, Mizoguchi’s gradual shift towards a more emphatically Japanese frame of cultural reference may be explained by a complex set of changes which were not only personal and commercial, but were more broadly located in the social upheavals of the period. Although Mizoguchi’s development of a more overtly Japanese style was not necessarily therefore a conscious one, it can be usefully interpreted by recourse to the traditional arts, especially the *emakimono* and *tsukurie*.

In Chapter Four, I continued to explore the influence of the traditional arts on Mizoguchi’s work, and questioned the motivations behind it. The deployment of a *mise en scène* which was inspired by traditional Japanese art was, during the decade 1935-45, part of a set of decisions which allowed Mizoguchi to continue working in the film industry, by a pragmatic accommodation of the Imperialist ideology. But in our ongoing analysis of visual style I also examined here the demands that this traditionally inflected *mise en scène* – informed by *emakimono* and *tsukurie* - makes upon the viewer. I suggested the need to take into account not only what we see within the frame but how we see it. The focus of this chapter was therefore spectatorship. Allowing the near impossibility of
recovering (without any contemporary evidence) anything about audience reception, I instead pursued a textual reading which revealed that the spectatorial relations constructed by Mizoguchi’s camerawork and *mise en scène* might imply a specifically Japanese way of seeing. It may thus be possible to reclaim something approximating to a culturally informed perspective. I pursued this argument by recourse to the mode of spectatorial distanciation known as *tsukihanasareta bōkansha*, in analyses of *Gion no Shimai* (1936) and *Yoru no Onnatachi* (1948). Mizoguchi’s interest in the Japanese visual arts was confirmed by his 1946 biographical portrait of the artist Kitagawa Utamaro, which revealed in his decadent lifestyle and romantic pursuit of painterly perfection. Our analysis of *Musashino Fujin* (1951) provided further evidence at the level of visual style of what I suggestively called Mizoguchi’s vernacular style. But in terms of spectatorial relations it also demonstrates how emotional affect is also an important dialectical counterpoint to the distanciation effect of *tsukihanasareta bōkansha*. Experiencing Mizoguchi’s films from a perspective which is culturally informed allows us adduce the reasons for the deployment of certain signifiers, to appreciate the mannerisms and language of a character, and to approximate to some understanding of the cultural functions of the text. I have suggested that it is at the level of *mise en scène* where these cultural complexities are most subtley addressed. The director’s committed renditions of the vernacular particularities of distinct local communities fashions dramatic worlds where larger contemporary social and political struggles are explored. This is where I feel that Mizoguchi differs from his peers. Unlike the fast-paced montage of Kurosawa, or the clinical observation of ideal Japanese virtues in Ozu, Mizoguchi revels in a Japan which combines the purity of art with the corruption of society. As I highlighted in Chapter Four,
this provokes both recognition and defamiliarisation which, as McDonald pointed out, challenges the native viewer both morally and spiritually.

In Chapter Five I looked at Mizoguchi’s relationship with melodrama – the mode he exploited more frequently than any other, across both period and contemporary subjects. I highlighted earlier in the thesis his reliance upon *shimpa* style dramas and how he continually returned to the genre. Returning to an analysis of *Musashino Fujin*, this chapter argued that in melodrama, Mizoguchi was able to draw upon a specifically Japanese rendition of a popular western literary and cinematic form. This was achieved through a wealth of culturally inflected material. I examined the reliance upon adaptations of traditional authors such as Saikaku and Chikamatsu, the performance style of his actors (especially that of Tanaka Kinuyo), the freedom he was granted by Nagata Masaichi at Daiei, and the influence of his creative collaborators, in advancing melodramatic style rooted in the hierarchal structure of Japanese society. I also examined Mizoguchi’s shift from a contemporary critique of the social order, to a more sympathetic representation of the Edo period and the Kansai region. The thesis argued that it was the combination of these factors, which lifted the Mizoguchi melodrama to a new level of sophistication, informed by his enthusiasm for the bohemian vernacular of the floating world and its decadent *demi-monde*. Another important element of this chapter was the analysis of the 1952 film *Saikaku Ichidai Onna* and its relationship with the ten worlds of Buddhist teaching. This culturally informed reading also called into question previous work by Cohen, whose analysis of the same film relies upon a western psychoanalytical reading. I established that in *Saikaku* Mizoguchi fashioned a passionate melodrama upon a Buddhist explanatory framework.
Finally, I ended the thesis by exploring the influence of theatre on Mizoguchi’s work. By critiquing Donald Richie’s view that the theatre had not had a discernable influence upon Japanese cinema, I examined how the director consistently drew upon the visual, aural and spiritual elements of the traditional theatre to highlight the emotional relationship between film and its audience. Historical research situated this analysis in the context of the long relationship between Japanese cinema and the theatre, in terms of stagecraft, form, and subject-matter. Here I highlighted the influence of kabuki, noh, bunraku and shimpa, and their relationship with film. Each of these aspects was explore through in-depth case studies of Zangiku Monogatari (1939), Joyu Sumako Koi (1947), Ugetsu Monogatari (1953) and Uwasa No Onna (1954). I established through these analyses not only that both Japanese and western theatre had a significant influence upon Mizoguchi’s films, but that the theatre was for him far more than a ready source of literary inspiration. He deployed dramatic devices and stylistic conventions as part of a repertoire of poetic realism, foregrounding the theatre’s performative excesses, dramatic ironies, spiritual iconography and artisanal hardships. Like the artistic milieu of the floating world, the theatre provided Mizoguchi with a stylised yet recognizable vocabulary of vernacular Japanese life, which enabled him to examine human relationships and social conventions with unflinching candour but sympathetic integrity.

This reappraisal of the work of Mizoguchi Kenji has sought to advance two new approaches, which not only aim to extend our appreciation of this director, but may also have potential for rethinking the context of Japanese film studies. The first approach, derived from film history methods, has sought to locate Mizoguchi’s films within the historical context of their production, taking into account collaborative agency, and social,
political and industrial constraints. This approach offered us the opportunity to examine how the films were marked by struggles attendant upon their production and to ground our analysis of Mizoguchi’s film style in a pluralist conception of authorship. The second approach drew upon semiotic theory and developed a rigorous analysis of *mise en scène* which traced the inspiration for Mizoguchi’s to its deeper cultural roots. There are conceptual challenges involved in semiotic debates about Japanese language which I shall return to below. But in pursuing a systematic reading which interpreted film language in terms of its wider semantic field, I imported the idea of the vernacular. Vernacular is a useful adjective for describing native language, and in a Japanese context has associations with the tradition of Tokugawa Nativism which did much to inspire the later *Nihonjinron* 日本人論. However, when applied to the arts and crafts, vernacular is commonly used to describe local style especially in architecture, and is usually applied to domestic and functional buildings rather than grand monuments of state. In thinking about Japanese vernacular, I have freely used the terms in this thesis to describe linguistic peculiarities (i.e. those words for which there is not equivalent English translation), and to characterise the visual (and aural field): buildings, costume, hairstyles, make-up and bodily adornments, masks, totems and music. Drawing upon Miriam Hansen’s idea of “vernacular modernism” allowed me to explore the complex and evolving nature of what I call the vernacular style. Close analysis of visual style in Mizoguchi’s films revealed a rich quotidian vocabulary which, it was argued, was the means by which he enabled audiences to confront contemporary anxieties attendant upon social change. By analysing local architecture, language and history, I was able to offer readings of specific regional milieu which proved a dynamic site for the exploration of cultural and political influence. Furthermore, I was able to identify the ways in which Mizoguchi elaborated and
developed this vernacular vocabulary across a variety of different subjects, combining traditional motifs and contemporary styles. This can be seen in the early films such as Chi to Rei (expressionism) and Taki no Shiraito (modern literature), the politically-influenced Genroku Chushingura and Meito Bijomaru, and the post-war films inspired by the floating world such as Utamaro o Meguru Gonin no Onna, Musashino Fujin and Ugetsu Monogatari. By developing a highly pictorial mise en scène, rich in Japanese tradition, Mizoguchi was able to highlight conflicts within modernity by locating struggles within localised settings and recognizable social milieu. Hansen observed in the Shanghai cinema of the 1920s that “female protagonists serve as the focus of social injustice and oppression; rape, thwarted romantic love, rejection, sacrifice, prostitution function as metaphors of a civilization in crisis” (2000, p.15). Similarly, this study has documented the dominant role of the female protagonist in Mizoguchi’s films: an individual who is frequently the catalyst of change, the victim of exclusion, and the embodiment of irreconcilable impulses.

Beyond Hansen’s usage, there is another suggestive application of the term vernacular in anthropology. In an article entitled ‘Vernacular Culture’ in the Journal American Anthropologist, Margaret Lantis uses the word to connote “the culture-as-it-is-lived appropriate to well-defined places and situations” (1960, p.205). Her definition offers a way of interpreting local speech acts, mannerisms and gestures associated with particular regional, sub-cultural or event-specific behaviours. She suggests that:

Vernacular culture, like any functional, unitary segment of the total culture, has the following components:
Values and goals, especially those that bring people to the situation
Appropriate time, place and artifacts
Common knowledge, e.g., regarding an industry, a sport, or hospitals
Attitude systems (including emotions) of participants
System of relationships (this subsumes social identification) or at least a pattern for relationships (in cases of transitory ones)
Sanctions Communication, including but not limited to special terminology and manner of speech (1960, p.206).

This taxonomy may be usefully appropriated in order to interpret the local communities, ‘cottage industries’ and bohemian and artisanal sub-cultures which Mizoguchi so favoured in his films. Throughout this thesis, my analysis of mise en scène has also paid attention to these measurements of social behaviour, their rules and transgressions in the discreet milieux of the floating world, the theatre, teahouses and the Gion. This is the world where Mizoguchi flourished. In critiquing what he considered to be poor literary translations of Saikaku’s salacious stories, the director remarked: “Translations by scholars are inadequate since they have not lived the decadent life” (1954, p.54). Mizoguchi and Yoda’s feeling for the vibrant culture of Kansai is evident in its vivid recreation in a great many of the most important films. Arguably, this profound empathy informed Mizoguchi’s best work.

There is another sense in which the term vernacular, with all the above associations, has been applied in this study. I have suggested that Mizoguchi’s sustained interest in the particularities of mise en scène, his painstaking research of period detail and the visual perspective he imposed upon his filmic worlds constitute a vernacular style of filmmaking. While never free from the vagaries of studio controls and political interference,
Mizoguchi worked best in the manner of a renaissance artist in his workshop with his trusted collaborators and acolytes around him. Like the dedicated artists and craftsman whose work he drew upon so readily, he created his work from the raw materials of his culture by recourse to tradition, yet putting his own signature emphatically upon each film. I have explored how the vernacular style has the function of rousing an audience to a heightened sense of awareness of the moral landscape and the dynamics of social change.

So, the skilled artist utilises traditional material and methods to fashion work which recreates recognisable cultural milieux, for people who are familiar with its discourse. It might be argued from this, that Mizoguchi was resorting to residual topoi which are consistent with the tradition of nativism. Doubtless this aspect of his work was what garnered approval from the authorities during Imperialist rule. And this static model of Japanese culture has indeed been seen as synonymous with nationalism and cultural essentialism. However, as I have noted in my analyses, the fictional worlds of his films are rarely static or comfortable. The tension in Mizoguchi’s films exists between the narrative impetus and mise en scène. It is the historical process of narrative which frequently destabilises the aesthetic composition. And, as many scholars have noted it is his women who are the agents of change. This is no accident, nor should it be read simply as a manifesto. Woman is the floating signifier in Mizoguchi’s sign system: a potent, alluring and mobile force, never settled upon one definite meaning. Her narrative function is to stimulate discord and to create upheaval, yet because of her subordinate position in society she can also be recuperated in order to maintain the status quo. One way in which Mizoguchi exploits the potential of the female as catalyst of change is through
sexuality. Eroticism is an element of Mizoguchi’s work which has received little attention, yet his depiction of the floating world is suffused with an erotic charge. As with his political films, the sexual elements of the early work are disguised behind mannerisms and social custom. For example, *Taki no Shiraito* is filled with sexual connotations, something that was not present in the original novel. In Kyoka’s *Giketsu Kyoketsu* there is no indication of a physical relationship between Kinya and Shiraito. However, in Mizoguchi’s film there are distinct erotic overtones. In the 1920s and early 1930s, his films were continually censored for their sexual and erotic content. In these films desire is a motivating force which disrupts social cohesion and for which women are fundamentally to blame. But this sexual charge is emphatically part of the attraction of the decadent floating world.

This study has raised some important questions about semiotics and Japanese culture which may have a bearing upon future work. The idea of vernacular culture as a dynamic rather than a fixed site of signification contests much received wisdom about semiotic theories of Japanese culture. Barthes’ critique of Japanese culture as surfaces without depth has found resonance with a number of subsequent scholars. Rambelli cites Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian who insist that *Nihonjinron* “produced ... a conception of Japan as a signified, whose uniqueness was fixed in an irreducible essence that was unchanging and unaffected by history, rather than as a signifier capable of attaching itself to a plurality of possible meanings” (Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989: xvi). Peter Dale adds to the debate and argues that Miyoshi and Harootunian “assume that the Japanese constitute a culturally and socially homogeneous racial entity” (Dale 1986: i). This cultural essentialism has influenced scholarship on Japan and its people but, problematically, such
a view is counterproductive. It’s a-historical, nationalistic character – itself employed for ideological ends by the Imperialist rulers - negates other histories which embrace culture plurality, local specificity and regional variation, as the demi-mondes favoured by Mizoguchi illustrate. The concept of vernacular culture enables us to be sensitive to the particularities and subtleties of these micro-communities as rendered in Mizoguchi’s films, and draws attention to the importance of diverse, local histories.

Living in Japan has only increased my awareness of the cultural specificity of regional variation. In the thesis I highlighted the stereotypical view of people from Osaka. However, after living in the region I discovered how misplaced such a view is, finding its people to be aware of the city’s rich cultural history as well as its significance in the arts. As a non-Japanese living in modern society it is impossible to experience the same emotions as a contemporary native audience. However, by approaching the analysis of Mizoguchi’s work from a position which is rooted in the culture, I have attempted to re-assess previous studies, while at the same time establishing an increased awareness towards cultural nuance.

Although Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian’s interpretation of Nihonjinron appears at odds with Barthes, the implications of their conception have the same end result - the abstraction of language from its encultured performance. This thesis has sought to argue rather that the work of Mizoguchi reveals a tension between the platonic ideal of essentialism and the historical process. The specific demi-mondes in which he chose to locate his melodramas are dynamic spaces in which tradition is challenged by modernity and social stasis is threatened by the excesses of individual’s actions. In the sign system,
this is the tension between the linguistic community and the parlance of the vernacular - the unaccommodated utterance. If this tension is observable as argued here, in the work of Mizoguchi, what implications might it then have for the study of Japanese cinema more broadly?

One of the problems that has persisted in the ideology of Japanese semiotics is that of self-determination. Barthes declared himself emphatically an outsider, and the outsider’s view of Japanese culture has been privileged as much by the Japanese themselves (by dint of their difficult political history), as by their cultural colonisers. Thus it has become commonplace for the Japanese to embrace the perspective of otherness as a mode of self-definition. In terms of film studies, there has been a tendency for scholars to abstract film-makers and films alike from their cultural rootedness. The vagaries of the Japanese sign system are evaded by means of other theoretical diversions. At times it appears that Japanese film-makers can be positioned in any way which suits the exegesis of the particular author, their work opened to any number of interpretative strategies. Therefore, we can question if there is any particular merit in applying feminist theory to Mizoguchi’s women, psychoanalytic theory to Kurosawa’s male characters, or Zen Buddhism to Ozu’s visual style. There are also issues surrounding the over-theorisation of Japanese cinema. Scott Nygren’s work is a recent example of this (2007). Every study conducted in such a way tends to detach us even further from the text’s cultural grounding. We must allow that this tendency has been encouraged in many cases by Japanese scholars themselves. But this thesis argues for a radical relocation of Japanese cinema back to the context of its cultural roots and industrial practice.
Japanese directors came to prominence in the award-winning period of the 1950s. Japanese directors were lauded for the style of their films and, soon after, the labels were applied. However, we should always remember that in the case of Mizoguchi and Ozu, and to a lesser degree Kurosawa, these film-makers were working unbeknown to the outside world from the 1920s. They were located in a Japanese studio system, and developed their craft in the context of social and political upheavals. The celebrated festival films were not created overnight; they were the product of years of change, studio restrictions, Imperialist rule and occupation.

It is important to relocate these film-makers in their cultural context. As I have noted, the Japanese tend to rely on others to see them, to define them as a race. This influence from the outside can be seen from the change in attitude towards Kurosawa’s *Rashomon* (1950). Original Japanese reviews were damning of the film, with its confusing flashback technique and violent scenes. As soon as the film took the Golden Lion in Venice, attitudes immediately changed and the feeling was, ‘if the international film community likes it, then so should we’. Why such a shift? Would a bad review constitute a level of ignorance on the part of reviewers? Maybe it was the Japanese desire to keep a semblance of *wa* (harmony) with the outside world? Either way, Kurosawa has now been ‘given’ to the world. He is commonly referred to as *Sekai no Kurosawa* 世界のクロサワ (Kurosawa of the world), and his name is frequently written in the Japanese alphabet reserved for foreign words (katakana).

This tendency to cultural capitulation can also be seen in contemporary Japanese film scholarship. The standard of research in Japan is extremely high, and this can be seen in
many of the newer monographs dedicated to film. However, in ideological terms many
film academics are reluctant to commit to a particular view. In the course of attending
numerous film conferences in Japan, I have spoken to many academics about this
problem. Surprisingly, most of them were aware that Japanese scholarship is often reliant
upon the west to lead the way, certainly in terms of the more internationally known
directors. Another problem is the reluctance to commit to a theory. According to one
academic, who I feel it would be unfair to name, “it is very difficult to commit yourself to
your theories. Once you raise an issue, if it does not accord with popular opinion, you run
the risk of being chastised”. This is apparent in many of the Japanese works which I have
consulted for the thesis, as there is no clear indication where the author’s argument rests;
such is the ambiguity seemingly inherent in their criticism. That said, there are signs that
something is changing over the last eighteen months, and I have been discussing these
changes with friends and colleagues in Japan. As more young Japanese are beginning to
access writing about their cinema, they are questioning the position which it holds in
western academia. There is a definite reaction against some of the more misplaced
readings of Japanese film. This can be seen in the work of Izuno Chita and more notably
Fujii Jinshi, especially his 1999 article on Naruse Mikio’s women’s films. His attack, first
on Sato Tadao (1975) and then on Mizoguchi’s treatment of women, was both forthright
and damning. For example, he condemned *Saikaku Ichidai Onna* is “nothing but sexism
disguised as feminism” (1999, para.6, n.p). This new vitality is a welcome development.

Although this revisionist study of Mizoguchi Kenji has endeavoured to be comprehensive
in its research base and its scope, it has not been possible, inevitably, to pursue every
avenue that the research has opened up. Saso’s continuing work in the field, in Japan at
least, continues to offer an unparalleled range of new source material, as well as offering ideas which are open to debate and discussion. His next book on Mizoguchi tackles *Taki no Shiraito* and will be available in the first quarter of 2012. There is also the continued discussion regarding Mizoguchi’s women which was addressed throughout the thesis and highlighted above. However, I feel that with the approach that the thesis has pursued, this issue can be tackled from a new position. By exploring the cultural, historical and political struggles of women in Japan, we may be able, as I have done with Mizoguchi and his work, to repatriate the Japanese female in her historical context. This should be achieved before a thorough re-evaluation can be attempted. Tempting as it was to fully engage with a study of this subject within the thesis, I feel that it was first important to re-ground the film-maker in his own culture before tackling other important issues such as the role of the female in terms of economic and class relationships.

In addition to this, research also revealed many interesting revelations about actress Irie Takako. As the first female producer in Japan, her contribution to Japanese cinema has been greatly overlooked. Her decline from a major star of the early silent era, to a character actress playing *bakeneko* in low-budget 1950s horror films is a theme worth pursuing. There is also her relationship with Mizoguchi which reached its lowest point when she ‘left’ the production of *Yokihi* in the mid-1950s. Although she rose to become head of her own she was the head of her own production company, how much power did she have? It has been suggested that her position was entirely based upon her popularity and that she was just a figurehead. At the time of writing, research has not revealed any material that substantiates this idea. However, this is an avenue of research that should
be advanced, and discussions with Saso Tsutomu regarding research material are ongoing.

Finally there has been very little work done on the censorship of Mizoguchi’s films and there is considerable potential to develop work in this area based upon archival records of censorship practices and cuts made.

These areas aside the dual approaches of film history and semiotic analysis pursued in this cultural studies re-appraisal of Mizoguchi have cast fresh light upon one of Japan’s most accomplished directors. I have presented Mizoguchi as an exceptional figure in Japanese film history, yet one whose creative achievements deserve more careful consideration than the accolade of auteur regularly confers. I have argued that, more than that of any of his contemporaries, Mizoguchi’s work with its richly allusive and culturally saturated texture, demands an appreciation of Japanese culture and society of the kind brought to bear here. And I have suggested a range of explanations – cultural capital, temperament, historical circumstance, collaborative influence – for his exceptionality. But it is hoped that the original approach taken by this study of a major Japanese film-maker also has implications for the potential re-appraisal of other figures from the classical Japanese cinema. And it may be that in the course of this study questions have been raised about the trajectories of western perspectives on Japanese culture and society which deserve further scrutiny. Whether there is mileage in thinking about the advantages of different kinds of histories, which might map the cultural geographies of particular periods and milieux, is beyond the scope of this thesis. But I
hope it has raised the possibilities of more nuanced models of film authorship than some previous studies have allowed.
http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/cteq/03/25/actors_revenge.html


Shinario Kurashiku Shirizu no.2 Tokushu: Saikaku Ichidai Onna o Saininshikisuru. [Scenario Classic Series no.2 Special: The Life of Oharu Re-appraisal: Round Table Discussion: Raising Questions about the Life of Oharu. *Scenario* (June): 14-26].


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http://www.matsudafilm.com/matsuda/c_pages/c_c_1e.html


Select Filmography


Mizoguchi Filmography

During my research, a range of problems have thwarted the aim of compiling a complete Mizoguchi filmography. Discrepancies exist regarding release dates and production details and the omission and accuracy of titles (in English and in Romanised Japanese and kanji). These errors can be found in books, journals and online. This filmography of the director’s work is as comprehensive as possible, and has been compiled using material from the National Film Centre in Tokyo alongside Saso and Nishida’s Eiga Dokuhon - Mizoguchi Kenji-Jonen no Hate no Onnatachiyo, Genmu eno Riarisumu (2006). This book charts each film chronologically and includes details such as production information as well as a synopsis of each film.


Mizoguchi, K. (1925). [Motion Picture]. *Daichi wa Hohoemu* – 大地は微笑む (*The Earth*


Mizoguchi, K. (1944). [Motion Picture]. Miyamoto Musashi - 宮本武蔵 (The Famous Sword


Appendix One: Interview with Oshima Kinue

September 9, 2010

Interviewer: Paul Spicer

Interviewee: Kinue Oshima

Interpreter: Asano Reiko

Translation: Asano Reiko

(Titles omitted)

Paul Spicer: What did you think of the film (Ugetsu Monogatari)?

Oshima Kinue: Well, you mean in general? This is an old film, it is black and white of course but I felt that the filmmaker focuses upon the beauty of the frame.

PS: How do you think a film such as this, which uses noh, was perceived?

OK: You mean by society?

PS: Yes, by an audience …

OK: Ahh, so you mean in a Japanese context, right?

PS: Yes …

OK: I don’t know exactly how the period was, or what was going on at this time, but in general younger people may not have been interested in this film. It was a very complex situation with different ways of thinking co-existing in society; some were against this westernisation. Overall the film could be perceived as something that contradicts the direction which Japan was heading.

PS: Ugetsu Monogatari … has a supernatural element. Do you feel that the audience of the period would have noticed this?
OK: The noh song which is sung in the film, during the scene with the armour for example added to the noh techniques used. This was done with the use of rōkyoku (noh song).

PS: ... how do you evaluate the way that noh is used in the film?

OK: Well, the first thing that springs to mind, when you consider the historical context, it is clear that Mizoguchi was a director who really thought about and used Japaneseness, in a time where the society around him was erring towards western ideas and thoughts. He uses noh just after the war, this is very interesting because when noh was established during the Muromachi period (1336 to 1573 approx), it was also a chaotic time. So, he may have been connecting these two periods, even though there is a huge time difference. Both periods experienced huge wars and many died. People were trying to build a new era; both were periods of transition.

PS: Perhaps noh’s serenity and the mood that it evokes ... was able to add a sense of calm?

OK: Perhaps, nowadays it is a lot different because we are flooded with new information and noh is not so popular. However for people who want noh, it is always there.

PS: Many of the noh stories are very tragic ... Mizoguchi made Ugetsu Monogatari during a time where people had been through difficult times, perhaps people seek something comforting and this is found in noh. Do you agree?

OK: Yes, I think so too...

PS: Do you think it is appropriate for noh to be used as a conduit to portray these spiritual and supernatural events?

OK: As a conduit...It is not my place to say whether it is appropriate or not (laughter); it is not limited to noh but a Japanese world view on ghosts, spirits and what we call the Netherworld or just the way we interact with the supernatural in general. We have this in
noh theatre, maybe that is why it is easier to understand if noh is being used. It is definitely not kabuki style and you can easily say that it is noh but also, perhaps it also reflects a Middle Age world view (in a Japanese context, the Middle Ages refer to the period from 1160-1600 approx) ...

PS: To a non-Japanese audience with little knowledge of Japanese culture, do you think they would miss certain aspects or at least see scenes differently? ...

OK: You mean people who do not understand noh?

PS: Yes ...

OK: If someone who knows nothing about noh hears the singing in that scene, I think they would find it scary and unsettling.

PS: Can you see other noh elements in the film?

OK: Well...first of all the utai (noh song) is used and also the movement of Wakasa. There are also noh mannerisms. By using this, I think that the filmmaker wanted to portray something that is not human.

PS: What about Kyo Machiko’s make-up?

OK: Make up? (Looking at a still of Kyo Machiko from the film), I see. They seem to have based this on a noh mask but then a noh mask is based on women’s makeup from the Middle Ages, but I think that here, they are definitely thinking about the noh mask.

PS: So you are saying that there could be two interpretations of this? The noh mask and traditional female make up style?

OK: Yes, that’s right. This kind of makeup was seen on aristocrats, the upper class.

PS: I would like to ask you about the noh stage. The scene where Genjuro is led down a long corridor ...

OK: He is walking into some other world, right?
PS: Yes ... Do you think that it is appropriate to compare Genjuro’s journey along that corridor to that which a noh actor undertakes on the hashigakari?

OK: Well, of course we can easily say it is like a hashigakari, but also in Japan we perceive bridges as somewhere where you would meet ghosts. Or you would walk across the bridge to travel to another world.

PS: So you think that walking down this corridor sees Genjuro on a journey?

OK: Yes, the character in Ugetsu Monogatari did not know this and unknowingly went there ... the bridge is a perfect place for these wishes to meet.

PS: Eventually, Wakasa reveals herself to Genjuro. Is it true that the shite (main noh actor) also always reveals his true form in a noh play?

OK: As a character, right? You mean the first half was a disguise, but in truth the shite was something like a god. Is this what you mean?

PS: Yes ... She reveals her true self, as a sprit, at the end. Do you think there is a connection here?

OK: You mean with noh? Her appearance doesn’t change too much through does it?

PS: Her hair changes and...

OK: Oh yes, yes. It gets scary near the end.

PS: Kyo Machiko is always with her nurse ... I thought that a similar thing can be seen on the noh stage.

OK: Ah you mean kōken (stage hands in noh theatre)

PS: Yes, exactly ... I am interested to hear your thoughts about this.

OK: I think that maybe this is not so much to do with noh’s kōken, but the fact that she is a Lady. Having someone constantly looking after Wakasa indicates her class but at the same time I do not really know because in noh and of course Kabuki’s kuroko, someone
adjusts the costume on stage. It could be a very Japanese thing, I am not too sure. In Japan, a bride would always have someone looking after her; she adjusts her *kimono* and fixes her hair etc ... I think that something like this was needed to reflect her class, to make her stand out.

**PS:** I would now like to ask you about ... the image of the *matsu* tree. The *matsu* tree has such a deep meaning within the world of *noh*, could you explain its significance?

**OK:** In *noh*, the *matsu* tree symbolises the spirit of traditional arts that came before. The *matsu* is a tree which attracts spirits, so that gods can descend to a physical space. It is not the only object of this kind, but it is the most well known. You perform facing the tree. Of course, as you know, at the back of the stage we have a painting of a *matsu*, but this is supposed to be a reflection. Originally the *matsu* tree was in front of the *noh* stage, where the audience sit today. The performers would always keep in mind that they sing or dance for the *matsu* tree, for the god, spirits or demon that descends into the tree

**PS:** So originally the *matsu* tree was situated where the audience is today?

**OK:** Yes, exactly. That is how we always think when performing. And also, the spoken sound of the word ‘*matsu*’ has a double meaning in Japanese; one is of course *matsu* as in tree and the other is ‘wait’. So, we are waiting for something that belongs to another world to materialise.

**PS:** You mean a god?

**OK:** Of course, but it depends on the song we are performing. We could be waiting for a demon to come out of hell or a ghost.

**PS:** Kasuga Myojin....

**OK:** The Kasuga shrine in Nara, yes...

**PS:** So this started from the time that Kasuga Myojin descended at the ... shrine ...?
OK: Yes...There is a tree called **yōgou no matsu** at the Kasuga shrine and we perform dance and arts in front of the tree, in front of the god. I suppose that that is the beginning of it all, we still have this festival.

PS: So you are saying that in **noh** matsu has multiple meanings?

OK: Yes, definitely.

PS: In *Ugetsu Monogatari*, there are many images of **matsu** trees ... This image is very important to highlight the existence of a spiritual world. Do you feel that this is deliberate?

OK: Of course, there is definitely an intention here. I don’t know if it is the reflection of the **matsu** tree on a **noh** stage but considering what the **matsu** represents, and the spirituality which exists on a **noh** stage, I would say that the **matsu** is acting as a conduit to allow a connection with the spiritual world. Wakasa is some kind of a spirit, a ghost and at the end of the film, she disappears. I think that it is not just a scary story, there has to be something more to it.

PS: ... I would like to discuss **kyōgen** (**noh**’s comic relief – a separate short play between the two main performances) with you. In Mizoguchi’s *Uwasa no Onna*, the director actually shows a **noh** stage and focuses upon a **kyōgen** scene ... Could you explain briefly about **kyōgen**?

OK: Can I explain in general terms?

PS: Of course

OK: Basically **kyōgen**’s role is to soften the seriousness of **noh**. It generally uses stories from the middle ages which feature common people. **Noh** is composed of poetic drama but on the other hand **kyōgen** is a conversational play, so it complements the main play with a comedic element which is lacking in **noh**.
**PS:** ... do you think Mizoguchi utilises these Japanese traditional arts out of respect?

**OK:** Yes, but at the same time I think that he uses these theatrical elements in his films in a natural way. For example, that way he uses noh is more than just superficial techniques. I think that the director has a worldview within himself, which is shared by noh, or even before. You cannot say that this part is noh and this part is something else. It is difficult to separate his techniques and his worldview.

**PS:** So you are saying that these influences are used naturally because of his cultural background?

**OK:** Yes, I think so. Director Mizoguchi as a person wanted to express the things which existed within him, and as such chose techniques such as those which were inspired by noh.

**PS:** So in Mizoguchi’s case, film was a perfect vehicle to express his worldview and noh techniques were used to do this ...

**OK:** Yes, definitely.

**PS:** ... if you bring traditional arts into the world of mass entertainment ... it is not in its purest form ... Do you think that if such representation comes out of respect ... do you feel that it is a good way to convey a story?

**OK:** You mean the way to convey the story of *Ugetsu Monogatari*?

**PS:** ... do you think that a non-Japanese audience sees Japanese arts, for example a play, theatre, film or painting ... differently to a native audience?

**OK:** You mean people today?

**PS:** Yes. . .

**OK:** I do think that. Also, when today’s young people see noh, they feel a little distant from it because Japanese traditional culture has become something of a distant memory.
to the Japanese of today. So you could say that we are not so different, but our grandparents generation, regardless of practising noh or not, they have more affinity to the traditional because of their education and the environment they grew up in. Such things were naturally learned through living in Japanese society.

PS: So do you think that noh is disappearing?

OK: Well, it is fading. What has to happen is that Japanese have to study Japanese arts and Japanese tradition.
Appendix Two: Interview with Sawato Midori

September 19, 2010

Interviewer: Paul Spicer
Interviewee: Sawato Midori
Interpreter: Asano Reiko
Translation: Asano Reiko

(Titles Omitted)

Paul Spicer: First of all, I would like to ask you to explain the role of the benshi.

Sawato Midori: Do you mean the role of the benshi in the old days or the contemporary role?

PS: The role of the benshi during the time that Mizoguchi was making films.

SM: The benshi stands between the film and the audience; understands the film; writes a script using appropriate language and talks with a certain rhythm.

PS: So, during these early days of Japanese cinema, were scripts provided by the studio?

SM: The subtitles and the synopsis of the film were provided to the benshi’s. The benshi wrote the spoken narrative between the subtitles and the actor’s lines.

PS: Benshi’s are often compared to Kabuki’s kowairo, what is your opinion of this? Do you feel that it is a comfortable comparison?

SM: In the early days of Japanese cinema there was a famous star called Matsunosuke Onoue who starred in period dramas. In those days, jidaigeki (period dramas) were called kyūgeki, there was also another type of drama called shimpa higeki (shimpa tragedy), and amongst this particular strand of drama, there was Taki no Shiraito, which Mizoguchi made into a film later on. In Japan, as you mentioned, film succeeded the tradition of
**kabuki** and theatre and was influenced by them both. In the theatre people, would perform a voice part for the actors. So when cinema began, take for example a Matsunosuke Onoue **kyūgeki** or **shimpā higeki**, a voice actor would go up onto the cinema stage and perform the voice parts for the actors on screen. This is why at the early stages of cinema it was naturally accepted, because people were used to it in the theatre.

**PS:** So, even though they were silent films, in effect that actually had a voice already, this was something that was naturally accepted?

**SM:** Yes, the fact that films ‘had a voice’ as it were, was naturally accepted. However, Japanese film critics who were influenced by European or American films were critical of this.

**PS:** In a Japanese cultural context, how important is it to have this spoken narration? By having this narration, do you think that the commentators, voice actors the film industry as a whole at the time were assisting the audience to a better understanding of the film?

**SM:** From the end of ancient times (593–1160) until the Middle Ages and onwards (in a Japanese context, the Middle Ages refers to the period from approx 1160–1600) we have had the ancient art of storytelling. Amongst them **sekkyōbushi** (formed the basis of a performance art which were chants, latterly accompanied with musical instruments) or Heike Monogatari (medieval Japanese prose narrative) these stories are meant to be performed with the human voice, not read in silence. Telling these stories was a form of art which was enjoyed by the public; it was a form of mass entertainment. Also during the Edo era (1603–1868), we had the **rakugo** (verbal entertainment with a solo storyteller), **kōdan** (story telling) and **rōkyoku** (storytelling with focus on the sound and pitch of the voice, a narrative singing) which became popular during the Meiji period (1868–1912). Therefore the art of storytelling, performed using various voices, has always been present
and was much enjoyed by the people. In Japan, as we discussed, in the traditional theatres such as kabuki or bunraku, we have a vocal narrative, so we already had this tradition which has been enjoyed by people for centuries. Although cinema comes from abroad, Japanese production companies thought that foreign silent films, if they were shown as they were, would not satisfy the audience. Therefore, they added a vocal accompaniment which was naturally accepted by the public.

**PS:** So, you are saying that a Japanese twist is added to this new art that came from the west and because of this, it was accepted by the Japanese?

**SM:** Yes, exactly, in other words we ‘Japanasise’ things that come from abroad.

**PS:** I want to ask you about benshi performances. Is it true, when they performed in cinemas they used to add things to the story, discussing the actors dress and talking about the weather … would this kind of thing happen more often if they were commentating on foreign films?

**SM:** Unfortunately, I have never read any material which highlights such issues. Such things may have occurred because every benshi had such a wide range of techniques within their art. Something similar might be, for example, us three are talking here; now if I told this story normally, I would just say

“Three people are talking”

Or I could say the same thing, but use a different technique, for example I might say

“Three people who are trying to overcome a huge immovable barrier, which has been created by different languages. The three will not be perturbed and they will struggle through this turbulence. What a significant day this is as we use all our strength to subjugate this predicament”
If this was the case with foreign films and if benshi did elaborate certain issues or stories this may cause the film to mean something different from the directors’ intention. However this was allowed to happen in Japan. Also, foreign film directors who made those films knew nothing about the art of the benshi, so at no time were these films made with a benshi in mind. It also depends on how you talk; for example if you talk in a high pitched squeaky voice (Midori makes a noise in a high pitched voice), a film becomes light-hearted and comedic and audiences enjoyed things like this. Regardless of if a film is Japanese or foreign, if you perform normally... for example if you describe someone who looks like a tramp, you might say;

“There is a dirty looking man…”

Or you can analyse the scene and say;

“Oh, what could be the reason why this man is wearing such dirty clothes? What cruel fate could have befallen him..?”

So you talk about the background of the character, regardless of the director’s original intention. So for a benshi, there is large scope for interpretation.

**PS:** I read that in the early 1900s benshi performances were very popular ... did a tension exist between the benshi and the directors, or studios?

**SM:** I think so, definitely. I heard that some benshi wanted a style of films which were easier for them to perform. They demanded that film studios made scenes longer because if shot A cuts quickly to shot B and then back to shot A, then this makes it difficult for the benshi to perform. Actually, I think that these demands came a little later than the early 1900s, but the point is that the benshi demanded that studios made films which suited them. Each scene should be longer, rather than having many edits.
Going back to your earlier question about films being changed by benshi in Japan, I think that a benshi decorates a film with words. For example, a shot with ordinary, everyday scenery can be decorated by a benshi to be something beautiful:

“The field is littered with beautiful flowers; their petals sway in time with the light breeze and radiate life, bestowed on them by the suns magical rays. Sweet and romantic music echoes in the background…”

With this, the ordinary calm scenery becomes something different. Especially with music playing, even if what is on the screen is kind of flat, with benshi’s storytelling, the picture becomes alive and dynamic. Therefore the film is transformed. This is what a Japanese audience wanted, they wanted to see just how much a benshi could decorate the film with beautiful, beautiful storytelling.

**PS:** ... do you think that benshi preferred films that contained longer takes?

**SM:** Yes, especially for those benshi who performed on the Japanese shimpa tragedies.

**PS:** ... Taki no Shiraito ... could be a perfect film for a benshi.

**SM:** This is a film that a benshi would have loved to have performed on, however I think it was after World War II, some benshi, I think he had a personal copy of Taki no Shiraito, changed the ending because he thought it was too tragic! I am sure you remember the scene where Shiraito feeds koi, which is a dream sequence where she is happy. In this dream she is a married mother with marumage (hairstyle for a married woman during the Edo and Meiji periods). The benshi edited the film so that scene was the finale!

**PS:** Did this happen while Mizoguchi was alive?

**SM:** I don’t know but I am sure Mizoguchi didn’t know what was happening to all the copies of his films. This is a very extreme case.

**PS:** I am sure that Mizoguchi would not have been so happy about that!
**SM:** (Laughs) I think not. In the early stages of Mizoguchi’s career, most of his films were with Nikkatsu and during this period, he was very adventurous. Of course I have not seen many of these films so I cannot say exactly, but there is a film called *Tokyo Koshinkyoku* of which only clips exist nowadays. The film was originally very long and was based on Kan Kikuchi’s novel. As you mentioned Mizoguchi made many films which had a social commentary but also his pictures are extremely beautiful. I do not know if all of the *benshi*’s liked his films but most of the early pictures are both exciting and joyous to perform on, I believe.

**PS:** ... Mizoguchi had experimented with various styles during the 1920s but he always had an element in his pictures which was very recognisably Japanese. Sometimes it is the social commentary and sometimes it is something visual.

**SM:** Definitely, I think so too ...

**PS:** ... Donald Richie has said that the development of Japanese film lagged ten years behind that of the west because of the *benshi* ... What do you think?

**SM:** Well, if you talk about this from a western perspective, critics of that time said that this lag is caused by *benshi*, then it could be so if you look at the situation from outside of Japan...but film is not for the critic it belongs to the people. I believe that film is an art for the people, it is a part of popular culture but even so it should evolve naturally and not try to detach itself from the people who view it.

**PS:** So you are saying that if this is what the public wanted, then that is fine?

**SM:** Well, that’s not exactly what I mean; personally I love modern and avant-garde films and in these films there is no need for *benshi*, you only need to look at the pictures ... that is all you need to do. On the other hand, I really like films that I perform on which are enjoyed by the public. People who say that *benshi* is the cause of such a lag are coming
from a western point of view; this is why I cannot agree. Japan had its own way of filmic development and we have our unique expression; this is why early Japanese films showed kabuki as kabuki with no close ups and with a camera shooting the whole stage from a distance. What is interesting here is because it is kabuki, the actors’ movements are very stylised. So in 1910s while Griffith and other people were experimenting with montage or doing something new, in Japan we still had oyama (female impersonator) and the acting was not realistic at all, but very much akin to the kabuki style.

When you look at the actors’ movements, Shirogoro Sawamura for example; his films are so theatrical, the position of the characters was very organised and they moved in a way which was comfortable for the viewer; it was a familiar theatrical stage formation. Alternatively, in foreign films such methods did not matter so much, they sought realism. In Japan we cared more about a more theatrical style, when you compare this with foreign films of the period, the kind of expression that we had in Japan was extremely unique.

So many benshi performed on these films using a kowairo style (the kowairo style is one where a highly skilled benshi drastically changes his/her voice, depending on the situation on screen), this is why I am so attracted to these pictures. Depending upon the cinema, I am not sure if everyone used a kowairo style, but nonetheless benshi’s performed on structured and unrealistic films which were based on a totally different concept to that of western films. There was also a band playing music. This kind of performance was probably exclusive to Japan at this time and I like this uniqueness. So if you compare Japanese films to those of the west, you will notice that in the Japanese films, the camera doesn’t move, the acting is not realistic, female roles are played by a male actors, the
stories are very old fashioned and there are no new techniques; to me, I say ‘so what’ I like it!

Also I would like to talk about the superb, masterful Japanese director Daisuke Ito, who I adore along with Kenji Mizoguchi. Daisuke Ito was very clever and was immersed in literature; he was a wonderful director, both intelligent and passionate. He created a new period drama which featured not just the already mentioned structured, heroic stories in the hero films featuring Matsunosuke Onoue and Shirogoro Sawamura, but also included something new and different. In 1926, Ito made *Choukon* with Denjiro Okochi, what surprised me was the fact that he portrays a man who has failed in love, gets emotionally hurt and eventually loses everything; this is totally different from the heroic films featuring Onoue Matsunosuke. In his films, the hero does not suffer at all but as I have said, Daisuke Ito portrays human beings who do suffer, get hurt and could lose everything. It is because of Daisuke Ito, that I believe the Japanese films at this time, around 1926, were in no way inferior to western films.

Also it is interesting that while portraying such human tragedies Ito also uses highly stylised *chanbara* (sword fighting) scenes but not in an obvious way such as those structured sequences in the films of Matsunosuke Onoue. For example, in the midst of all of the action...bang! Pursuers suddenly surround Ito’s lead actor. Or maybe he would try to escape by ascending a staircase, but again, in a flash, his pursuers appear from both sides. Ito uses symmetrical techniques, which were also used in *Metropolis* and *Siegfried*, but he used them in Japanese period dramas! Therefore, we can begin to see new themes in Japanese period dramas; that of heroes suffering like anyone else and of course love stories, not seen before. Moreover, during the action sequences, he features a kind of stylistic beauty, which is different from Matsunosuke Onoue’s. This is why I think Ito’s
work is very interesting. Old and new co-exist in his pictures. The Japanese film directors’ artistic sense was superb.

We had Mizoguchi, Ozu, Naruse and so many other great directors, so in the late 1920s the standard of Japanese film was extremely high. Maybe, I could even say that this started in the early 1920s. So when people say that Japanese film lagged behind the west, if this is so, then it is purely this factor which allowed us to make truly great films of a standard which we are unable to make today. Because of this ‘so called’ lag, the highly stylised movement which is obviously influenced by kabuki, is featured in films with actors such as Shirogoro Sawamura and Matsunosuke Onoue so when we watch these films today they are so interesting. They appeal to us because these filmmakers created something we can never replicate. For example, in Goketsujiraiya, Matsunosuke Onoue disappears in a puff of smoke, only to reappear, on the same spot, as a frog, a similar technique used by Méliès...it’s fascinating. Also in Shirogoro Sawamura’s films, I seem to have forgotten the name of the film, but it is a very long film, in it a ghost appears, I think that a double exposure is used. Have you seen Goro Masamune? You see, as demonstrated in these films, we were using new techniques...and yet it is said that Japanese cinema was lagging behind the west...

**PS:** I saw a Daisuke Ito film at an event in Hiroshima...

**SM:** When Daisuke Ito was making films, the film was truly a form of art and as I mentioned before he had intelligence and passion and used new themes and techniques. His films were loved by a wide range of people from the mass public to intellectuals. At the time, even the people who would only usually watch western films fell in love with Daisuke Ito’s pictures. His films, like Kenji Mizoguchi’s, focused upon society, they
appealed to young people at that time because they could see their frustrations with society reflected through suppressed and lost lead characters ...

**PS:** It has been said that the *benshi* began to disappear when talkies became more popular ... Do you think that there is any stylistic change in these films? For example, were directors a little more experimental, were they freer, and was there more artistic expression?

**SM:** On the contrary, I do not think that directors were freer because the war in China had already started. However, silent films made in the mid-1930s were often the films that studios and filmmakers wanted to make with sound, but they couldn’t, so therefore they would make a silent film; For example Yasujiro Ozu’s *Umarete wa Mita Keredo* ... but I think Ozu was a bit different. He didn’t want to make talkies until a man called Hideo Mohara, who was conducting research on film with sound, had finished his work. This is why Ozu is a little different. So you are asking, do I notice any difference when there was a shift from silent to sound?

**PS:** What I meant was by making a film which does not require *benshi*, in other words films with sound, did the directors change their style or techniques?

**SM:** Well...I think that this might very well have happened but I have not done any research in that area, so I cannot say exactly. But because they could now utilise actor’s voices and sound effects, as seen in *Madamu to Nyobo* for example, I think that they could be more adventurous with the use of sound. But I don’t think that the sound technology was very good in the early days, so the voice and the lip movement were sometimes out of sync.

**PS:** In the 1920s in western films, you could argue that although revolutionary, sound had become a creative restriction for many film directors ...
SM: I think that in Japan, the range of filmic expression had become greater, because they could utilise the actors voices as well as sound effects. However, the sound system was not at all perfect, so as I said, there were lip-sync issues. Also, we were able to make musicals, which with silent films we could never do; for example, *Utau Tanuki Goten* and the Tanuki Goten series, and we must not forget *Oshidori Utagassen* by Masahiro Makino where Chiezo Kataoka and Takashi Shimura burst into song. We must not also forget that these films were in fact period dramas (laughter)…

PS: It must have been a great shock to contemporary audiences…

SM: Oh yes…The musicals made in the late 1930s were so interesting…

PS: You could also say the same thing about the American musicals from the 1930s, they are so lavish but at the same time, seem to be very tongue in cheek…

SM: Absolutely, and the size of the casts in those films, there were so many people. All those chorus girls lining the stairs…

PS: You are thinking of MGM musicals, right?

SM: Yes, yes. MGM musicals were so influential . . .

PS: I would like to speak about your performance on Digital Meme’s *Taki no Shiraito* DVD… Could you tell me how you prepared? Did you have an original script … or did you rewrite from scratch?

SM: Well, this was based on Kyoka Izumi’s *Giketsu Kyoketsu*, so I read the original novel. However, Mizoguchi’s *Taki no Shiraito* portrays someone who is not featured in the novel and also Mizoguchi quotes few lines from the original. I watched the film again and again, perhaps Mizoguchi may not agree with me, but I didn’t want to make the film a simple tragedy. I don’t know Mizoguchi’s original intention, and this could be different from his thoughts, but for me the leading character played by Takako Irie, seems like a woman
who is very proud and possesses great dignity. Therefore for the heroine Shiraito, to devote and sacrifice herself to an also very proud young man, is a method into allowing her to start a brand new life. There are many social barriers and she sees so much ugliness in people but by devoting her love to him, she could ascend to a higher level.

**PS:** So, you are saying that she could get to a place where there are no social restrictions, a place where social barriers do not matter?

**SM:** In Japanese society travelling performers were looked down upon, and of course it was a male dominated society. There were so many factors which shackled Shiraito, such as the man who tried to take advantage of Shiraito’s monetary situation.

**PS:** In that sense, we can see a similarity here between Shiraito and Oharu in *Saikaku Ichidai Onna*.

**SM:** Yes, absolutely right. However, Shiraito could not break down her social barriers, but she could actually change from within. Materialistically she could not change anything, but spiritually she could ascend to a higher place. In the end, she kills herself in the court room, being true to her love; the copy which the Tokyo Film Archive has, includes the scene where Shiraito looks up and says “gokigenyou” (‘farewell’), this scene is not featured in the Matsuda version. She looks up at Kinya, says farewell and then kills herself by biting her tongue. At the moment of death she is at the pinnacle of her spiritual journey. So this is how I interpreted the film, this is a very noble story, where a very proud woman reaches a spiritual plateau, when she gets to the top she dies. This is how I wrote the script.

For example, do you remember the scene where Shiraito performs her water magic? In that scene I described her as a Venus in a palace of crystal.
PS: I remember very well ... I believe that his criticism is more social and he tells these tales through women.

SM: I feel the same thing, and that is why he creates someone who is not featured in the original novel in both *Taki no Shiraito* and *Orizuru Osen*.

PS: To aid in the critique of society, right?

SM: Exactly ... adding someone who makes the heroine suffer even more ...

PS: ... we must not forget that he worked with four of the great Japanese actresses, Takako Irie, Machiko Kyo, Kinuyo Tanaka and Isuzu Yamada. If you create a story which focuses on a woman’s life, are there any other actresses better than these four?

SM: I really think so too, absolutely.

PS: Especially Isuzu Yamada...

SM: Oh definitely...she is beautiful and such a fine actress. *Gion no Kyodai, Naniwa Ereji*...

PS: ... when you consider Mizoguchi’s sharp criticism on Japanese society. In the 1930s Yamada went through severe personal problems and difficulties and it comes across in these pictures...

SM: On the screen, Kinuyo Tanaka grew into a woman from a girl. But from her teenage debut, Isuzu Yamada was already a woman. The roles she plays were also of someone who tackles obstacles in life.

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Appendix Three: Interview with Saso Tsutomo

September 20, 2010

Interviewer: Paul Spicer

Interviewee: Saso Tsutomu

Interpreter: Asano Reiko

Translation: Asano Reiko

(Titles omitted)

Paul Spicer: Generally, in western film criticism Mizoguchi is known as a director of mise en scène – Ozu is revered for his Japanese-ness and Kurosawa for his western influence (John Ford). Just as a starting point, what is your opinion about these ‘labels’?

Tsutomu Saso: When you say mise en scène, you are not including sound or music, right?

PS: Well it depends on who you read … music enhances the visual and narrative reading, as well as being able to change the mood and feeling.

ST: So you are saying everything within the frame, right? Not so much focus on sound or music in Mizoguchi’s films? I am not happy about that.

PS: … French critics … mainly discuss the visuals.

ST: I do agree with the fact that Mizoguchi’s visual techniques are rated as one of the greatest in the world but if they think that Mizoguchi’s sound and music have not reached the same level as his visuals, I cannot agree with that.

Section Omitted

Watching Taki no Shiraito
**ST:** Do you think that Takako Irie is beautiful? (Pointing at the screen) Anyway, this next shot is a long-shot, which I personally think is very much influenced by Russian films, particularly Russian avant-garde film. This kind of great long-shot is also featured in *Storm over Asia*...

**PS:** Mizoguchi … was very sensitive to foreign film and literature.

**ST:** I think that Mizoguchi saw foreign films and also heard about them from various people; at the time for example, *Potemkin* was not released in Japan because of censorship, but I think that he knew about it through reading or he heard about it from those who had seen it outside of Japan. I firmly believe that Mizoguchi was heavily influenced by Russian avant-garde film. The reason for that is written in the *Nipponbashi* chapter in my book...

**Section omitted**

**ST:** Here, I think that the camera movement is very subjective.

**PS:** This scene is quite frenetic … the camera is always trying to keep up with her …

**ST:** That is very interesting…The spectator is detached from Shiraito, it is almost as if her soul has been released.

**Section omitted**

**ST:** (Pointing at the screen) - Here, this is a perfect example of psychological expression without any subtitles. In scenes such as this, you can definitely see a perfect example of *mise en scène* … in later years; Mizoguchi stopped doing things as distinct as this. (Pointing at the screen) - After this scene, it is incredible … The scenes are connected by using a dissolve and continues and reminds me of the scene in *Ugetsu Monogatari* where Machiko Kyo and Masayuki Mori are in the bath together and the camera follows the water flow, seamlessly cutting to a totally different scene on the beach. Here, the scene
shifts to a different time and place ... (pointing at the screen) and now look, they are here! I think Mizoguchi combines shots which he then makes look like a long take, seamless ... I think that only five of Mizoguchi’s silent films exist today, and also a film called *Furusato*, which is a talkie, but if you look specifically at his silent films, there are only five and amongst them, two of them are only digests. Only three of them remain in almost complete condition. Therefore we could only guess from these remaining films, but I think that Mizoguchi’s silent films consisted of the combination of these short shots and shots which flow.

**PS:** You could say that he was experimenting?

**ST:** Yes, absolutely...but I think that he always strived to do something new, all the way up until his death.

**PS:** I think at one point, he was trying to outdo himself in regards to the length of his takes.

**ST:** At one point in his career, but around this time, this is his peak I think. After the war, his takes are not this long I believe...I think Noel Burch likes the films from around this period, he says that they are very unique; alternatively he does not seem to like the post-war films. So he has his likes and dislikes.

**Section omitted**

**PS:** Early Mizoguchi pictures seem to be inspired and influenced from many sources ... How important are these foreign influences on Mizoguchi as a director?

**ST:** Mizoguchi was hugely influenced by world cinema. As I mentioned in my book, Mizoguchi during the silent era was so eager to see foreign films, which were of course new to Japan and was also quick to adapt to new techniques such as those by people like Chaplin and Sternberg.
For example the French director Marcel L'Herbier had a great influence on Mizoguchi. You can clearly see this influence in Kamingyo Haru no Sasayaki. He copied the illusion scenes' double exposure, mastered by L'Herbier and used it in his film. To do this now is nothing new of course, but at the time, it was a fantastic new technique.

**PS:** ... How do you think the style changes from this time and through the 1930s into the war?

**ST:** I think that the biggest change can be seen in Naniwa Elegy; the long take really takes form from there. Also, Mizoguchi stopped replicating foreign styles including, as we discussed before, Russian avant-garde. I think that there is a clear difference in style between Naniwa Elegy and Gubijinso, which was made previously. The reason why there is such a huge difference is of course the huge issue here. I think that the long take technique emerged because of the advent of sound cinema. I do not think that you could use long takes as much with silent films because of the need for subtitles. He uses the long take more because of the shift to talking pictures but not all directors did the same because of this change. So we are left with this question why Mizoguchi turned to the long take...I still do not have clear answer to that question and I will keep researching on this subject, so I cannot give you a definite answer, but I feel that Mizoguchi did not particularly have the long take in mind when he began shooting Naniwa Elegy; in other words, he did not think of using the long take technique at the beginning, but as he was shooting the long take developed, almost naturally, it complements the film beautifully. Perhaps it is because the theme of Naniwa Elegy is very harsh and portrays a woman in very difficult circumstances, right? So I think he naturally adopted a method of filmmaking in which he could contemplate on the plight of the woman in harsh social conditions. I believe that rather than deciding to use a certain technique before the film, Mizoguchi
had certain themes in mind and whilst shooting, the long take technique followed.
Perhaps it happened because of the actress Isuzu Yamada, her acting could withstand such long takes, she had that quality. Then after this film, the style continued.
As you mentioned earlier, Mizoguchi he may have wanted to outdo himself, especially if you look at films like *Genroku Chushingura*. At that point, he may have wanted to put the technique first, but I think that the origins of this much discussed style are directly related to his themes ... It is sometimes said that Mizoguchi’s post war films such as *Ugetsu Monogatari*, *Sansho Dayu* and *Chikamatsu Monogatari*, which won awards abroad, are made just for that. What do you think about this? Do you think that there is some kind of truth to this argument?

**PS:** ... you can easily identify the films that Mizoguchi loved; it comes across in the pictures. Like *Taki no Shiraito*, *Naniwa Elegy* ... and of the late films *Saikaku* for example, you can feel him trying so hard to make that film as good as it could possibly be ... **ST:** I think that *Saikaku Ichidai Onna* may be in the same category as *Naniwa Elegy*. After the war, Mizoguchi was in a slump and the film did not enjoy a great reception in Japan but I think that he really wanted to make and he went back to his roots; hence he again used that familiar long take ... About *Akasen Chitai* ... I think that it is a comedy...

**PS:** Really?

**ST:** Definitely, it is what we in Japan call *jukigeki*, in other words it is a tragedy and a comedy at the same time ... It may seem light-hearted but behind this you can see a tragedy and then behind this tragedy, there is always a comedic element, and this is why I quite like it. Not many people talk about this but I think Mizoguchi really valued this type of humour; for example *Gion Bayashi*, that could also be a comedy and then we have Sadako Sawamura’s hair scene in *Saikaku Ichidai Onna*; even in *Taki no Shiraito* there is a
scene where a rich man did something like this (gesture) during a tea ceremony. The
comedic elements that Mizoguchi used were influenced by caricature, manga and rakugo;
you could even say that he learned things like caricature from Meyerhold, the Russian
avant-garde theatre director. Also, again no one talks about this but I think that Kaoru
Osanai had a huge influence on Mizoguchi. He was a pioneer of Japanese shingeki who
went to the Soviet Union in the 1920s and saw Stanislavski and Meyerhold plays.

Do you know, Mizoguchi had a friend called Matsutaro Kawaguchi, well, his mentor was
Kaoru Osanai and Mizoguchi made his work into a film called Jinkyo. I think that
Mizoguchi studied what Osanai said and did. In 1927 Osanai made a talking picture called
Reimei it is a very early example of a Japanese talking film. Mizoguchi saw that and wrote
that ‘it was a great film’. Osanai founded the Tsukiji Shougekijou (Tsukiji Little Theatre)
and there he transformed a kabuki play called Kokusenya Kassen into a shingeki (western
style) play, and he copied the stage set of Meyerhold. So I think that it is very likely that
Mizoguchi knew that Kokusenya Kassen was shown at the Tsukiji Shougekijou and learned
that it was possible to transform something old into something new, with an individual
approach. This is why Mizoguchi made Nipponbashi into a film. He must have heard
information about the Russian avant-garde scene from Osanai. One of the reasons that I
said that Mizoguchi was influenced by Russian avant-garde earlier is this. Going back to
what I was talking about, Mizoguchi uses caricature very often, but one of the most
influential factors is the Russian avant-garde. No one discusses this...

**PS:** The argument against that would be that how could he have known such things, but
you said that he has been fed information ... right?

**ST:** Well, not many Soviet films were shown in Japan during this time; only a few films
such as Pudovkin’s *Storm over Asia, The General Line* by Eisenstein and then later on
Spring. Therefore, the films that Mizoguchi was actually able to see first-hand were very limited; but as I mentioned earlier, people that Mizoguchi knew, such as Osanai and Teinosuke Kinugasa went to the Soviet Union and I think he heard about the films and also about certain scenes within them. I think he knew a lot about these films.

Also, Mizoguchi was quite big headed, but there was a side of him that was always looking for approval from others, so he would borrow certain techniques because they had already been tried by someone. Let me give you an example; do you remember the music used in Akasen Chitai? The style was very new but was not received so well, people did not like it. When Mizoguchi first listened to the score, he was not at all confident about it; but do you know William Wyler’s film The Desperate Hours? In this film, the music used is very similar to the music used in Akasen Chitai, so he thought that if Wyler had used it, then it would be ok. That is why I think that Mizoguchi cared about what other people were doing, for example if Mizoguchi heard about Russian avant-garde and learned about its experimentation, then he must have thought that it was ok to do such things.

Section omitted

PS: In a lot of the films you have characters with forward thinking ideas struggling in an old system. It is stronger in some of the work, but it is always there. Naniwa Elegy for example is all about tradition verses modernity.

ST: But it is strange, for example in Sansho Dayu, the Father of Zushio, who lived in ancient times, talks about a very modern, liberal ideology ... about equality.

PS: ... in a film such as Chikamatsu Monogatari, the message is very strong but it is modest, the strength of this film is its modesty, because it is not so blatant, it is stronger ...
**ST:** I know what you mean...For example the last scene in *Gion no Kyodai* was not received favourably, right? It seems like the author suddenly appeared and told us his message! Even Mizoguchi himself admitted that it did feel like that ... but I quite like it. The message, all of a sudden becomes so obvious, and that I think is expressionism. I like it when Mizoguchi uses the unexpected; he combines all of these different elements and puts them together. I don’t like *Sansho Dayu* so much; however I think that the final scene is excellent. I don’t think that the film sought realism; I think that it was more like a kind of fairy tale. I do feel that it is ok for characters who are portrayed as living in Ancient times, to have a more modern and liberal ideology.

**PS:** ... *Chikamatsu* is also a wonderful film and ... *Musashino Fujin* and *Oyu Sama. Uwasa no Onna* too.

**ST:** I love *Uwasa no Onna*, I think it has great comedy elements in places ... Not many people write about *Uwasa no Onna* ...

**PS:** ... I think it gets a little swallowed up by the other more prominent 1950s pieces. But if you remember, we talked about the film at the *Chi to Rei* screening in Morioka, the scene with the *Kyōgen* ....

**ST:** He does a similar thing in *Naniwa Elegy*.

**PS:** In the theatre with *bunraku*?

**ST:** Yes, yes, exactly. He does that ever so often.

**PS:** The theatre is very important; in *Naniwa Elegy* where he gets caught by the doctor.

**ST:** The event we see with the doctor is happening in parallel with the *bunraku* story on stage.

**PS:** It is very clever.

**ST:** I really like the fact that you like *Uwasa no Onna*. 
PS: *Women of the Night* too, I always compare it with *Akasen Chitai* ...

ST: *Women of the Night* is challenging, the rape scene for example.

PS: Again, it has been ignored somewhat!

ST: Could it be that it is a *gendai*geki (contemporary drama)?

PS: I think so.

ST: But what about *Naniwa Elegy*?

PS: *Naniwa Elegy* is always compared with *Gion* ...

ST: Yes, when you compare the two, *Gion* certainly gets the greater share of attention. That is why I have a suspicion that the films which are liked more in the west are those which feature the more typical traditional Japanese cultural elements. When you think about *Gion no Kyodai*, and *Zangiku Monogatari*, they are both reliant on obvious Japanese look, aren’t they. Perhaps *Zangiku Monogatari* does not receive a great reception in Europe ... *Zangiku* seems like a melodrama but it is not a melodrama nor it is a sweet drama. I think it is a very cruel story, especially the death scene at the finale. This scene is not at all portrayed in the way that would make an audience tearful, but rather it is portrayed in a way which detaches the audience, they are in effect pushed away and that, I think, is amazing ... It seems to me that the amount of writing on a certain film depends on whether it has been released with English subtitles or not.

We talked about the use of sound earlier in *Zangiku* and the way that the sound is handled in fantastic, because the film has no music...it is incredible.

PS: ...during the war period ... how much pressure do you think that Mizoguchi was under ...

ST: *Naniwa Elegy* was made in 1936, and *Gion no Shimai* was made after that...up until then, Mizoguchi was pretty much able to make what he wanted, in regards to his
relationship with the government. *Aien Kyo* was ok but after this in July 1937 there was the battle of the Marco Polo Bridge (a battle between the Republic of China's National Revolutionary Army and the Imperial Japanese army. It was the battle which is often cited as the first of the Second Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1945), and a full on invasion of the Chinese continent begun. After this incident, Mizoguchi attempted to make two films but could not! One of them was a love story and because of that particular theme, and even though it had been shot, it was not released. The second one, the script was written but it was not made because it featured social issues. After that he made the war film *Roei no Uta* in 1938. The fact that he could not make the former two films indicates that the theme of oppressed women, struggling in society as seen in *Naniwa Elegy* and *Gion no Kyodai*, could no longer be made.

So you could argue that after the invasion of China was in full effect, Mizoguchi was no longer able to make films which he wanted to make, such as those featuring social issues. In 1939 he made *Zangiku Monogatari*, and from that point he only portrayed the world of *kabuki* or *bunraku*, which is also called *geido mono*. While all this was going on, Mizoguchi’s personal philosophy seemed to become more right wing...well...or so it has been said, we do not know for sure. We do not know for certain if Mizoguchi wanted to make films like *Genroku Chushingura*...I very much doubt it, but I think that he had to make it because of the demands of the period. Again though, we cannot say for sure that he didn’t want to make that film; for example, the film made in 1932 called *Manmo Kenkoku no Reimei* is commonly known as the film that Mizoguchi had to make and I think this is very much the case. I suspect however that Mizoguchi still put his full effort into making this film because the actors who appeared in it point that out; it has also been said that because he put so much of himself into the project it became too long and
eventually Mizoguchi could not handle the editing; he just ran away from the whole film. This sounds almost unbelievable does it not? (laughs) But there have been two reliable accounts of the events so I am sure that it must be true.

So, I think Mizoguchi’s political ideology changed a lot ...in the 1940s, when Japan went in a right wing direction, I think he followed the trend. However, I think it was in 1943 or 1944; he went to China because he was asked to make a war film in co-operation with China, but he could not make it. I believe that this was because Mizoguchi could not capture the reality of war; although his political ideology changed a lot, Mizoguchi was a director who could not make a film unless he could capture a certain level of personal realism. The reason he could not make this war film was not because of his political ideology or anti-war consciousness; I actually think he wanted to make the film; he certainly had no problem with the subject matter. However, I think he knew that he could not capture the reality of war, because he had never been involved in one, he had not experienced it and that is why he could not make it. I feel that the most important factor for Mizoguchi is to capture a sense of recognisable reality and as a result, and although he had made pictures which seemed like war films, he never made a proper propaganda film. For example, you could say that *Genroku Chushingura* is a war film; it features that scene where Kuranosuke Oishi takes a deep bow whilst facing the direction of the emperor’s palace. This is one of the characteristics of *Chushingura*, but it is important to note that the film does not feature an *uchiiri* (revenge/raid) scene. Mr. Yomota in his essay on the film discusses this in detail, it is excellent and I recommend you to read it when you have the chance. Yomota talks about the reasons why Mizoguchi chose to use the scene where a woman, Youzenin, and the servant read the letter informing her of her husband’s death, instead of using the *uchiiri* scene. Have you heard the story that when
Mizoguchi was asked why he did not shoot the uchiiri scene, he said ‘it is because you can’t actually kill people on screen’ there are people who actually believe that he meant that, but of course it was a joke. So he wanted to shoot the messenger scene... where the woman reads the letter...instead of the uchiiri scene. I agree with what Mr. Yomota says one-hundred percent. By portraying this from a female point of view, it changes the film. It is true that it is a propaganda film, but it has a slightly different aspect to it, which is very Mizoguchi...there is an odd element to it ... I mentioned in my book, at the core of Mizoguchi’s philosophy is the portrayal of things through oppressed women. Of course whether or not Mizoguchi’s attitude was like that, in reality is a different matter, but as a film director...as an artist, I believe that Mizoguchi was like that. If Mizoguchi bullied women in reality, well that is another story, but as a film director he always portrayed his stories from the perspective on an oppressed woman, perhaps his upbringing had a lot to do with this theme...well, it is undeniable really. For example, Mizoguchi would visit prostitutes regularly, and there are accounts that amongst them, he preferred the lowest kind...if there is such a thing as low class and high class prostitutes...in other words he saw things from the bottom of the social scale, like he prefers the lowest class of prostitute, and that I think you can see this throughout his career.

As Matsutaro Kawaguchi said, Mizoguchi’s political ideology shifted from right to left, left to right; he became a supporter of democracy; but he would always, no matter what, portray social issues from the viewpoint of a working class man or someone who is oppressed. Of course, focusing on oppressed women was at the core of his philosophy. In reality however, there was a side to Mizoguchi, as you can see in this picture too (looking at a picture of Mizoguchi during the war) he could be easily pleased by receiving a medal, or he insisted on being given a higher military rank when he went to China. This doesn’t
mean however that Mizoguchi as a film director believed in militarism, nor was he an authoritarian.

Although it is difficult to separate the two, Mizoguchi as a man and Mizoguchi as an artist are not necessarily the same; we should be careful not to confuse them. I think that so many people discuss this issue and seem to think that the two elements are inseparable. As you indicated, lets separate the man and the artist...I also agree with Mellen that Mizoguchi portrays issues from the perspective of the oppressed common people. So, on the surface, *Meito Bijomaru* is a complete example of a propaganda film, right? But Mizoguchi, as seen in *Taki no Shiraito*, begins the film as melodrama but again, it ends up as something quite different. So he made *Meito Bijomaru* with militaristic ideology behind it, but in the end he turned the film into something different. We see the same thing in *Genroku Chushingura* and then later *Miyamoto Musashi* and then as we have mentioned, *Meito Bijomaru* – he made all of these films because he had to, he could only make these type of films, and then...What do you think of *Miyamoto Musashi*? Do you think that it is a little strange?

**PS:** ...the version I have is very short.

**ST:** This is what I have heard. During a telephone conversation that I had with scriptwriter Masashige Narusawa he said that originally, the film *Miyamoto Musashi* featured a prominent love story between Kinuyo Tanaka and Chojuro Kawarasaki. However because of the strict censorship at the time, these scenes were cut, this is why the film seems so strange.

**PS:** The film does seem somewhat disjointed ... from reading the films ... Mizoguchi would never compromise or be dishonest with art; this is the area where we discover the true Mizoguchi.
ST: I think so too, even when we compare to other directors.

PS: I think it is too simple to just say, he was right wing.

ST: There is no benefit in saying such things.

PS: Some people are looking for a quick answer; we need to give the artist credit for having more depth.

ST: The reason why I began researching and then writing books about Mizoguchi is because I wanted to break the pattern which has been created, especially by someone like Sato Tadao. I think that it is ok if they really believe what they say, but he has created this idea that Mizoguchi is simply a director of realism. I started off from nothing … without the films themselves. I wanted to show people that Mizoguchi had more sides to him. As I was researching, these different sides of Mizoguchi became apparent. It matters not how contradictory they are, I do not want to dismiss anything, I want to embrace everything.

PS: I think there is a lot of contradiction and that sometimes adds to the confusion.

ST: I feel that studies on Mizoguchi have become too simplistic; people are trying to make something which is complicated and contradictory into something simple. What I am trying to do is to re-examine Mizoguchi after acknowledging these contradictions and all the different aspects of Mizoguchi. So I share the same view as you.

PS: I agree, it is far more complex that people seem to realise maybe …

ST: We discussed Genroku Chushingura before, and we talked about the message aimed at women in the audience, the scene with the letter, it actually reminded me of Ugetsu Monogatari. I think that Mizoguchi hides these kinds of social commentary in his film. Ugetsu Monogatari of course, features war, but behind that film, although nobody says so, there is a commentary about the Korean War which was going on at this very time.
The character played by Masayuki Mori tries to make money, because the price of pottery is going up on the back of war breaking out. During the Korean War, Japan experienced a Korean War economy boom and Japan made a fortune because of this. Up until that point, the Japanese economy was suffering after the Second World War but it grew significantly, which in turn led to the significant economic growth that followed in later years. I think that the character that Masayuki Mori played is a reflection on a Japan which was making its fortune on the back of the Korean War. Someone who makes money out of war, in the end is denied. So the film of course has an anti-war message, but at the same time I think it contains a criticism on Japanese society which welcomed economic profit from war.

PS: Again, you can see the same theme ‘money,’ and people profiting from other people’s misfortune.

ST: I wonder from what period Mizoguchi became interested in concentrating on the theme of money? As far as I know, it began from the very early stages of his career;  *Taki no Shiraito* and he also made a film called *Ningen* in 1925. The story of *Ningen* regards a young man who comes to Tokyo looking for success and fortune and tries all sorts of things. In the end he fails at all of them and ends up returning to his home town where his fiancé is waiting there to comfort him. So, in a way it is a similar film to *Ugetsu Monogatari*. Again the focus is on money, I believe that Mizoguchi began this theme in the very early stages of his career. In *Taki no Shiraito*, the scene where the money is just thrown, it has been said that a similar kind of scene was featured in *Ningen*.

Also, in *Saikaku Ichidai Onna* the character played by Eijiro Yanagi throws the money at the prostitute played by Kinuyo Tanaka ... in the west ... the research focus is on the woman.
**PS:** So society and culture is often forgotten?

**ST:** Yes, this is what I have read ... I do think that when a woman has any problem, money is always at the root of it. I would like to ask you about something, don’t you think that it is strange that men are portrayed as stupid?

**PS:** I think the term stupid is slightly unfair. I think Mizoguchi shows male weaknesses ... a man’s weakness is women and money and woman’s is men ...  

**ST:** I have always felt that it is extreme; I think that because of his past, Mizoguchi was obsessed with such themes. His older sister became a Geisha and Mizoguchi was supported by her financially and perhaps he felt shame or guilt. This encouraged him to portray men in such an unnatural way. How can I describe this, it is unnatural and exaggerated, a caricature

**PS:** ... how it is exaggerated?

**ST:** I think that Mizoguchi’s men are unfairly lazy...in reality they cannot be like that, so surely this is not realistic.

**PS:** I see how certain characters could be seen as stupid ... I also think that some of Mizoguchi’s other male characters are quite wonderful, Mohei for example.

**ST:** Yes, absolutely, Mohei is very different.

**PS:** ... I think Mohei takes the role of the woman. I think Mizoguchi plays around with this theme in Chikamatsu.

**ST:** Yes, yes...and also, Mohei is played by Kazuo Hasagawa.

**PS:** I think he is subverting gender roles in that film. I have always thought so ... it has not been discussed before but it is obvious to me.

**ST:** Yes definitely, that film is different

**PS:** Genjuro as well?
ST: Genjuro is not so strange...

PS: So...what characters do you think are odd? I cannot think of any specifically.

ST: Well, what I meant was the way in which women persecute men is unnatural or just too much. For example, Isuzu Yamada in *Gion no Kyodai*, perhaps it doesn’t seem that way from a western point of view

PS: I would like to talk about another area of Mizoguchi’s work and that is his position within the Japanese film industry. If we could start with *Taki no Shiraito*, Irie Productions; the walkout of the Nikkatsu staff which sees him join Irie. What do you think made him go there? Do you think it was the promise of being able to make what he wanted … to have more freedom?

ST: Maybe…I need to look into literature on that subject. Mizoguchi made *Manmo Kenkoku no Reimei* as soon as he joined Irie Production. This film was a project which he had to make; perhaps behind it, he had a promise in which he could make *Taki no Shiraito* after completion.

PS: Kyoka was not happy with his adaptation was he? They were arguing about it?

ST: Kyoka Izumi did not seem to like Mizoguchi’s adaptation of *Nihonbashi*.

PS: Do you think the studio had some influence on Kyoka?

ST: I am not sure about that … I will look into it.

PS: … they were asked to work together and did not get on

ST: You wrote about that in your thesis…I did not know about this, how did you find out?

As far as I know, none of the Japanese literature features that incident, so this is a subject that I am not familiar with so I will definitely research. I never thought that Kyoka rejected the film so much … I heard that he did not like Mizoguchi’s adaptation…it was something
to do with dirty feet! Some of the characters were barefoot and the backs of their feet were black!

**PS:** ... after, he went straight to Daiichi, 1935? How long did he stay at Irie Productions?

**ST:** He stayed with Irie Productions until *Taki no Shiraito*, after that he joined Shinko Eiga, there he shot films such as *Jinpuren* with Takako Irie but that was for Shinko.

**PS:** When he went to Daiichi, was he given more freedom?

**ST:** It seems so, especially when we watch the films he made for the company and of course Mizoguchi’s friend Masaichi Nagata was there. You can see it in films like *Orizuru*, *Osen* and *Maria no Oyuki* but I don’t know why he made *Gubijinso*.

**PS:** This is returning to Meiji period drama, isn’t it?

**ST:** That’s right, but I don’t know if Mizoguchi deliberately chose Soseki Natsume’s work for his film.

**PS:** If you look at Mizoguchi’s career, every time there is a so-called slump, it is when he returns to these Meiji period dramas. Do you think so?

**ST:** So you are asking whether or not he made these kinds of films during the periods which were considered a slump. Well, you can see the same kind of thing just after the war; he made a couple of films like that.

**PS:** I read that he originally planned to make Kansai trilogy.

**ST:** Yes, that’s correct. *Naniwa Elegy* which is of course set in Osaka, and *Gion no Kyodai*, set in Kyoto both relied heavily on the Osaka and Kyoto dialects. I heard that after these films, he wanted to make a third film which was to be set in either Kobe or Nagoya; he was very keen on films with regional characteristics around this time.
**PS:** ... Combining Mizoguchi’s Kanto aggressiveness with Yoda’s Kansai spirit ... worked marvellously together. With any other scriptwriter, these films may not have been as good ... Do you think so?

**ST:** Of course, Yoda was chosen because of the issue with the Kansai dialects; it worked marvellously. At that time, Yoda was not well known at all and he had just become a scriptwriter, so in a way it was a surprise choice.

**PS:** ... Was it a Mizoguchi’s decision or the studios?

**ST:** Mizoguchi’s.

**PS:** Was that quite rare for a director to do such a thing?

**ST:** Not at all; Mizoguchi’s had he used the same scriptwriter, Shuichi Hatamoto for almost all of his 1920s films. Hatamoto wrote about twenty scripts for Mizoguchi. Also, in 1923, which is the year Mizoguchi debuted as a film director, he made films which are known as masterpieces such as *Chi to Rei, Yoru* and *Kiri no Minato* and it is also important to note that he used the same cameraman, Aoshima. Then, in 1923 there was the great Kanto earthquake; Mizoguchi moved to Kyoto but for some reason, Aoshima never followed and began working with director Minoru Murata. After this, Mizoguchi fell into somewhat of a slump and as a consequence, could not choose his crew. I am not sure if this had anything to do with directorial hierarchy, but it is interesting to note that Murata was said to be at least on the same level as Mizoguchi in terms of talent. I think that Mizoguchi being separated from cameraman Aoshima played a huge part in his slump during this period because Mizoguchi, unlike Ozu, is not a director who could do everything by himself. He was a director who made great films by utilising talent and by getting the best out of his crew, such as cameraman, art or music director.
**PS:** So, in contrast with Ozu, collaboration with his crew members was a very important element for Mizoguchi. Do you notice any affect or difference brought by the change of his staff?

**ST:** Well, for example there was a cameraman called Minoru Miki, his tone is totally different from Kazuo Miyagawa; Miki’s photography is very dark, sometimes you can hardly see anything on screen. It could of course be down to the quality of the film, but still ... *Aien Kyo* is shot by Miki, but in this film it is difficult to see even the actors’ faces! Of course, this is also down to the fact that Mizoguchi was a director who used long-shots, but still, this is extreme. For example, while the actors are acting, you cannot make out their facial expressions whatsoever. However, although the screen is dark, you can of course hear the spoken lines and what is fascinating about this is that the emotion comes across so strongly, maybe more so than if you could actually see the facial expressions.

There are other examples of this kind of lighting in other films such as *Maria no Oyuki* ... well this is not a great film but you can see the affect that cameraman Minoru Miki had on the film. This is seen on the screen where you cannot really tell what is what ... Miyagawa’s work is a lot clearer.

Having said that, a cameraman called Hirano shot *Saikaku Ichidai Onna*, which is his only film with Mizoguchi. Even though this was the case, the director’s tone is still apparent; it is still a ‘Mizoguchi film’. So of course, there are elements of the films which change with staff members; however there are also certain things which remain the same. That sums up Mizoguchi.

Unlike Ozu who had a very clear image, for example he would know when an object needed to be one millimetre lower or higher. This is unlike Mizoguchi who was more flexible; he would work within his own personal tolerance range. He has a rough image of
what he wants but he always challenges his crew to match or better this image... So Mizoguchi’s image is like a balloon; he wants to expand the balloon as big as possible, and if his crews input helped him do that, he welcomes such input. However, if crew input made the balloon go in a direction that Mizoguchi did not want...everyone had to be pulling in the same direction, artistically at least. Therefore I think for Mizoguchi, the staff, the actors and of course the actresses were very important to him.

**PS:** ... So after Daiichi, the Nagoya film is never made because of bankruptcy, right?

**ST:** Yes, that’s right, Daiichi did go bankrupt; actually just after *Gion no Kyodai* was made. It made no money.

**PS:** It was critically acclaimed?

**ST:** Of course, Mizoguchi was seen as coming out of his slump at the time he made *Naniwa Elegy*, which was also highly acclaimed, but yet again it made no money either ... it’s the same even today isn’t it? It is not the type of film which generally makes a lot of money at the box office ... I haven’t really researched this subject so much, although it would be interesting to discover box office figures from 1936.

**PS:** We had trouble finding box office figures.

**ST:** I think you could maybe find out by looking at old copies of *Kinema Junpo* ... good luck (laughs)...

**PS:** So after the Daiichi collapse, he goes back to Shinko.

**ST:** Indeed, at this time Mizoguchi was separated from Isuzu Yamada. Yamada stayed in Kyoto and Mizoguchi went back to Tokyo, this had a huge effect.

**PS:** That was a big thing?
ST: Yes, yes...the fact that they were artistically separated was a huge blow on all levels. Fumiko Yamaji was great but I would have loved Mizoguchi to make more films with Isuzu Yamada.

PS: And then he makes two films for Shinko?

ST: In 1937 he made Aien Kyo and then in 1938 he made Roei no Uta and Aa Kokyo, the latter film had the Tohoku accent. He then made Zangiku Monogatari for Shochiku, although Shinko and Shochiku were in fact affiliated companies. Strictly speaking he only made three films for Shinko. Don’t forget though, he worked for Shinko before he went to Daiichi but post Gion no Shimai, he made three.

PS: In Shindo’s Mizoguchi documentary, he interviews Takako Irie …

ST: Well, she did hate him but she would never, ever admit to it…

PS: … she was the first woman producer in Japan, so a very important figure. Why do you feel he had so much trouble working under a woman?

ST: Mizoguchi simply hated it! He even admitted as such; he said ‘a woman should never do such a thing’. As I said before, the philosophy, or the attitude towards women Mizoguchi had as a director and as an individual were totally different....

PS: … in 1933 Takao Irie was the biggest star in Japan, right?

ST: Totally...I think that Mizoguchi had an inferiority complex. He was a proud man but also very sensitive towards people looking down on him. Around that time, the Irie Mizoguchi collaboration, people were very old fashioned so they would have thought that working for a mere woman ... [would have been a disgrace]. So I think that when Kawaguchi said that Mizoguchi was not at all a democratic person, he has got a point. In reality, Mizoguchi was a bit like that...
PS: ... After the war, around 1947-1948, how was he viewed, was he known as ... a difficult director?

ST: Just after the war, right? Well, I think that Mizoguchi was already known as a difficult director during the mid 1930s. Even before this time actually; even during the 1920s it has been said that he put actors ‘through the wringer’... whether this is true or not is debateable because we have two contrasting eye-witness accounts. Two actresses who worked with him during the 1920s, Shizue Natsukawa and Yoshiko Okada, offer us two different views. Okada says that Mizoguchi was a strict disciplinarian on the other hand Natsukawa says that he wasn’t as bad or as difficult as people went on to believe. I think that it depended on the films; Mizoguchi put all of his soul into the projects he really wanted to direct, but on others he could be a bit shoddy. In the early 1930s, he made Meiji period dramas of which Taki no Shiraito is one of course, he insisted upon using real props. So I think that Mizoguchi image of being a difficult director stems from this time.

Well...I am sure Mizoguchi insisting on certain props or set design could easily have been seen before this time ... Also, post-war Mizoguchi was seen as an old fashioned director. Actually, this was the case even during the 1930s because people were saying that using techniques such as the long take were so anachronistic. For example, just after the war there was a review which said something like ‘a film without montage has no intelligence’. People thought that the long take was just ‘shooting the scene without structure or composition’ ... Do you know about the friction between Mizoguchi and Kurosawa regarding Fumio Hayasaka?

PS: No ...

ST: Well, Fumio Hayasaka was in charge of the music used in Ugetsu and Sansho Dayu and both Mizoguchi and Kurosawa fought over his talents. While Kurosawa was shooting
Shichinin no Samurai, Mizoguchi was making Sansho Dayu. Hayasaka had a lung disease which had gotten worse over the years but despite his ill health, Mizoguchi insisted that Hayasaka worked for him on the film Shin Heike Monogatari. After the film was finished, Hayasaka passed away and rumour dictates that at the funeral, Kurosawa blamed Mizoguchi for his death. Behind this however, could be the fact that Hayasaka and Kurosawa had a very close working relationship and Mizoguchi was jealous. I strongly believe that Mizoguchi was motivated by Rashomon winning the Golden Lion.

**PS:** From Ugetsu onwards everything is documented quite clearly; I just wanted to talk about Oyu Sama. It has been said that Kawaguchi took total control of the script in this film and demanded that certain sequences were removed. It has also been said that the only reason Mizoguchi made it, was because he wanted to direct Saikaku Ichidai Onna ... I wonder what you think about this.

**ST:** I don’t really have any information about this, other than what has already been said. When I first watched Oyu Sama I didn’t like the film very much at all but after a few viewings I began thinking that actually, this film is not that bad ... it is truly a film of mise en scène; the interaction between camera and actor movement is fascinating but the story is not, because it is totally different from Tanizaki’s original novel.

**PS:** In the novel, Oyu is a free spirit; she is not really human, more like an enigma. In the film, it is not the case...

**ST:** Absolutely, they totally missed this aspect of her, I have no idea why! They could quite easily have made the film much closer to the original novel.

**PS:** Is it said by Yoda that they wanted to use flashbacks

**ST:** I believe Yoda wanted it that way.

**PS:** But Kawaguchi was against it?
ST: Perhaps, from a box office point of view?

PS: But Rashomon uses flashbacks……

ST: Oh yes, so you cannot say that the audience did not like flashbacks. I am not sure why he did not like flashbacks so much, especially as Kawaguchi was not a person who did not understand art, so surely he must have known why Yoda wanted to make the picture more faithful to the novel. It is even odder when you think about Kawaguchi as an established scriptwriter who wrote many scripts including Kyoren no Onna Shisho.

PS: It could have been the studio …

ST: Or it could have been because of Nagata … Near the end of the film, the character played by Nobuko Otowa lives in a very humble home near Tokyo, an element that is totally absent from the original. At that point, the story had no resemblance to the novel.

〜雑談〜
Appendix Four

Omoukotonado: Edo Jocho no Eigaka Sonohoka

(My Thoughts: Creating Edo Culture in Film) by Director Kenji Mizoguchi

Nikkatsu Magazine June 1926

It has not been too long since Japanese film has become a kind of cinematic play; but already, the future of Japanese cinema is gloomy, and for us filmmakers this is a very sad state of affairs. It is a real shame. Of course Japanese cinema has made rapid progress in a very short period of time, although with a certain handicap, and I feel that it has reached a standard where it is as good as foreign cinema. Japanese films were nurtured by those from America; this is a national cinema which is at the top of its game, however, there is a cloud over its future. It is inevitable that if American cinema suffers some kind of creative deadlock, Japanese cinema, which has been stimulated and influenced by it, will suffer the same fate. Alternatively, European cinema has started to create a new type of film, one which is extremely sharp and sensitive. Trends such as these are extremely illuminating. These ‘oh so smart’ Japanese filmmakers are finally beginning to catch up with these European techniques and in the process, are beginning to reject the old American ways.

As a Japanese filmmaker I have extremely poor experience and knowledge. However my hope and desire for Japanese cinema is burning within me like a fire. My fledgling passion for filmmaking has been challenging and has been met with failure on so many occasions. Chi to Rei, my expressionist film; Uchen Puchan, a Chinese play based upon Ippei Okamoto’s manga; Samidare Zoshi, a romantic film set in Gion and finally, my recent Edo
culture film Kaminingyo Haru no Sasayaki. All of these films are products of my youthful exuberance and inexperience and unfortunately, met with little success.

Modern cinema should reflect modern times, to this end I feel that modern living is a major component of contemporary cinema, one should understand it. For the first time, I have realised that the basic principle of filmmaking and what I wanted to create were two conflicting elements. No wonder my previous films ended in failure. It is because they did not have a concrete view. I was flip-flopping, there was something missing from my work, a personal view, and this is the most important element of any artistic work.

When I made Eizo Tanaka’s Kaminingyo Haru no Sasayaki, critic’s reviews were split. I did my utmost to create a great film. What also spurred my efforts is that Mr. Tanaka is my senior. This film allowed me to achieve something which was missing from my work for a long time. I finally managed to make a film which contains something that I can say ‘this is mine’.

I grew up in Tokyo surrounded by working-class people and I have been an admirer of Edo culture ever since my so-called literary youth. You stand and eat at the cheap food stands; you talk about cheap noodles; you argue over kabuki actors; you enjoy the public baths, appreciate the scenery of Okawabata and enjoy Japanese sit-down comedy. Growing up in such an environment allows me to proudly say that I know the essence of Edo culture. I am fascinated by the Edo era and feel that we have seen a small influence from it on modern art. However, perhaps it could be something beyond art? It could be the atmosphere of the era, just like talking about the atmosphere of a painting and whether
its colour is classy, hip and fashionable. Nonetheless, I always tried to put this Edo culture, or at least this interest in Edo, at the heart of my filmmaking. On one hand, I try to maintain this challenge of Edo but alternatively as a man who lives in the modern age, I am also attracted by contemporary society, such as the decadent life in the café’s and dancehalls. Although I am attracted to these two trends, I have never been able to arrange them both in my work, and therefore I repeatedly made mistakes.

While I was shooting Kaminingyo Haru no Sasayaki I struggled to bring the best out of Edo culture and thus, was unable to lift my representation of the period to a higher plateau. Because of this, I unwittingly managed to arrange Edo culture and Edo interests in this film. I was able to condense these two different trends into one. I would like to go on and create something in a purely Japanese style for my next project. I would like to shoot something by Kyoka, whose stories are lavish, mysterious and sensual. I would also like to get my hands on Mantaro Kubota’s work and if allowed, I would also like to make Yotsuya Kaidan and Genya Dana but in a modern context. Of course, these stories have to be made into films which include the underlining tones of the Edo period as well as representing a recognisable, modern everyday culture. I am sure that stories of such films would be masterpieces. In the year that I moved to Kyoto from Mukoujima, I wanted to make an adaptation of Haruo Sato’s Hoshi, so we negotiated with Mr. Sato. Scriptwriter Hatamoto worked very hard and completed a script but the studio stopped production. Hoshi is based upon historic Chinese events and the story is so beautiful and pure, it is almost poetic. This should have been a masterpiece of cinema, like an emakimono displaying bright colours of purple, pink and red. It should have portrayed crystal clear blue skies, evergreen forests, bright green rolling hills, and a beautiful princess on a
Chinese balcony and a handsome boy on a horse. It is tragic that, at this time, the production of *Hoshi* remains at a standstill.

Talking about *Hoshi*, has reminded me of *Botandoro*, which is taken from a collection of ghost stories called *Ryosaishii*. *Botandoro* is quite unique, there is something about the story which has a great impact. It is beautiful and erotic, but is also full of Edo atmosphere. I would like to make it into a film, but with some changes to the ghost elements. Actually, there are many stories which feature ghosts in *Ryosaishii*. These ghosts are coquettish and beautiful and far-removed from those seen in typical Japanese stories.

The leaves of the weeping willow, the un-ripened fruit on the peach tree, the smoky golden moon and then, a ghost of a girl appears in front of a handsome, intelligent young man. Not a moment to wait, they begin living together. This is quite a story and I am sure that if it is made into a film, with the right atmosphere it would be a beautiful and interesting picture. I have heard that the Chinese film industry has created a way in which to export their pictures but if all of these Chinese stories could be made into films like *Hoshi*, Japanese cinema would truly benefit.

Mizoguchi Kenji, 1926

Translated by Asano Reiko from original text - November, 2010.
Appendix Five

Kanji Readings of Key Figures

Directors
Fujita Toshiya - 藤田 敏八
Hosoyama Kiyomatsu - 細山 喜代松
Ichikawa Kon - 市川 崎
Inoue Umetsugu - 井上 梅次
Ito Daisuke - 伊藤 大輔
Kinoshita Keisuke - 木下 恵介
Kinugasa Teinosuke - 衣笠 貞之助
Kitano Takeshi - 北野 武
Kurosawa Akira - 黒澤 明
Mizoguchi Kenji - 溝口 健二
Murata Minoru - 村田 實
Naruse Mikio - 成瀬 巳喜男
Oba Hideo - 大場 秀雄
Oshima Nagisa - 大島 渚
Ozu Yasujiro - 小津 安二郎
Sakane Tazuko - 坂根 田鶴子
Shindo Kaneto - 新藤 兼人
Shinoda Masahiro - 篠田 正浩
Tasaka Tomotaka - 田坂 具隆
Teshigahara Hiroshi - 勅使河原 宏
Uchikawa Seiichiro - 内川 清一郎
Ushihara Kiyohiko - 牛原 虚彦
Yamanaka Sadao - 山中 貞雄

Actors
Asagiri Kyoko - 朝霧 鏡子
Bando Minosuke - 坂東 巳之助
Eguchi Chiyoko - 江口 千代子
Fujisawa Asajiro - 藤沢浅二郎
Hanayagi Shotaro - 花柳 章太郎
Hara Kensaku - 原 健策
Hasegawa Kazuo - 長谷川 一夫
Irie Takako - 入江 たか子
Kagawa Kyoko - 香川京子
Katayama Akihiko - 片山 明彦
Kawakami Otojiro - 川上音二郎
Kawasaki Hiroko - 川崎 弘子
Kogure Michiyo - 木暮 実千代
Kuga Yoshiko - 久我 美子
Kusajima Kyoko - 草島 競子
Kyo Machiko - 京 マチ子
Minamida Yoko - 南田 洋子
Mito Mitsuko - 水戸 光子
Mori Kakuko - 森 赫子
Mori Kikue - 毛利菊枝
Mori Masayuki - 森 雅之
Natsukawa Daijiro - 夏川 大二郎
Ogawa Toranosuke - 小川 虎之助
Oizumi Akira - 大泉滉
Okada Tokihika - 岡田 時彦
Okura Chiyoko - 大倉千代子
Onoe Matsunosuke - 尾上 松之助
Onoe Tamitaro - 尾上 多見太郎
Otani Tomoemon - 大谷 友右衛門
Oya Ichijiro - 大矢 市次郎
Ozawa Sakae - 小沢 栄
Sakai Yoneko - 酒井 米子
Sawamura Sadako - 沢村 貞子
Shiganoya Benkei - 志賀廼家 弁慶
Shigeyama Sengoro - 茂山千五郎
Shindo Eitaro - 進藤 英太郎
Sugai Ichiro - 菅井 一朗
Takada Kokichi - 高田 浩吉
Tanaka Kinuyo - 田中 織代
Tono Eijiro - 東野 英治郎
Tomimoto Tamihei - 富本 民平
Tsukida Ichiro - 月田 一郎
Uno Jukichi - 宇野 重吉
Umemura Yoko - 梅村 蓉子
Urabe Kumeko - 浦辺 粟子
Yamada Isuzu - 山田 五十鈴
Yamane Hisako - 山根 寿子
Yanagi Eijiro - 柳 永二郎
Wakao Ayako - 若尾 文子

Film Studio Management
Iwasaki Akira - 岩崎昶
Makino Mitsuo - マキノ 光雄
Nagata Masaichi - 永田 雅一
Nakatani Sadatomo - 中谷 貞頼
Ootani Takejiro - 大谷 竹次郎
Shirai Shintaro - 白井 信太郎

Staff and Crew
Arakawa Masaru - 荒川 大
Hanai Ritsu - 花井 りつ
Ito Natsu -伊藤 なつ
Kajitani Ichizo -梶谷市造
Koike Kazuyoshi - 小池 一美
Kurosawa Yoshiko - 黒沢 良子
Miki Shigeto - 三木 滋人 (Later Known as Miki Minoru) - 三木 稔
Miki Shigeru - 三木 茂
Miyagawa Kazuo - 宮川 一夫
Mizuguchi Yasumi - 水口 保美
Mizutani Hiroshi - 水谷 浩
Mochizuki Tamezo - 望月 太明蔵
Nakai Tsuru - 中井ツル
Naito Akira - 内藤 昭
Ootani Iwao - 大谷 巌
Saito Ichiro - 斎藤 一郎
Sugimoto Fumizo - 杉本 文造
Sugiyama Kohei - 杉山 公平
Ueno Yoshio - 上野芳生

Writers (Film Script/Novels/Plays)
Chikamatsu Monzaemon - 近松 門左衛門
Hisaita Eijiro - 久板 栄二郎
Ihara Saikaku - 井原 西鶴
Iwaya Sanichi - 巌谷 三一
Izumi Kyoka – 泉 鏡花
Kawaguchi Matsutaro - 川口 松太郎
Kikuchi Kan - 菊池 寛
Kimura Chieo - 木村 千則男
Kunieda Kanji - 邦枝 完二
Matsuo Basho – 松尾 芭蕉
Mayama Seika - 真山 青果

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Mikami Otokichi - 三上於菟吉
Muramatsu Shofu – 村松梢風
Nagai Takashi - 永井 隆
Nagata Hideo - 長田秀雄
Natsume Soseki – 夏目 漱石
Ooka Shohei – 大岡 昇平
Osada Arata - 長田 新
Shimamura Hogetsu - 島村 抱月
Shimazaki Toson – 島崎 藤村
Takashima Tatsunosuke - 高島 達之助
Tanizaki Junichiro - 谷崎 潤一郎
Tokutomi Roka - 徳冨 蘆花
Tsubouchi Shouyou - 坪内逍遥
Ueda Akinari - 上田 秋成
Yanagida Kunio – 柳田 國男
Yoda Yoshikata - 依田 義賢
Yoshida Momosuke – 吉田 百助
Yoshii Isamu - 吉井 勇

Politicians
Inukai Tsuyoshi – 犬養 毅
Kishi Nobusuke- 岸 信介
Matsuoka Yosuke - 松岡 洋右

Historical Figures
Emperor Komei – 孝明天皇
Emperor Hirohito (Also known as Emperor Showa) - 昭和天皇（諱：裕仁）
Kido Takayoshi – 木戸 孝允
Lady Asano (Asano Aguri, later known as Yozei-in) - 浅野 阿久里(瑤泉院)
Lady Toda (Toda no Tsubone)- 戸田局
Lord Asano of Banshu Akou (Asano Naganori, also known as Asano Takuminokami) – 赤穂藩藩主 浅野長矩 (内匠頭)

Lord Kira (Kira Yoshihisa, also known as Kira Kozukenosuke) - 吉良義央 (上野介)

Oishi (Oishi Yoshio, also known as Oishi Kuranosuke) – 大石良雄 (内藏助)

Sakamato Ryoma - 坂本竜馬

Saigo Takamori - 西郷隆盛

Sen no Rikyu- 千利休

Tokugawa Ieyasu – 徳川家康

Toyotomi Hideyoshi – 豊臣秀吉

Yotsuya Masamune – 四谷正宗 (real name: Minamoto Kiyomaro -源清麿)

Personal Communications

Oshima Kinue - 大島衣恵

Saso Tsutomu - 佐相勉

Sawato Midori - 澤登翠

Yanashita Mie - 柳下美恵

Artists/Painters

Fujishima Takeji - 藤島武二

Kano Masanobu - 狩野正信

Kitagawa Utamaro – 喜多川歌麿

Mincho - 吉山明兆

Sesshu – 雪舟

Takehisa Yumeji – 竹久夢二

Tosa Mitsunobu- 土佐光信

Umehara Ryuzaburo - 梅原龍三郎

Yanase Masamu - 柳瀬正夢

Yasui Sotaro - 安井曾太郎