Alan G. Chalk Guides to Japanese Films

Lesson 6: The Women of Japan: Tradition and Change, a Historical Perspective

Viewing:
Gate of Hell, 1953, Kinugasa, -- the 12th century, an aristocratic woman. Ugetsu, 1953, Mizoguchi, -- the 16th century, a poor artisan's wife.

**The Life of Oharu*, 1952, Mizoguchi, -- the 17th century, a fallen court attendant.

**The Makioka Sisters*, 1983, Ichikawa, -- 1939, sisters of a prewar wealthy family.

**No Regrets for Our Youth*, 1946, Kurosawa, -- 1932 - 1946, the daughter of a University professor and the wife of an executed anti-war dissident.

Mother, 1952, Naruse, -- mother to a poor lower-middle class family

The Island, 1961, Shindo, 1950's the postwar enduring life of a farmer.

The Family Game, 1984, Morita, 1980's, the modern "education mama."

Tampopo, 1986, Italami, 1980's, the new woman as a small restaurant owner

**Taxing Woman*, 1988, Itami, 1980's, the new woman as a tax collector.

* films for mature students

Suggested grades: grades 9-12 and college, 1 to 5 classes; an extended unit (showing one or more entire films) 2 to 3 weeks; the unit can also be expanded with readings as a semester course.

Central idea:
Tradition and change. While we cannot assume that these films and the women they portray are historical or anthropological documents, we can view them as a gallery of portraits of Japanese women in their times painted by Japanese artists. Each represents the way a film director envisions and presents for the Japanese audience the life of a woman in a particular historical or modern setting. Her struggles to overcome problems or to shape the conditions of her life into some meaning constitute the plots or stories. What each woman represents in relation to her time and situation? How representative she and her life are to other women? What meaning the film has to the period in which the film was made or to present Japan? Are questions of interpretation. Yet used with a text such as Women in Japan from Ancient Times to the Present (Bingham and Gross, Women in the World Area Studies, 1987) or Recreating Japanese Women 1600-1945 (ed. Bernstein, Univ. of Cal. Press, 1991) these films can provide images which begin to work as metaphors and symbols suggesting patterns and ideas in relation to the study of tradition and change in Japanese women.

Following the physical and moral devastation of Japan at the end of the Asia-Pacific war, film directors, under the restrictions of Occupation authorities focused their cameras on

women as the source of self-sacrifice and moral strength in the families' and nation's struggle to survive and recover. In the suggested films, all those made in the 1950's through 1961 present images of the traditional ideal of women - those with character and strength who suffer from the wars and injustices of a male dominated society, yet who resign themselves to their defined roles and fates. In the 1983 film the Makioka Sisters we begin to see the seeds of change in prewar Japan. Although three of the four sisters of a wealthy Osaka business family are what we can call "traditional women," one is rebelling trying to establish her own identity and business. In the other 1980's films, The Family Game presents a caricature of an "education Mama," a new version of the "traditional woman," and Tampopo and Taxing Woman present examples of a new type of woman, a single mother striving for economic self-sufficiency and respect as an individual.

Teaching:
These films offer images and stories of traditional women from the 12th, 16th, 17th and 20th centuries. A single clip from any one may serve as the image and idea of a traditional woman: the Tokugawan-Confucian ideal of the "Good Wife and Wise Mother" who knew and accepted her place in the family and society. This ideal was revived during the Asia-Pacific War when the ministry of education issued the following prescript: "We must admonish Japanese women to reject individualistic ideas and encourage them to cultivate and improve such virtues inherently belonging to them as submissiveness, gentleness, chasteness, perseverance, and service."

Students can be asked to observe and list with examples what social roles and duties each woman assumes, her apparent attitudes, characteristics and qualities, virtues and values. They can note any incidents when the woman's feelings or will are in conflict with what is expected of her and how she responds. In the end, as most of the women resign themselves to their conditions, students may consider the question asked by the daughter-narrator at the end of Mother: "Are you happy?" The answer may not always be clear or simple.

The sequence of films and film-clips suggests a historical development. Students may observe some change in the lives and characters of these women, but in the end they should consider the time in which the films were made and the fact that they were made by male directors. An important question for discussion should be, what is the attitude (or are the attitudes) of the film (and, perhaps, the film director) toward the woman and her situation?

The Gate of Hell gives us an image of an aristocratic woman in the 12th-century Heian Japan. It is a period in which the almost 400 year aristocratic culture was disintegrating into civil war. This 1953 film (which won the Grand Price in Cannes Film Festival and an Academy Award in this country for the Best Foreign Film) recreates the color, violence and passion of that period. The possible uses of this film are:

1. as an introduction to twelfth century Japanese history and the struggle between the Taira and Minimoto clans for control of the Imperial throne and Japan;;

2. as an introduction to traditional Japanese court costume, dance, music, and literature;

3. as an introduction to and discussion base of Confucian and Buddhist ethics and morality in historical and traditional Japanese culture;

4. as an introduction to and discussion base of social themes and problems of traditional and modern Japanese society: the individual and the group; loyalty to one's superiors, family, or husband; the strength of aristocratic women in early Japan; face, guilt, and suicide;

5. as a comparison-contrast with Akutagawa's short story "Kesa and Morito" - literary and film interpretation, and related to this, the problem of interpreting this historical story in the context of post-war 1953 Japan (note Part I, units 2 and 3 in the film/literature guide).

However, here we are concerned primarily with the character of Lady Kesa as a 1953 portrait of a beautiful, courageous, self-sacrificing model of the traditional woman in Heian culture. The recommended clip is the final 30 minutes of the 85-minute film. Kesa, facing the irrational passion of Morito, that if she does not submit to him, he will kill her husband, her aunt, and even herself, she decides on the ultimate sacrifice to trick her would-be-lover into killing her instead of her husband. This final scene dramatizes the woman's self-sacrifice as expressions of guilt, love, and duty. The ironic conclusion of the film is that Kesa's husband does not seek revenge on the murderer of his wife but releases him to a life of repentance as a buddhist monk and teller of moral tales such as this story.

Not telling the students of the conclusion should hold their romantic interest in what this 12th-century woman will do in such a timeless and universal situation. But the ending of this film is pure Japanese - and the basis of discussion: What are the traditional virtues of the traditional Japanese woman?

Ugetsu (1953) is a moral tale of vanity, ambition, and suffering during the 16th century, a period of civil war. Although the story is set in the historical period, it reflects the memory and condition of the Japanese people who have just lived through the tragedy of the Asia-Pacific War. A village potter and his farmer brother risk their lives to travel to Kyoto to sell their pottery. Success and wealth ignite their dreams. The potter is bewitched by the ghost of a noble lady while his brother seeks his fame as a warrior. Meanwhile their families suffer. The potter's wife is killed by wandering soldiers; his brother's wife is forced into a life of prostitution. In the end both men return home disillusioned, only then learning of the suffering of their wives. In the suggested clip, the last 13 minutes of the film, Miyagi, the potter's wife is dead, but she lives on in spirit to guide her husband and son, a powerful image of the traditional Japanese woman who even in death is the spiritual center of the family.

Life of Oharu, (for mature students) is the classic Mizoguchi study of a prostitute as victim of the male dominated feudal society. Again the setting is historic Japan, here 17th-century Kyoto. But the will and spirit of Oharu are 20th century. Oharu, a beautiful, willful lady-in-waiting at the Imperial court is banished because of her love for a man from a lower social rank. He is beheaded; she and her family impoverished. When a lord is interested in Oharu as a concubine and mother of his heir, she is forced by her parents and society to comply. Once she fulfills her role she is released to struggle for existence, finally ending as an old prostitute.

The selected segment of the film is the first 39 minutes in which she tells the story of her fall. Oharu's will, her strength of character, and particularly her belief in love over social roles and duty mark her a woman before her time. These characteristics do not allow her, as they might in modern postwar Japan, to define her life, but they enable her to somehow transcend her victimization and to live in defiance of her condition as a woman.

The Makioka Sisters (for mature students). This film is discussed in Part I, Unit 11 of this guide. Although the 140 minute film and 500 page novel are too long for history classes, parts of both or even the first 12 minutes of the film (the first scene through the credits) provide an unforgettable portrait of the Makioka sisters and important images and ideas for this unit.

The time is the spring of 1938. As has been their custom, the sisters have traveled to Kyoto to view the cherry blossoms. They are all beautifully dressed in colorful spring kimonos and obis appropriate to their family's wealthy position and each sister's place

in the family. In this brief and deceptively simple opening scene leading to the film credits, we are introduced not only to the character and role of each sister but also to the thematic and plot dimensions of the film/novel: money, marriage, and the differences between the worlds of women and men.

When students are asked to analyze a passage from a text, especially when they do not know the full thematic and plot contexts, they tend to "read" more closely words, images, and patterns to understand what is happening. In this brief opening scene, students can, if challenged, analyze the differences between the four sisters. What they are wearing, how their hair is arranged, how they talk to each other and what they discuss can reveal a great deal about each sister and the film/novel's themes and plot.

Relevant to the concerns of this unit, Tsuruko, the oldest, is the head of the family, wielding with a strong sense of duty a firm authority over the other sisters. Their parents have died ten years before, leaving the married sisters and their husbands to maintain the family business, wealth, and position. Sachiko, the second, is maternal and more flexible with the younger sisters. An important fact is that the younger two sisters are living with Sachiko's family rather than Tsuruko's. Yukiko, the third is, as her name suggests, like a delicate, pure, new snow. Through complicated circumstances, she is at 33 still unmarried and of deep concern to the family, for the younger sister Taeko cannot marry before her older sister. To complicate matters, while Yukiki is a beautiful, shy, traditional woman, Taeko is impulsive, willful, and modern. Whereas the three older sisters are bound to a traditional world, Taeko is in this prewar world already Westernized and determined to run her own business and life.

Students should be able to draw much of this from close examination, but they may not perceive and understand the ironic juxtaposition of this traditional woman's world to the world of men beyond the domestic scene, a world of war and the destruction of families.

Tanizaki, the author of the novel, was very sensitive to this theme. Writing the novel during the war, he saw the world of women, made up of marriage, childbirth, family celebrations and illnesses: the daily domestic routines and rhythms representing the timeless, enduring, continuity of life. In opposition was the world of men with the disruptive, destructive rise and fall of business, politics, and war. For the author the Makioka family and these four women represent a microcosm of the domestic continuity and changes in prewar and wartime Japan. The novel and film represent an elegy to a passing era and a way of life but also an insight into the forces of life which will enable Japan to survive and recover.

In this view Taeko emerges as the new Japanese woman striking away from tradition to define her own identity and life. For scenes which reveal what happens to the sisters, minutes 120-130, reveal that Yukiko will marry an aristocratic widower and Taeko will marry a bartender, and work to establish her business. Both younger sisters combine tradition and modernity, continuity and change in a promise for Japan's future, Yukiko carrying on the sensitivity and beauty of traditional culture, Taeko promising for postwar Japan a new life style and role for women.

No Regrets for Our Youth (for mature students) is one of the few Kurosawa films focusing on a woman. The time covered is 1931, from the Manchurian Incident through 1945, the end of the Asia-Pacific War. Although Yukie is the intelligent, cultured daughter of a Kyoto University professor, who is forced to resign because of his views on intellectual freedom, she has no political opinions. She plays the piano, Western classical pieces, and studies traditional Japanese flower arrangement.

In a 15-16 minute section (beginning with the title "1938" and ending with "1941," minutes 25-41 in the film) we find Yukie restless and unable to find meaning in her music and flower arrangement. She is attracted to two of her father's former students. Itokawa is a stable conventional man working for the government. He wants to marry

her, but she finds him boring. Noge has already been to prison for his radical anti-war views. Yukie is afraid of yet fascinated by him, feeling her life with him would be stormy. At the end of this clip she is leaving home to work as a secretary in Tokyo. Ahead, she will meet and marry Noge, and although she will know little about his political activities, they will both be arrested and sent to prison. Later after her release, she learns he has been executed as a spy and decides she must return his ashes to his parents, poor farmers in a remote northern village.

The final 38 minutes of the film (beginning when Yukie learns of her husband's death, minutes 111 to 149 in the film) present an image of peasants struggling to sustain life in primitive conditions. This is far from the cultured life Yukie had known in Kyoto, but her experience in prison and finally Noge's execution have changed her. She chooses to remain with his parents, to discover her roots she says. But to the villagers she is the wife of a traitor and with her husband's parents must share in his guilt. The simple villagers ostracize and harass the family. When these peasants destroy the family's new rice planting, Yukie somehow finds the strength to crawl from her death-like exhaustion to lead the family in replanting. If the subject and pace of this film, even as edited here, is still too esoteric for students, the scene of the rice planting and replanting alone is worth showing.

When the war ends, Yukie has found her true self and her place in society. The villages have finally accepted her and made her their district leader. For Kurosawa she represents the new spirit of the Japanese people rebuilding their society as a democracy. However, although Yukie has emerged a strong-willed independent woman, she is still bound to the traditions of the land.

Mother: This film was one of three in the New York Japan Society's first teaching module in the series, Japanese Society Through Film. The one contemporary film, Morita's 1984 *The Family Game*, dealt with current problems of the family and educational pressures on the children to succeed in school; the other two, Ozu's 1951 *Early Summer* and Naruse's 1952 *Mother*, dealt with the struggle of the traditional family to survive in the postwar years.

The film brings us into the home of the Fukuhara family in a poor section of Tokyo. It is 1950, five years after the end of the war. Although other members of the extended family have died in the war and postwar conditions, the Fukuhara family have survived intact: the father, mother, three children, and a young nephew who lives with them while his widowed mother seeks some training that will allow her to support her son. But the war has left its mark: overwork, inadequate food, poor living conditions during the war and immediately after have planted the seeds of tragedy.

Although I have used *Mother* effectively with a small, select group of high school students, I feel it may be a difficult film to teach with young or average-ability students. The problem is that there is no dramatic plot and few sustained scenes that can be viewed and understood outside the context of the entire film. Yet it is an important film contributing an image of the ideal of motherhood-the self-less mother who, as the center and heart of the family, provides the love and strength which keeps the family together and, through difficult times or family tragedies, allows it to endure. Naruse's Masako is such a woman, and his portrait is a beautiful tribute to the women like her who during the immediate postwar years held the families together and enabled the society to recover. But the movie is also a soft, nostalgic eulogy to the demise of the traditional family and the passing cultural ideal of the "Mother."

A possible approach to this film is to make a connection between it and the students' own mothers or at least their ideal of motherhood. The film was based on a prize-winning essay in a national elementary school children's competition on the theme of the postwar family. Because Toshiko, the teenage daughter, is the narrator of the film, this point of view and frame can be used to involve the students as observers and

questioners. The most important question is asked by Toshiko at the very end of the film.

In the time covered by the film, Toshiko has watched her mother courageously and stoically endure the death of her eldest son by tuberculosis, the death of her husband due to overwork and inadequate medical attention, and the adoption of her young daughter by another family better able to provide for her. Her mother has tended the family, run the family business, and worked far into the night without revealing her fears and anguish. She has allowed a possible relationship and marriage between her and a friend of her dead husband to slip away because of her daughter's objections. In the end as her mother is playing and laughing with her nephew, Toshiko asks: "Mama dearest, Mama, are you happy? Ah how anxious I am to know."

The answer is complex and revealed throughout the film more through the mother's eyes and facial expressions than through words. As Toshiko and her younger sister Chako represent the new generation, we must wonder how they have been influenced by their mother's example: will they too marry, bear children, and strive to live with the same selfless devotion to their families? The answer to this question rests with the daughters' awareness of her mother's situation and the future prospects for both of them. Frequently in literature and film a narrator is not only the eyes and voice of a story but also the character who is most profoundly influenced by the events and people of the story. If Toshiko is a future mother and the future generation of mothers in Japan, how would she be influenced by her mother and her mother's life?

An alternative to showing the entire film is to give students an overview of the story and character relationships, and then to view the opening, selected clips through the film, and the conclusion as a basis of discussion of Naruse's "ideal mother." They may recognize that this ideal is, at once, beautiful and terrifying, demanding of all mothers, a complete, self-less dedication and devotion to the family and children.

The Island: an off-beat, not-well-known, black and white film, is about a 1950s farming family struggling to cultivate and irrigate their small, Inland Sea island. Because the island has no water supply, the farmer and his wife, when there is insufficient rain, must scull their small boat to and from the mainland, painfully carrying their heavy buckets back up the incline to their crops. They and their two small boys live in this simple world with its endless survival routine. The surprise is that there is no dialogue in the entire film. With background music the camera follows their daily life through the seasons of simple joys and profound sorrows, always returning to the rhythm of their routine. This is a poetic film of black and white images and possibly the director's bare metaphor of the Japanese farmer's existence in the period of recovery after the war.

When I showed a clip of this film to a 10th-grade class, I was met with the questions: Why do they live like that? Why don't they move to the city? And in regard to the suffering wife: Why does she put up with that life? Although young students can view and empathize with these people, they need background information and help in viewing and interpreting the metaphorical relationship between the island and Japan, the farm family and the pre- and postwar Japanese people.

The entire 96-minute film may be too slow and dreary for most students, yet clips can be effective. After a very slow developing predawn trip to the mainland, the opening reveals the lifestyle and daily routine of the family (eliminate the first 8 minutes and continue to where husband and wife are watering their crops, minute 23, a total of 15 minutes).

The most powerful scenes occur in the final 20 minutes of the film. One of the boys has become ill and died. A boat carrying a Buddhist priest and the boy's classmates approaches the island and is met by the mother. What follows is a simple but moving funeral and burial of the boy on the island (minutes 73 to 83). In the final scene the husband and wife return to the routine of watering their crops. Then the wife collapses

in grief, tearing out the small plants. Her husband looks on compassionately but keeps on watering. Dragging herself out of her grief, the wife returns to the routine (minutes 83 to 95).

The film is dedicated to the director's parents who were farmers. Like many of the films considered in this unit, The Island reflects at once a nostalgia for and celebration of the past, here, the rustic almost primitive simplicity of the farmer's existence. Also, the farmer's wife is presented with compassion for her difficult life role and admiration for her courage and strength. Her rebellion is momentary; the family must survive. She returns to her role and routine. This film offers a pure visual experience.

The Family Game in part I, unit 18 of this guide focuses on the Japanese's educational system and the family in 1980's Japan. Here we are concerned primarily with the mother as an "education mama," a modern role for the traditional Japanese woman. Because Morita's film presents a satirical portrait of the modern urban "education family," the character of the mother is a caricature of a weak, ineffective "education mama." Mrs. Numata is a sweet but shallow woman who has failed in all her roles as wife, housewife, and mother in charge of two sons' education. However, there is a double edge to Morita's satire: whereas she is a pathetic shadow of "an education mama," the satire cuts into the ideal as well. The real "education mamas" are according to Morita as much the victims of the education game as the husband and the children.

To examine the layers of this satirical portrait, some outside reading is helpful: "They get by with a lot of help from their Kyoiku mamas," (Teacher's Manual for *Suburban Tokyo High School Students*, The Asia Society, New York, NY) and "Education Mama" (*A Half Step Behind*, Condon, Tuttle, 1991). We find that much of the success of Japan's educational system and its students is due to the support of the mothers who are completely involved in their children's education from preschool through college. And much of the mother's sense of personal accomplishment (and the community's perception of her) is tied to the achievements of her children. This is not the problem. In fact, what this describes is a part of the heritage of the traditional mother depicted in earlier films. What Morita is satirizing is what is happening to the families (mother, father, and children) caught up in this "Family/Education Game."

In part I, I recommend the viewing of the entire film. Here, if the focus is on the "kyoiku mama," then the following clips can be used. The opening 8 minutes introduce the Numata family and the roles of the mother and father supervising the education of their two boys. Their failure to motivate the apparently intelligent but difficult younger boy has resulted in the hiring of a tutor. Students can observe where the family lives, the layout of the apartment, the eating patterns of the family members, the lack of meaningful communication, and the mother's ineffectiveness in creating a family unit, all as symptoms of the depersonalization of family life and the hollowing out of family roles and relationships.

Another brief but important scene is the one in which a neighbor visits Mrs. Numata to talk about her problems with her dying father-in-law. She is concerned that if he dies they cannot transport a coffin down in the small elevator, and further, their apartment is too small to hold a proper wake. When the younger woman moves her chair around the long rectangular table, she forces the mother into an eye-to-eye contact; Mrs. Numata must listen. But this attempt at personal communication is interrupted by the return of the younger son who has been in a fight with classmates and now demands that his mother get his bed ready and attend him. The young woman with her problems is put off with promises that will never be kept. Not only the breakdown of the traditional family but also the traditional community and neighborhood support systems are suggested. As we learned in the first clip, neighbors do not know who lives next to them and they are concerned only for their own families and not others.

This brief scene anticipates the ambiguous ending of the film. In the apartment the

boys are asleep as if dead, while outside a helicopter is causing a loud disruptive noise. Mrs. Numata closes the opening to the outside, reducing the sound, and soon falls off into bored sleep herself. A possible explanation is that the helicopter has been called in to transport the coffin of the young woman's father-in-law to the crematorium, thus emphasizing the death-like stupor and the moral apathy of the Numata family (the boy's acceptance into the prestigious high school, minutes 89 to 90, and, after the family dinner, the final scene, minutes 100 to 104).

Mrs. Numata, although certainly not the model "Kyoiko mama," has, for the moment, succeeded in getting her sons into the top school and the fast track to a college and a salaried position such as their father's. But if we ask Mrs. Numata the same question asked in the end of Mother, "Are you happy?" Morita's final image suggests that the cost of the new society and its family/education game is the loss of the traditional roles and values which have sustained Japanese society and culture through the centuries.

Itami's *Tampopo* and *Taxing Woman* offer images of Japanese women in the late 1980s. In the first,Tampopo is a middle-aged widow and mother trying to run her husband's small noodle ship. In the second Ryoko is a divorcee who is trying to support herself and her five year old son as a tax inspector. Both women are the creations of writer-director Juzo Itami and his wife, who plays the lead roles. Although Itami is a sharp satirist criticizing through his films different aspects of modern Japanese society, his comic visions have drawn a strong following in both Japan and the United States.

For this unit Tampopo represents the traditional woman who with the help of men achieves her goals of self-sufficiency and expertise in becoming the best maker of ramen noodles and noodle soup in Tokyo. The "taxing woman" Ryoko, on the other hand, is unlike any other woman portrayed in this sequence of films and possibly unlike any other woman in films before *Taxing Woman*. She is alternately disarmingly innocent and charming taking genuine delight in some experiences and then demonically dedicated to exposing tax fraud at all levels. In her position as an inspector she must compete with men and go beyond them in pursuing and catching her prey. She is a new kind of woman who while retaining her feminine charm achieves an independence and respect not usually accorded the usual subservient traditional woman.

Because both of these films contain a few scenes of partial nudity and sexual activity, showing the entire films is recommended only for mature and select audiences. However, clips from both can serve as fascinating images of women in contemporary Japan.

The opening 17 minutes of *Tampopo* introduce us to the themes of the search for the perfect noodle soup and the art of eating it. They also establish the relationship between Goro, the Westernized truck driver, and Tampopo, as he promises to help her in her quest for the perfect noodle. While the rest of the film dramatizes that quest, it also offers delicious, unrelated vignettes about people and food, any of which can be excerpted for delight and discussion. For example, a group of Japanese businessmen all end up ordering the same ordinary meal from a French menu in typical conformity to the group, while a young assistant orders, with gusto, French delicacies along with a quality wine. In another, young women are taking a course on how to eat spaghetti Western style without slurping. In a vignette which ridicules the slavish dedication of the traditional woman to her family, a mother rises from her death bed to make one last meal for her family before dying. They, of course, finish the meal out of respect for the dead mother before they begin their mourning. These, like a multi-course meal, can be enjoyed at will as separate satirical pieces with insights into contemporary Japanese society.

The conclusion of *Tampopo*'s quest and the film are found in the final 6 minutes (minutes 107 to 113). With a line of hungry customers extending out the door of

Tampopo's remodeled noodle shop, Goro, in the tradition of the Western hero, drives off into the sunset.

Taxing Woman's Ryoko is small, pretty, with round, open eyes which seem astonished and delighted by some experiences but which narrow with intensity as she becomes the tax detective in relentless pursuit of her prey. In the suggested two clips (minutes 36 to 53 and 118 to 125 for a total of 24 minutes) she is focusing on Gondo, the owner of love hotels and manipulator of shady real estate deals, as the master tax evader. She has worked her way up from small to big game. She is the huntress, and he, the hunted, fascinated by the game of evasion.

Yet both are human, both single parents neglecting their sons because of obsessive work. Gondo is obsessed with making money supposedly for his son, yet he has lost the ability to communicate with the boy. In this clip we see Ryoko working late and telephoning instructions to her five year old son on how to use the microwave. She will later show motherly concern and understanding with Gondo's son, yet something has taken her away from the traditional role of mother. There is a hint that Gondo and Ryoko will be drawn together in a love relationship, but this can never be.

In the final scene she has finally trapped Gondo for tax evasion, but he is still trying to hold on to one more cache. As they look across the city, he notices two children playing. He says, "It makes me sad to see them so happy. I feel my chance for happiness slipping away." Once more he tries to get her to give up the tax racket and join him, and once more she shakes her head no. At this moment he takes her handkerchief that he has kept since their first meeting, cuts his finger, writes in blood the number of the deposit box with the last of the tax hidden funds, and hands it to her before limping sadly away. Both will follow their obsessions on separate, lonely paths.

The main problem in teaching this film is to deal with the levels of satire. Is tax evasion the primary target? The greed of the people? The dehumanizing effects of Japan's money worship? There is a framework of right and wrong, justice and injustice, yet the film at moments blurs these distinctions in odd ways. Everybody seems to be doing it: business owners, petty bankers, politicians, petty gangsters. Corruption exists on all levels. Second, our heroine and her fellow tax inspectors are fanatics going to great lengths to catch tax dodgers at the expense of their own lives and happiness. In the end she too seems to be a target of Itami's satirical camera.

Still, she is the center of the film, a delightful *fun* heroine, and a possible model of the new liberated Japanese woman trying to establish her own identity and to live her own life in the male-dominated society. The success of this film and its heroine led to a sequel: *A Taxing Woman's Return*.

While we cannot draw firm conclusions from these films concerning the changes in the roles of women in contemporary Japanese society, we can view them for images, ideas, and questions to be placed in the contexts of readings. The fifth and final module in the *Japanese Society Through Film* series deals with Women in Japan. A teaching guide including an excellent, long essay by Yoriko Meguro (professor of sociology at Sophia University, Tokyo) and discussions of the module's three films (Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, Mizoguichi's *Osaka Elegy*, and Ozu's *Floating Weeds*) by Patricia Erens (professor of cinema at Rosary College) can provide those contexts plus student discussion questions. Also a good source for contemporary images and information on Japanese women is the Asia Society's *Video Letters from Japan II*, the videos and teaching guides for *The College Years, The Early Working Years, The Young Family,* and *Options for Women at Mid-Life.*

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