Women of the early Japanese cinema

By
Isayasu Neggusse

Thesis submitted to the
Department of Oriental Languages
Stockholms university

Bachelor in the Japanese Language
Spring semester 2016

Instructor
Trond Lundemo
Abstract

Japan has a long history of producing films since the early 20th century. However, gender roles within these films are vastly unexplored. The cinema movement created celebrity icons and strongly influenced the women of this era. The so called moga, which is short for modern girls, is an example of how cinema portrayed the modern image of women in Japan.

The aim of this study is to explore how the image of women in the early 20th century’s films evolved with the growing presence of western culture and a thriving economy. I will also explore the gender roles and changes that may have occurred with the introduction of cinema in Japan. It is to my belief that Japanese filmmakers managed to capture the course of this cultural exchange within their films of this era. This is why I selected films to be my looking glass in order to see the changes as the directors saw them and have expressed through their films. I will make use of Marxist theory to study the socio-economic relationship of how the modern girl evolved.

The economic growth opened up markets focused on women, which acknowledged them as a new consumer group. It went further to create the so called modern girls, moga, a deviant group of women in contrast to the traditional women of Japan would serve as icons for the growing change. It is unlikely that the Japanese women of this era would experience this increased independence were it not for the thriving economy during the early 20th century.

Keywords: Japanese cinema, Gendaigeki, Industrialization, Modernity, Tradition, Ryōsaikenbo, Moga, Mikio Naruse, Yasujirō Ozu, Shochiku

Throughout this study Japanese words will be written in italics and phonetic letters will also be used according to the modified Hepburn romanization system. For names I’ve chosen the western standard of given name first and surname last. The translation of titles, books and such are done by myself if not stated.
## Contents

- Abstract ............................................................................................................. 2
- Introduction ........................................................................................................ 5
  - Background ...................................................................................................... 5
  - Typography ...................................................................................................... 6
  - Objectives ........................................................................................................ 6
  - Hypothesis ....................................................................................................... 6
  - Theoretical perspectives .................................................................................. 6
  - Method .............................................................................................................. 6
  - Previous studies ............................................................................................... 6
  - Limitations ....................................................................................................... 7
- The economic growth of Japan ........................................................................... 8
  - The Economic boost of World War I ................................................................. 8
  - The government’s industrial investment and a new workforce .................... 8
  - Growing wealth inequalities .......................................................................... 9
  - Opposition and criticism towards industrialization ....................................... 9
- The cinema .......................................................................................................... 10
  - Oyama and the cinema ..................................................................................... 10
  - Oyama walkout ............................................................................................... 10
  - Keikoeiga - tendency films ............................................................................ 10
- Japanese society during the early 20th century .............................................. 12
  - The modern Japanese girls moga .................................................................. 12
  - The middle class of Japan .............................................................................. 12
  - Ryōsai kenbo .................................................................................................. 12
  - The path the modern woman should take ..................................................... 13
  - The Japanese identity crisis .......................................................................... 14
  - The American Flappers .................................................................................. 14
- 二人妻 妻よ薔薇のやうに Wife! Be Like a Rose! (1935) Mikio Naruse .............. 16
  - Summary of Wife! Be like a Rose! ................................................................ 16
  - The high-class wife ....................................................................................... 16
  - A wife’s responsibility ................................................................................... 17
  - Bad wife, good wife ....................................................................................... 18
- 非常線の女 Dragnet girl (1933) Yasujirō Ozu ................................................. 19
  - Summary of Dragnet girl ............................................................................... 19
  - The moga Tokiko ........................................................................................... 19
The innocent traditional girl Kazuko ................................................................. 19
The delinquent boy ....................................................................................... 20
Delinquents, working women and a president’s son ................................... 20
The director’s portrayal of the women in society ....................................... 21
   The city ........................................................................................................ 21
   Tokiko & Kimiko ....................................................................................... 21
   Kazuko & Oyuki ....................................................................................... 22
   The director’s techniques ......................................................................... 23
Findings .......................................................................................................... 24
New gender roles in society ....................................................................... 25
   The Image of moga ................................................................................... 25
   Factors of growth ..................................................................................... 25
   Sociopolitical aspect ................................................................................ 25
Conclusion .................................................................................................... 26
   Summary .................................................................................................. 26
References ..................................................................................................... 27
Films ............................................................................................................... 28
**Introduction**

**Background**
Japan has a long and rich history of film production since the early 20th century. These films give great insight into the pre-war society of Japan. Despite the massive loss of films during the course of history there are still films that survived that give us an insight into an early industrialized Japan.

With the introduction of the first camera by the end of the 19th century, Japanese directors captured that which was initially thought to be most entertaining in society: geisha entertainers and kabuki plays. However, these films were thought to be mere copies of the real art forms and were not treated as an art form by itself.

Directors would produce samurai films with intense action and fighting scenes with techniques borrowed from western films. These quickly became popular and recognized as an art form by itself. The latter type of films were to fall within a category called jidaigeki (period drama). With the growing economy and rapid change in society another category of films was developed called gendaigeki (contemporary drama). Several genres would fall within this category, such as woman’s films, shōmineiga (common/middle class drama of everyday folk) and shishōmineiga (lower middle class/petit bourgeoisie home drama of everyday folk).

The Shochiku Company created a niche of woman’s film, its target audience being women. Heavily inspired by film techniques from abroad the directors would make films encouraging strong independent women while also criticizing their frivolous modern lifestyles.

The Great Kanto earthquake of 1923 marked a definite separation of the two film categories jidaigeki and gendaigeki. Much of the instruments and films destroyed by the following fires sparked an initiative to relocate the studios to better suit the genres. jidaigeki would from now on be produced exclusively in Kyoto while gendaigeki films would be produced in Tokyo. The reason was a practical one as the growing capital Tokyo would offer modern suburban settings to film, in contrast to Kyoto and vice versa. And with the separation of the two schools, scholars believe this to be the real start of industrial competition between the two studios Shochiku and Nikkatsu, each reflecting modernity and tradition in Japan.

---

2 Donald Richie. (2001), *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film A Concise History*, p. 22.
4 Ibid., p. 3.
5 Ibid., p. 26
8 Donald Richie. (2001), *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film A Concise History*, p. 43.
9 Ibid., p. 6.
Typography
When presenting Japanese titles of films or books within this study I’ve chosen to first use the Japanese title followed by romanization of the title and lastly a translation of the Japanese title to English. For names I have chosen the western standard of given name first and surname last.

Objectives
The objective of this study is to study how Japanese women were affected by the gradual change in society caused by the industrialization of Japan. It will strive to understand the extent to which women were depicted as well as what role they had as audience and consumers. Furthermore, it aims to answer, how middle-class women in pre-war Japanese films were depicted during the growing industrialization of Japan?

Hypothesis
I believe the growing Japanese economy had a dramatic effect on how women were depicted in Japanese films. If possible I will try to find a correlation between these two elements and interpret them using the selected theory.

Theoretical perspectives
This study will approach the research questions using Marxist theory, based on the idea that society and classes are affected during periods of economic change. Applying the theory that class differences grew stronger, I will analyze the films as a cultural product of its time. The theory uses class-relations and conflicts as basis for its analysis as these often grow stronger in periods of economic growth. Since Japan would become a newly formed capitalist society during this historical period, this theory is relevant for this study.

Method
This study will analyze how the depiction of middle class women in contemporary Japanese cinema are depicted. It will also examine the critical discourse of the reception of these films. Mikio Naruse and Yasujirō Ozu had strong influence on women’s image through their films during this period and therefore their films were chosen for this study.

Previous studies
In this chapter I will present previous studies relevant to my own study. Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano’s article “Imaging Modern Girls in the Japanese Woman’s Film” covers the same time period of Japanese cinema I will be focusing on and also focuses on the women’s role in society during the same time period. Her article involves the clash between modernity and tradition in society and how it can be seen in cinematic genres. Women would become living examples of this change as their roles and lifestyles were adapted to the new capitalist society. Wada-Marciano’s also brings up the problem with
a loss of national identity caused by the influx of Western technology and culture during this era.

Women’s identities became linked to a new culture of consumption surrounding the appearance of modern capitalist forms and technologies such as department stores, movie theaters, and print media. The woman’s film served both to configure a female identity as consuming subject and to provide material for her consumption. Wada-Marciano’s argues that the women became more included in the new economic system as consumers. Because of this their identities would be linked to the economic growth of this era.

Limitations
It is important to clearly define the time frames relevant to this study. Because the focus of this study will be the industrialization of Japan, the separation of the gendaigeki and jidaigeki schools after The Great Kanto earthquake would be an optimal point to start off. This is due to the fact that the cinema institutions had reestablished themselves to fit their niche genre. As previously stated in the introduction, 1923 marked the real start of the industrial competition between the schools. Up until 1941 when Japanese military intervention forced the cinema industry to reorganize and break with the policies of the free market. This was caused by the lack of propaganda films produced by the companies which were demanded by the militaristic government.

There is also the issue of censorship during this time period when Japan was at war in Asia this will also be taken into account when analyzing the films. An example of censorship during this era was Tomu Uchida’s Earth which was heavily censored for showing a widow forced into poverty and being too “realistic” However, it should be noted that this analysis will not be based on how well these films reflect reality of its time period, but rather on the class struggle and social discourse presented by the directors within the context of the Japanese society.

I have selected two of the most prominent gendaigeki directors during this era, according to votes procured by Kinema Junpo, Mikio Naruse and Yasujirō Ozu. It is interesting to see how Naruse and Ozu have chosen to depict the Japanese women in their films. Films from about the same time period was therefore chosen from each director in order to compare the similarities and differences in how they chose to represent the women in their films.

---

11 Donald Richie. (2001), A Hundred Years of Japanese Film A Concise History, p. 96.
12 Ibid., p. 94.
The economic growth of Japan

Figure 1.

Source: Graph by Susumu, Kuwabara. (2010,07,30). Nikkei Business Online.

Figure 1 shows Japan’s GDP per capita calculated through the “Madison estimate” (blue line, calculated in ten thousands yen) and population (calculated in thousands, purple dotted line) from 1820 to 2000. Only the necessary dates will be referred to throughout this study.

The Economic boost of World War I

By the end of the 19th century the Meiji government sought to expand Japan’s international trade by promoting heavy industries. The goal was to create an industry capable of competing in the international market. This proved to be difficult as their international competitors in the west were more technically advanced during this period. However, with the start of World War I in 1914 the western competitors involved in the war were weakened and thus an opportunity to enter the market was created. Japan obtained a foothold in the international market which most scholars believe this to be the true start of Japan’s industrial growth.

The government’s industrial investment and a new workforce

In 1914 the government had built The Tokyo Taisho Exhibition hall to celebrate and promote industrial investment by inviting the city’s residents to the hall. The remarkable

---


display of architecture and urbanization of the large cities created positive attitudes towards the industrialization. Although by 1920, over half of the total labor force still worked within the agricultural sector, the government decided to invest in the urbanization of the larger cities. As Harry Harootunian explains, most of the people immigrating into the urban cities were second sons and daughters of families. That is to say, family members who would not become head of the family sought to find job and carrier opportunities in the growing cities. This was in turn the beginning of the formation of a women’s labor force centered in the growing cities.

Growing wealth inequalities
In figure 1 above, from 1900 to 1940 there is a rapid growth in population in contrast to a slight increase in GDP per capita. This gap is connected to the industrial investment of Japan where newly formed companies paved way for rapid economic growth. Although the graph shows a steady increase in GDP per capita during this period, most of the economic growth was in fact centered in the larger cities where the government chose to invest. This suggests that the wealth was not evenly divided throughout the population as a whole. Rather, the workers of the larger cities experienced this wealth boom in contrast to the rural workers outside of the larger cities. The economic difference of workers in the cities and the rural workers was the start of growing rifts between the social classes and a more clearly defined bourgeoisie class.

Opposition and criticism towards industrialization
The massive migration to the larger cities due to the job opportunities was not sparked without criticism from the rural population. This movement was often depicted in films created during this era. Unethical behavior such as late night life and frivolousness were main topics of condemnation, as seen in the film Dragnet Girl by Yasujirō Ozu. On the other hand, the criticism may also be interpreted as a display of the growing discontent towards the thriving urban population. This criticism toward the large city population fits well with the class struggle following economic growth of the Marxist theory.

---

18 Ibid p. 10.
The cinema

Oyama and the cinema
It is important to note the absence of female actors in early Japanese cinema, instead male actors known as oyama were used for female roles in films. oyama were male actors specialized in portraying women, mainly used in kabuki plays, they would appear in early jidaigeki films as well. The oyama actors were completely abandoned by 1923; frustrated by the lack of roles given to them they deserted the film studios\(^\text{19}\). The reason for this can be argued with the fact that the cinema audience was now composed of more women, thereby increasing their influence and demand for female actors. The Shochiku film company who had decided to focus on films for women during this period experienced great success by abandoning oyama in their films and focusing on lead female actors. Some of the directors include Ozu and Naruse who worked for Shochiku drawing heavy influences from western film techniques\(^\text{20}\).

Oyama walkout
Oyama actors walked out on the film studios due to the lack of roles they were given. As the female audience grew, the demand to represent them in films increased. The Shochiku film company responded to this demand by supplying it with appropriate films aimed towards a female audience thus, a new genre was created called woman’s films. The creation of this new genre served to meet the consumer’s demands; coincidentally, it acknowledged women as a new consumer group\(^\text{21}\).

Keikoeiga - tendency films
Keikoeiga or tendency films was the genre of films produced to reflect the impact of the difficulties caused by the change in society during this period. The tendency films were left wing films that criticized the situation of the lower working class. These films were however often censored by the government due to their negative stance toward the ongoing war efforts\(^\text{22}\). The films arguably draw a more realistic picture of society during this period in contrast to the glamorous pictures drawn by the gendaigeki genre. The government encouraged patriotic films which encouraged modernization and war efforts of the governments interest during this period. On the other hand, films that created any negative stigma surrounding these topics were strictly censored.

The Japanese governments attention was incited after the film What made her do it (1930) by Shigeyoshi Suzuki had become the most profitable film up to date. The film features a tragic heroine who is tricked and used by selfish people for their own interest

\(^{19}\) Donald Richie. (2001), A Hundred Years of Japanese Film A Concise History, p. 35.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 29-34.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 78.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 90-91.
throughout the film. It clearly shows the “ugly” side of a capitalist driven society and the helplessness of the poor and common folk. *What made her do it* had gained popularity because it sided with the rural populations frustration over drawing the short straw of the government’s economic investment in the larger cities. The film had a critical stance on the development of society and the direction it was headed.

When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 the government sought to eliminate any source which might have instilled opposition against their war efforts. The government therefore set up plans to eliminate the source of such media, in this case the *keikoeiga* producers and left-wing writers\(^{23}\). Films from 1931 and onward were strictly censored and in turns the *keikoeiga* genre can be said to have ended due to the governments censorship\(^{24}\).

\(^{23}\) Tsuneo Hazumi (筈見恒夫). (1947), *15 years of film history* (映画五十年史), p. 139.

\(^{24}\) Donald Richie. (2001), *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film A Concise History*, p. 100-114, 146.
Japanese society during the early 20th century

The modern Japanese girls moga
The modern girls were independent women of the city who favored luxury. These girls would wear “modern” western clothing and live independent lives in contrast to the sheltered traditional women. The moga would become an icon for the new consumer group of women. Many woman’s films during this period would often deal with moga and their frivolous lifestyles pitted against the traditional Japanese housewife and ryōsai kenbo ideals. It can be argued that the introduction of films and the rising economy helped create the moga and there is no doubt that moga were the result of the industrialization and urbanization of larger cities during this period.

The middle class of Japan
It is difficult to define the middle class of Japan during early 20th century as it evolved from the feudal Japanese class system called shinokosho. The hierarchy of shinokosho class system started with warrior-rulers on top then came peasants, artisans, and lastly merchants25. In contrast to the western bourgeoisie who had the second highest status in society the merchants of Japan were lowest on the hierarchical chain.

While the term “middle class” was used to promptly solidify the new classes of labor, the classification itself in interwar Japan remains ambiguous as less of a quantifiable reality than as class rhetoric indicating how people saw themselves. When the Japanese word shoshimin started to be used for “middle class” in the 1920s, it was actually a literal translation from petite bourgeoisie, the stratum of the bourgeoisie having the least wealth and lowest social status26.

Because of this reason it is difficult to analyze the social structure of Japan with Marx’s capitalist versus working class approach. However, as seen in the films from this period, it is evident that there was in fact class structures, only that they differed from the western definition of class. Wada-Marciano explains that the terms used for middle-class society, the general public, petit bourgeoisie and such were not strictly defined and was often used vaguely to define white collar workers of the larger cities27.

Ryōsai kenbo
When looking at the Japanese society it is important to understand the underlying family values. As society changes values also follow in order to find balance in for example tradition and modernity. This is why it is important to look at the Japanese woman in society in the context of the pre-war Japanese mentality.

---

27 Ibid., p. 21.
With the growing western influence in society western ideals and culture would come to clash with the domestic one. In order to counter this the government revised the moral education literature taught in schools also known as *shushin*. This would strive to clearly define women’s role in society. This ideal is known as *ryōsai kenbo* roughly translated to good wife, wise mother\(^{28}\).

As Wada-Marciano explains, the project was to industrialize Japan for the profit of the state and discourage profits for the individual. The individual profits in this case were the benefits of modernization such as increased civil rights for women\(^{29}\).

The path the modern woman should take

A book written by three women of the married women’s association during the early industrial era gives an insight of the social status of women during the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century and their thoughts on gender difference in society. “The modern woman is one that can much like men drink their alcohol recklessly”\(^{30}\). The simple act of drinking alcohol was considered a statement. When the “new woman” shared a glass of alcohol together with men they were seen as equals. This would hold true not only for alcohol but for other products such as cigarettes which were marketed towards men.

Our definition of being a modern woman is to not be sent away to live insignificant and meaningless lives at the expense of having a sole goal in life, significantly suppress our way of expressing our individuality and personality in order to become an adult woman\(^{31}\).

The woman’s duty during this period was to raise strong children for the sake of the country and its war efforts\(^{32}\). However, women who had other ambitions in life were still expected to follow the norms of becoming a bride, creating a family and living a life devoted to her husband and family. Without the financial means and social stigma towards women being independent and not creating a family, as the quote above reads women could indeed be seen as having only one choice life. Looking at figure 1 again, the increase in population during the start of the 20\(^{th}\) century proves the government efforts to encourage having larger families also paid off.

---


\(^{29}\) Ibid., p 20.

\(^{30}\) Ayako Nishikawa, Komako Kimura, Tomoko Miyazaki (西川文子、木村駒子、宮崎明子). (1913), *The path the modern woman should follow* (新しき女の行くべき道), p. 18. (女でも男と同じく酒を飲んだり放埓にするのを以て新しい女と云う).

\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 21. (私どもの真に新しい女というのは、ボンヤリ無意義に人生を送らず、一定の目的を定まて有意義に自分の個性を発揮して行かうと云う、真に自費せる婦人を云うのです。).

The Japanese identity crisis
With the increasing conservatism in Japan during this period the continuing presence of the “superior” western culture and technology would invoke feelings of loss of national identity. Like Wada-Marciano explains:

Certainly throughout the 1920s and 1930s, in the case of Japanese cinema, modernity was constructed within an already permeating nationalism. More specifically, in its assimilation of and distinction from Hollywood cinema, the woman’s film of the period materializes both a desire oriented toward the West and a desire for national identity.

It is possible to argue that the Japanese experienced a form of national identity crisis. The moga together with the urbanization of cities worked as a visual manifestation of the westernization, which may be the reason they became the target of criticism during this period.

The American Flappers
Coincidentally, the moga lifestyle wasn’t unique to Japan during this era. Women in large cities outside of Japan such as New York, Paris, London and others were on the rise. These moga of the west would be known as flappers. Following the global economic growth Japan had taken part of, women’s status in society would gradually change internationally. In Paul Nystrom’s Economic of fashion these women are described in the following sense.

Those who come there are, for the most part, well-educated, wide-awake, highly sophisticated young women who possess sufficient income to insure the possibility of being in fashion, but who are well able to judge of the values of the apparel they buy not only from the standpoint of fashion but of utility as well. Many of them are probably in part or entirely dependent upon themselves for their incomes. They realize the relation and effect of proper dress upon their business and social successes.

Paul H. Nystrom conducted a study based on the relationship between the women’s skirt length and the economic growth based on a theory developed by George W. Taylor in 1926. Figure 2 shows how the average length of skirts changed during the period 1919-1928. The frontier of this change was caused by a rise in women’s independence and consciousness of fashion and status as described in the above quote.

Summary of Wife! Be like a Rose!
This film is about a soon to be wed salary woman by the name of Kimiko Yamamoto. The woman lives together with her mother, Etsuko and uncle while her father, Shunsaku, is working in the countryside to provide for the family.

In preparation for the wedding ceremony her fiancé wishes to meet the bride’s father in a go-between and thus the daughter sets out to bring back her father. However, before she sets out to find him in the countryside they spot him while riding a taxi on their way home. Presuming he had come back to see his family they prepare a feast although he does not show up in the end. After hearing rumors that her father has been visiting a geisha, Kimiko sets out to find out the reason why he didn’t visit them in Tokyo. To her surprise she finds a boy by the name of Ken’ichi Yamamoto, the same family name as herself. The boy offers to guide her to his family’s residence during which Kimiko grows weary of what she might find. Her fears come true when greeted by his mother. The child’s mother, Oyuki Yamamoto explain regretfully that Shunsaku has been living with his new family and that she is aware of his double life. Despite this Oyuki’s only wish is to continue her modest lifestyle together with Shunsaku and their children.

At first Kimiko is enraged by the fact that her father had cheated on her mother with a former geisha. However, after spending time with his new family Kimiko sees it in another light. Kimiko’s father had spent his time as an unsuccessful gold digger in the mountains while Oyuki had provided for their family as a hairdresser. It also turns out that Oyuki was the one who sent money to Kimiko’s family despite them not having enough for themselves. In the end Kimiko forgives her father and Oyuki but still wishes him to come back to Tokyo in preparation for her wedding.

When they return to Tokyo Kimiko tries to convince her father to spend more time with Etsuko in order to change his mind to stay. During this period Kimiko comes to realize her parents are not suited for each other and gradually comes to accept her father’s choice to return to his new family. The film ends with everyone except for the uncle, accepting Shunsaku’s choice to return to his other family.

The high-class wife
During the first half of the film the viewer is given the impression that Kimiko’s mother is culturally educated and an upstanding wife. Etsuko writes Haiku poems and uses fashionable “imported words” such as insupirēshon (inspiration) when talking about her poems. She is also an avid visitor of nō plays. Her father had left his family at home in order to find work outside of the city but only manages to provide with 30yen each month.

After Kimiko’s visit to the countryside and the traditional lifestyle of Oyuki and her family, she sees her own mother in a new light. Oyuki was supporting her family through her work as a traditional hairstylist. In contrast to Etsuko, Oyuki prepared
dinner for her family, took care of household matters and sent money to Kimiko’s family. Her only wish is to remain together with her family Oyuki tells Kimiko she is aware that her husband has another family.

After Kimiko returns to Tokyo with her father the family attends a nō theatre in which Shunsaku falls asleep during the show, Etsuko notices this and walks away furiously. When they are out for a walk together Etsuko wants to call a taxi in order to return home. Shunsaku however, tells her it is wasteful. It is also worth noting Kimiko preparing dinner for her mother during the beginning of the film but is told to hire a maid for such chores, instead she is scolded for disturbing her haiku writing. Shunsaku admits that Etsuko is too high-class for someone like him and it is clear they mix like oil and water.

A wife’s responsibility
Mikio Naruse puts focus on three women in this film, the soon to be married salary woman Kimiko, the overindulging wife Etsuko and the traditional housewife Oyuki. One cannot help but notice the critical tone towards the housewife Etsuko. In a particular scene Kimiko complains about the flowers her mother receives from her students, which she educates for free. Her fiancé looks at the flowers and notes how pretty they are and continues to ask if they are edible.
It can be interpreted as comical criticism toward her Haiku writing in the sense that Etsuko’s poems may be “pretty” but in the end, do not feed or support the family.

During the start of the film Kimiko meets up with her fiancé, Seiji, as they stroll down the city road. The shot is taken in profile and we see Kimiko promptly taking the lead. Seiji hastily catches up with Kimiko and takes the lead as tradition dictates the woman should follow behind the man’s lead. Kimiko however, quickly regains the lead again. This relatively short and seemingly unimportant scene speaks out strongly about Kimiko’s character. Naruse does not only depict Kimiko by the way she dresses, her actions also reflect the small victories the modern woman enjoys as written by Nishikawa in *The path the modern woman should take*. Similar to the way women should be able to drink alcohol the same level as men, Kimiko literally takes it a step further by being a step ahead of Seiji.

**Bad wife, good wife**

Donald Richie puts it simple by stating that Etsuko is the bad wife and Oyuki the good. However, I believe the parents are simply a mismatched couple in the following sense. In Japan there is a saying called *omote to ura*, which translates into “the public face” and the “private face”. *Omote* is ones outer image and *ura* is the private, which is hidden from the public eye.

The husband Shunsaku, is an unemployed, middle aged man with little income. If Shunsaku was switched out with an economically successful husband, Etsuko would be considered a good wife. This is because a wife’s duty was not only to care for her family but also be the “public face”. A wealthy woman should act according to her status, be culturally educated and dress appropriately. In this context Etsuko would be seen as an ideal wife. Arguably this is the result of the class difference between couple.

---

非常線の女 Dragnet girl (1933) Yasujirō Ozu

Summary of Dragnet girl
In this film we are presented with the protagonist Tokiko an independent woman who is working in a busy office in Tokyo. The setting has heavy western influences; Tokiko is no exception. Her modern clothing reveals she is a typical moga. Working an honest lifestyle during the day she manages to capture the eye of her employer’s son who showers her with gifts in affection. In contrast, outside of work another image of her is created. Tokiko is in love with and shares an apartment with a delinquent by the name of Jōji. They spend most of their time going to clubs, drinking alcohol, smoking and socializing with other moga and delinquents. Jōji however, falls in love with another girl called Kazuko who appears to be the complete opposite of Tokiko.

The moga Tokiko
Tokiko is portrayed as a modern independent woman living in Tokyo with her lover Jōji. Her moga style and attitude gives the viewer the impression that Tokiko is a self-confident strong woman.

As the story progresses however, we are drawn another picture of Tokiko as she constantly compares herself to Kazuko the “ideal” woman. When the boss’s son confesses his love to Tokiko she tries to dissuade him by admitting that she is foolish and selfish at times.

Later in the film Jōji falls in love with one of his gang member’s sister named Kazuko, Tokiko in return becomes jealous and prepares to confront Kazuko and even goes so far as to threaten her with a pistol. While Tokiko is economically independent she is still very emotionally dependent on Jōji’s affection.

Tokiko is arguably portrayed as a weaker woman towards the end of the film in contrast to the first half. Afraid to be left by Jōji and afraid to run away with him she shoots him in the leg in a panic and begs him to reconsider turning themselves in and living a straight life.

The innocent traditional girl Kazuko
It is important to note that Kazuko is depicted as the complete opposite of Tokiko. She wears traditional Japanese attire in contrast to Tokiko’s extravagant moga style. Her mannerism and respectful way of speaking is also the opposite of Tokiko.

Kazuko as a character is rather two dimensional in the sense that she never shows any ill intent toward the other characters despite their aggressive behavior. When Tokiko threatens her with a pistol because she became acquainted with Jōji the next time they meet she does not show any ill-intent towards Tokiko. Kazuko is presented as an innocent mother-like figure who hopes to straighten out her younger brother.

Kazuko is in a sense the living image of ryōsai kenbo in the film even though she is neither a wife or a mother. Her sense of duty to foster her brother comes from this ideal.
The fact that she is working in a “modern” record company in order to provide for her brother and herself could be a metaphor for the ryōsai kenbo ideal struggling to exist within the developing modern society of pre-war Japan.

The two heroines, Tokiko (left), Kazuko (right). From Yasujirō Ozu’s Dragnet Girl

The delinquent boy
When Kazuko comes to visit Jōji in order to inquire of her brother’s whereabouts he throws her a cold shoulder. Tokiko scolds his behavior but Jōji later explains to Tokiko that he did it intentionally to give up on Kazuko. The director presents how Jōji comes to realize the class difference between him and Kazuko, which ultimately is the reason why he gives up on Kazuko. He continues on to say “We’re punks after all”, “Delinquents like you are just my type”. In this scene the pair is being recognized as part of a different social group. Similarly, Tokiko gives up on the boss son who proposed to her earlier despite him accepting all her flaws.

Delinquents, working women and a president’s son
To strictly divide the characters in the film into social classes Tokiko and Kazuko are both middle class workers in the urban city, earning just enough to provide for themselves and their loved ones. Okazaki, the president’s son, is upper middle class, wealthy enough to buy Kazuko expensive jewelry in order to win her heart. Jōji seemingly manages to scrape by everyday life through gambling and criminal activity.

Tokiko is presented with a critical choice where she can choose between staying with Okazaki and live a life in luxury or stay with Jōji as delinquents. Tokiko however, wants to straighten out and try to live an honest life working for an income. Jōji responds by saying he does not want to live off Tokiko, manipulating Okazaki for money. This is a clear start of the social friction caused by the income difference of the different classes. By taking into account their way of income the character’s social class is usually understood. You could go so far as to say that when Jōji and Tokiko decides to rob Okazaki, it can be seen as the resulting “revolution” caused by the class friction according to Marxist theory. In this case Okazaki is seen as the bourgeois and Jōji and Tokiko the lower middle-class.
The director’s portrayal of the women in society

The city

*Wife! be like a rose!* and *Dragnet Girl* were the respective director’s most modern inspired films for their period. These films were chosen since the modern depiction of the woman would reflect more clearly in comparison to the traditional woman.

At first hand glance it is almost difficult to make out in which country the film is set in as the impressive urban environment might as well have been filmed in New York or Paris. Both films begin with a short presentation of the modern urban city, a bustling crowd during rush hour, modern cars driving on paved roads and people waiting to board a train. Not much different than compared to today’s society.

Tokiko & Kimiko

Tokiko and Kimiko are both presented as the *moga* heroines in the two films. The heroines modern clothing quickly allows the viewer to identify them as *moga*, also the directors chose the same approach to present them at their workplace at the start of the films. The directors strategically chose the starting dialogues between the characters to further portray their outgoing and independent *moga* characteristics.

In *Wife! be like a Rose!* Seiji is seen waiting for Kimiko after her work-shift ends, having waited what seems like a long while Seiji is ready to leave when Kimiko arrives. In this rather odd conversation he invites Kimiko to go see a movie together but she declines and says she is busy, Seiji responds by saying he is also busy and then Kimiko nonchalantly says “Well, Good-bye then”. The effect of their dialogue shows how Kimiko is decisive and does not hesitate to take charge. Similar to how she overtook the lead when walking during the sidewalk scene, she literary sets the pace of their relationship. It is fascinating how Naruse manages draw a picture of Kimiko as a character in just the first 5 minutes of the film by having the actors use subtle actions and phrases in this way.
In the start of *Dragnet Girl* we are fooled to believe Tokiko as a passive girl who is desperately trying to evade the president son’s affection in order to keep her job. It seems like Tokiko is in a hopeless situation. When her shift ends we see her walking down a road with two men by her side saying “Miss, I think he is a sucker. Let’s use the same method as always”, the viewer now understand that Tokiko is quite the opposite of what she is portrayed to be during the start of the film. Ozu quickly reverses Tokiko’s character as we understand that she is somewhat criminally involved with gangsters. In the next scene we see Tokiko with her boyfriend Jōji who relies on her financially. Again, Ozu turns the tables by having Tokiko, the woman of the household become the income maker effectively switching their gender roles.

**Kazuko & Oyuki**

The directors introduce Kazuko and Oyuki in a similar fashion throughout their films. In contrast to the quick way Tokiko and Kimiko’s character are drawn, Kazuko and Oyuki’s personalities are formed slowly through their actions and interaction with the other characters. By using the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal it is possible to understand how the characters are constructed by the directors.

In *Wife! be like a Rose!* Oyuki is introduced as a house wife living together with her children in a rural town. When the children introduce themselves to Kimiko it is clear that Oyuki has raised them to be well mannered by the formal speech they use. When the son asks who Kimiko is Oyuki explains that she is someone very dear to his father. The reason she does not say it is his daughter from another family is that Oyuki, as a wise mother understands the emotional impact this may have on him and thus hides the truth from him until he is old enough to understand. Oyuki as a good mother, makes it her duty to send money to Kimiko and her mother in place of her father each month in order to support them financially.

Even though Kazuko is neither a wife or mother she still fits the *ryōsai kenbo* model in the sense that she cares for her brother the same way a mother cares for her children. Kazuko who is working to support her brother finds out that he is been involved with Jōji and his gang. In order to set her brother on the correct path she tries to convince Jōji to help her. Later, when Jōji comes to visit her in the record store, similar to a wise mother lecturing her son she sees through his hardboiled act and explains that he should be more honest with himself. Ozu presents two sides of a woman’s love in his film. The first being Tokiko’s love for Jōji as a lover and the second being Kazuko’s platonic love for her brother.
The director’s techniques
While Naruse uses subtle yet effective actions and words when presenting the moga in his film, Ozu’s turnabout method produces quite an impact for the viewer. It is also worth noting that Naruse had the advantage of sound recording in his film which allowed him to make use of the character’s tone of voice to further convey a message. The director’s initial depiction of the moga is them being and taking control of their situation. This is what makes them stand out from the traditional women in the films.

The similarities between the traditional women in the films is their will to protect their family and their selflessness to do so. Their behavior corresponds with the ryōsai kenbo ideals as good wives and wise mothers.

When the directors present a problem to the characters the traditional women arguably chose a passive way to solve the problem by enduring hardship and staying strong. Oyuki raising her children while also caring for Kimiko’s family financially and Kazuko caring for her hopeless brother in hope that he straightens himself out. While the modern women actively try to solve their problems by taking control of the situation, Tokiko arming herself with a pistol and threatening her rival Kazuko and Kimiko heading straight to her father’s town to confront him.

Naruse uses a similar “childrens” perspective as Ozu uses for his film I was born, but... when the children’s father ridicules himself to humor his boss. The children do not understand the reason for their father’s actions due to their innocence and ignorance of the adult world’s rules. Naruse uses Oyuki’s son in a similar way where the adults say that he will understand who Kimiko is when he grows up.

---

Findings

The findings suggest that the Japanese women’s image in films and industrialization has a common relationship. By looking at the films studied in combination with the economic growth followed by the development in society it can be understood how the films of this era helped define and construct the portrayal of the Japanese woman. The Japanese woman would develop new gender roles in order to fit the demands of a rapidly growing nation and the economic laws of supply and demand. “Without holding back on the topic, we women aren’t recognized as more than reproductive tools.” In accordance to what Nishikawa wrote on how the “new women” were to drink alcohol on the same level as men in 1913, Tokiko from Dragnet Girl is on several scenes depicted drinking together with Jōji and his gang. The films may indeed exaggerate some actions and scenarios which for obvious reasons would not be accepted in real life scenarios, e.g. Tokiko carrying and pointing a pistol. The films served to define the image of women and their new gender roles in the rapid changing society.

38 Ayako Nishikawa, Komako Kimura, Tomoko Miyazaki (西川文子、木村駒子、宮崎明子). (1913), The path the modern woman should follow (新しき女の行くべき道), p. 18. (手放題なことを言って、女を生殖器以上には少しも認めて居ない。).
New gender roles in society

As defined by ryōsai kenbo, the woman’s role in society prior to the industrialization was mainly to support the family as traditional housewives. With women now working and earning salaries, they could now switch roles to become new consumer subjects. With this newfound independence from men, the female consumers could continue on to become so called moga. The moga would in turn become the symbol for modernity in the growing cities which was pitched against the traditional values of the ryōsai kenbo ideology. Women now had the freedom of choosing another path in life than just becoming housewives.

The Image of moga

An important difference to note when it comes to the moga girls in Wife! Be like a Rose! and Dragnet Girl is the critical tone in how they’re depicted. Tokiko is presented as an unlawful delinquent girl while Kimiko is a respectful office lady. Wada-Marciano writes:

The moga figure is equally ambiguous, assimilating elements of respectability and deviance, increasing the possibility that the female audience will identify with the transfigurative new women in the film39.

Factors of growth

While the economic growth may have been the main factor for the woman’s growing status during this era, it is still possible that other factors may have contributed to this change, as, for example, the presence of western imported goods and culture. This is the main reason I selected the industrialization of Japan in my research question, and not economic growth to take the cultural exchange into.

Sociopolitical aspect

Furthermore, while the economic growth may have boosted the women’s independence during this era, as depicted in the films, the political factors such as the growing conservative government were counterproductive towards this change. As mentioned in the moga chapter the growing westernization and independence of women in the form of moga was the target of criticism which is why these films were not exempt of censorship. This makes it difficult to accurately determine to which extent the moga lived in independence. It is possible that the directors exaggerated the lifestyle of the moga in order to create a positive image of Japan overseas. It is possible considering the government was highly concerned with the image of society created through films, bearing in mind the censorship of keikoeiga as an example.

39 Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano. (2005), Imaging Modern Girls in the Japanese Woman’s Film, p. 43.
Conclusion
The industrialization was mainly the reason why Japanese women’s status in society would change drastically during the pre-war era. However, it is possible other elements could have contributed to this change such as the growing influence of western culture.

First, the westernization of Japan during this period brought on not only by western imported goods but also western culture and ideals such as independent and social rights for women. Japanese women were not only influenced by the domestic film productions but also imported films that were shown in the cinema.

Additionally, the inclusion of female workers in the larger cities created a woman’s consumer group which allowed women to create a new market with goods specifically tailored for women. One of these goods were the woman’s films which, while serving the purpose of being consumer goods also served the function of defining the image of the modern woman. The mogas were the living subjects of this gender role reform.

The women achieved newfound independence through the economic change and the mere existence of “woman’s films” proves this.

Summary
The goal of this study has been to acquire an insight of the image of pre-war Japanese middle class women in films. My initial hypothesis was that there was a connection between the industrialization and image of women in these films. The study was conducted by selecting acknowledged directors of early gendaigeki films and analyzing films in order to gain an understanding of this relationship. The evidence found was used to consolidate my claims in order prove the relationship throughout the study. My findings were based on the idea that class separation had grown stronger during the course of the selected timeframe. The films were treated as mediums for the directors to express their view on society, in this case the depiction of women. The directors depict and thereby acknowledge the mogas as “the new wave” of women in their films. While the mogas are always depicted as part of the urbanization of the larger cities, they were also the product of this industrialization as their modern office jobs is the main reason they are able to enjoy an independent lifestyle.
References


Hazumi, Tsuneo (恒夫筈見). (1947), *15 years of film history* (映画五十年史)


Ayako Nishikawa, Komako Kimura, Tomoko Miyazaki (西川文子、木村駒子、宮崎明子). (1913), *The path the modern woman should follow* (新しき女の行くべき道).

Richie, Donald. (2001), *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film A Concise History.*


Wada-Marciano, Mitsuyo. (2005), “Imaging Modern Girls in the Japanese Woman’s Film”

Wada-Marciano, Mitsuyo. (2008), *Nippon Modern : Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s*
Films

Mikio, Naruse. (1935) 二人妻 妻よ薔薇のやうに, Wife! Be Like a Rose!

Ozu, Yasujirō. (1933) 非常線の女, Dragnet girl