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Yoshimura Kozaburo and the Working Woman in the Old Capital

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“In societies that are changing very rapidly,” Hanna Papanek observes,

ambiguous signals are presented to women. Fears are often translated into attempts to prevent changes in their roles. They become the repositories of “traditional” values imputed to them by men in order to reduce the stresses men face. Resistance to women’s greater participation in economic and political life may be felt especially strongly among groups most exposed to rapid change and ambivalent about it.

[\(Papanek 1977: 15\)](#)

These tensions, as they operated in the fast-changing society of postwar Japan, are expressed with particular clarity in films set in Kyoto. The city’s status as Japan’s historic and cultural capital ensured that it was used in postwar films as a site specifically and peculiarly representative of traditional values. But its status as exemplar of Japanese tradition also allowed Kyoto to be used fruitfully as a site where the process of modernization then in progress in Japan could be explored and analyzed.

Between 1951 and 1960, director Yoshimura Kozaburo (1911–2000) dramatized female experience in Kyoto in a sequence of films, thereby interrogating wider cultural questions in the context of dramatic social change. He posed probing questions about the way in which women, newly enfranchised by a liberal and broadly feminist Constitution, oriented themselves towards tradition, and about whether tradition provided a space for Japanese women to achieve personal fulfilment. If Papanek asserts that women become “the repositories of traditional values,” the films suggest that the relationship between women and tradition is more ambiguous.

Tensions such as those which Papanek describes had been present in Japanese society since the Meiji Restoration set the country on its modern course of industrialisation and development. The role of women in Japan since 1868 has been marked by contradictions between their official position and their actual social role and function. The model of female conduct promoted by the Meiji regime and subsequently into the 1930s – a period of resurgent nationalism and anti-Western sentiment – was that of *ryosai kenbo* (“Good Wife, Wise Mother”).¹ Clearly, a woman’s official place was in the home. In 1890, this status was legally enforced by a Law on Associations and Meetings (*Shugai oyobi kessha ho*), which barred women from attending political meetings or joining political organisations. These laws were not repealed until 1945.

Such conservative expectations and policies were however belied by the actual role of women in Meiji, Taisho, and early Showa period society. These “repositories of ‘traditional’ values” were a vital source of labor for Japan’s industrial revolution. As Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Anne Hastings observe, “by 1890 women had become the backbone of the developing Japanese industrial economy. Female workers outnumbered males in light industry, especially in textiles, where a work force that was 60 to 90 percent female produced 40 percent of the gross national product and 60 percent of the foreign exchange during the late nineteenth century” ([Nolte and Hastings 1991](#): 153). Due to their concentration in the textile industry, women still constituted the majority of all industrial workers in the early 1930s. In 1931, 53.6% of industrial workers were still female, and although this figure fell through the 1930s, mainly as a result of the shift from light to heavy industry, that decline was countered by a growth in the number of women employed in secretarial positions and in the service industries.

Women were arguably the chief beneficiaries of the postwar Occupation, and the role of women changed visibly and dramatically. Shunsuke Tsurumi writes that “For people at large, the most durable influence of the Occupation was on the Japanese lifestyle, especially with respect to relationships between women and men,” which pivoted towards more liberated Western models

([Tsurumi 2009](#): 11). In terms of their representation in the media, *ryosai kenbo* gave way abruptly, in films and magazines, to a new image glancing back in part to the *moga* of the 1930s but also inspired by the models and codes of behavior promoted by the American occupiers. In legal terms, women's rights were a central platform of the US-sponsored constitution, which departed radically from Japanese custom by prohibiting sex discrimination, offering freedom in choosing a spouse, and ensuring that future legislation must conform to assumptions of sexual equality. In addition, "the Labour Standards Act of 1947 specifically prohibited wage discrimination based on sex and created a wide range of legal protections for women workers" ([Upham 1999](#): 326).

The early postwar decades were marked by a shift in employment patterns both male and female. The percentage of workers of both sexes employed by family businesses declined by roughly half. This category included a majority (62.5%) of all Japanese female workers in 1950, but by 1965, the figure had declined to 36.8%, while in the same period the percentage of women workers who were wage employees had more than doubled from 22.4% to 48% ([Kawashima 1995](#): 274). The decline of the family business and the rise of the wage employer is reflected in postwar cinema. Ozu's younger female characters, such as Noriko (Hara Setsuko) in *Bakushu* (*Early Summer*, 1951) are often office workers; this is true particularly of his films set in Tokyo, where many of Japan's big companies were (and are) concentrated. By contrast, in *Kohayagawa-ke no aki* (*The End of Summer*, 1961), set in Kansai, Ozu traces the decline of a family-run sake brewery.

To an extent, this contrast reflects historical reality: compared to the industrialization of other major cities, Kansai in general and Kyoto in particular remained a center of small-scale cottage industries, such as silk-weaving in the old capital's Nishijin district. But despite this fealty to contemporary conditions, the image of Kyoto in films of the postwar era derives as much from an imagined conception of the city as from its physical or social reality. Kyoto is used in postwar films as a fictive site where traditional values can be interrogated through the deployment and reinterpretation of the iconography customarily associated with the city. It is telling that in Kyoto-set films such as *Nishijin no shimai* (*Sisters of Nishijin*, 1952, Yoshimura), *Yoru no kawa* (*Night*

River, 1956, Yoshimura), and *Umi no koto* (*Lake of Tears*, 1966, Tasaka Tomotaka), the decline of local industry is mediated through the experience of a female protagonist. In fact, in contrast to the dominance by women of industrial textile production, there was “a concentration of men in the luxury, craft branches of textile production, where higher value added could support higher labour cost – for example in the Nishijin silk weaving industry” ([Hunter 1995](#): 372). The portrayal of female protagonists *in these jobs* is not a matter of verisimilitude; rather the dramatization of female experience was perceived by filmmakers as being of particular relevance to the portrayal of a culture in transition.

The stress on female experience also doubtless relates to the fact that some of Kyoto’s associations are specifically and uniquely feminine, most particularly, another form of “woman worker,” the geisha. This class of professional entertainers originated in Edo (as Tokyo was called until 1868), but their association with Kyoto was firmly established by the mid-Edo period (eighteenth century), when entertainment districts known as *hanamachi* (literally “flower quarters”) were established in various parts of the city. The role and function of a geisha has long been ambiguous: officially professional entertainers, they have also at times served a function not far distinct from that of a prostitute. Although technically not required to sleep with their clients, they often adopted a patron, or “*danna*,” to whom they extended sexual favors in return for financial support.²

Thus, the geisha, a member of a long-standing institution existing to titillate and entertain men, may be taken as an extreme representative of Papanek’s formulation according to which women serve as “repositories of ‘traditional’ values” in changing societies. In Kyoto-set films of the postwar era, the experiences of geisha are often used as a microcosm of the situation of women in Japanese society as a whole. However, the films discussed here also explore various other professions open to women in a society poised between tradition and modernity. In so doing, they pose broader questions about the options for women in postwar Japan.

The interest and complexity of Yoshimura Kozaburo's *Itsuwareru seiso* (*Clothes of Deception*, 1951) lies in the way in which it presents the geisha system as one facet of female experience in Kyoto, juxtaposing a geisha a "respectable" working woman (the two protagonists are sisters). This film was the first in a remarkable sequence of films by the director exploring the situation of working women in the old capital, which deserve, as Yoshimura's films do generally, to be better known and more fully discussed.

It is regrettable that the most detailed and informative general survey of Yoshimura's work in English is still the five pages included in Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie's *The Japanese Film*. Although enthusiastic, their discussion of Yoshimura places undue stress on similarity to Mizoguchi (admittedly a position adopted by many Japanese critics at the time). Thus, Anderson and Richie claim *Clothes of Deception* "made Yoshimura something of a rival to Mizoguchi," comment that "upon Mizoguchi's death it was but natural that he should take over the directorship of *An Osaka Story*," and report that "some maintain that the Mizoguchi tradition is now upheld only by Yoshimura" ([Anderson and Richie 1982](#): 384). In reality, Yoshimura did not evolve a mastery of a specific style to rival Mizoguchi. His average shot length, for instance, does not depart substantially from the norm (then around ten seconds), and he tended to favor unobtrusive techniques such as two-shots. Nevertheless, his work was judged unusual at the time for its fast pace, particularly his technique of "making a direct cut right at the high point of one scene into another scene which is building up" ([Anderson and Richie 1982](#): 385). Discussions of the quality of a director's oeuvre are necessarily subjective, but I wish to emphasize that Yoshimura's work includes some of postwar Japanese cinema's most complex depictions of Kyoto, its culture and its situation in a time of change.

Yoshimura had been working as a director since the thirties and had achieved considerable commercial success with *Danryu* (*Warm Current*, 1939), a film that also ranked in the *Kinema Junpo* Best Ten of its year. In 1947, he initiated a collaboration with scriptwriter Shindo Kaneto (himself later a director in his own right) with *Anjo-ke no butokai* (*The Ball at the Anjo House*),

which was top in the *Kinema Junpo* poll. Yoshimura modestly asserted that he “needed to hang onto another fellow’s shirt tails in order to do what I wanted” (Shindo, Kaneto, quoted in [Anderson and Richie 1982](#): 383), and indeed the intelligence, subtlety, and structural precision of Shindo’s scripts is often a central virtue of Yoshimura’s films. Two of the three films discussed here, *Clothes of Deception* and *Onna no saka (A Woman’s Uphill Slope, 1960)*, were scripted by Shindo, while the third, *Night River*, was scripted by Tanaka Sumie (1908–2000), adapting a novel by Sawano Hisao (1912–1992), whose prose fiction also formed the basis for *A Woman’s Uphill Slope*. These writers may be credited with significant influence on the films, and given the close narrative parallels between the two later works, it seems reasonable to attribute their more positive presentation of female agency in part to Sawano, as well as (in the case of *Night River*) to the intervention of a distinguished female screenwriter. Nevertheless, all three films share not only a geographical setting and thematic concerns and tropes but also display visual echoes for which Yoshimura is presumably responsible. Anyway, my primary concern is not to debate Yoshimura’s status as auteur, but to analyze a part of his output that is indispensable to an understanding of the representation of Kyoto in postwar cinema.

Yoshimura and Shindo both worked at Shochiku during the forties but left the studio in 1950 to found an independent production company, Kindai Eiga Kyokai, before approaching Daiei to produce *Clothes of Deception*, a project Shochiku had rejected. Daiei, founded as a consolidation of various smaller companies in 1942, had studios in Tokyo and Kyoto. While Kyoto’s traditional environment lent itself readily to the production of *jidai-geki*, Daiei regularly also made *gendai-geki* in the city. During the 1950s, these included, in addition to some of Yoshimura’s films, Mizoguchi’s *Gion Bayashi (Gion Festival Music, 1953)* and *Uwasa no onna (A Woman of Rumour, 1954)*, Ichikawa Kon’s *Enjo (Conflagration, 1958)* and *Kagi (Odd Obsession, 1959)*, and Inagaki Hiroshi’s *Kottai-san yori: Nyotai wa kanashiku (Geisha in the Old City, 1957)*. Inagaki’s film, about the inhabitants of a geisha house pursuing their trade as Kyoto underwent a process of industrialization and experienced the political repercussions of the postwar expansion in the power and freedom of

organised labor, bears closer narrative similarities to Yoshimura's sequence of Kyoto-set films than to most of Inagaki's own work.³

Between 1951 and 1960, Yoshimura directed a sequence of four films set in Kyoto, each focusing on the situation of a woman working in a traditional industry in the old capital. Yoshimura seems explicitly to have envisaged these films as microcosmic representations of Japanese society; he is on record as stating that "Kyoto is Japan. Japan is preserved there in the same shape. Kyoto's antiquity has been integrated into the city, but the whole is the whole of Japan" (Yoshimura, cited in [Ichida 1957](#): 3). I shall discuss three of these films in depth (omitting *Sisters of Nishijin*, since it was inaccessible when this essay was written). They chart a spectrum of individual responses and possible attitudes to Japanese social change during that period and explore the way in which women were both affected by and instrumental in implementing that change.

Figure 5.1 Debating models of womanhood in Kyoto. *Clothes of Deception*, 1951. Yoshimura Kozaburo, Daiei.

Clothes of Deception

Clothes of Deception, also known in English as *Under Silk Garments* and *The Disguise*, marked a turning point in Yoshimura's career. Anderson and Richie recount that the film, "praised for its exact and realistic creation of the very special Gion atmosphere, [...] established his position as a specialist in films about women" ([Anderson and Richie 1982](#): 384). Their description of the film's plot, however, is not wholly accurate: "The film was much like Mizoguchi's *Gion no Shimai* (*Sisters of Gion*) except that the two sisters' characters were reversed and life in Kyoto's Gion was brought up to date by showing its postwar deterioration" ([Anderson and Richie 1982](#): 190). It is certainly true that Shindo's script echoes plot developments in Mizoguchi's film – for instance, the fact that in the climax the geisha heroine is wounded, but not killed, by a resentful former suitor. But if the assertion that the setting is updated by showing the postwar deterioration of the Gion district is true enough, it is misleading to argue that the two sisters' characters are reversed, since, unlike in Mizoguchi's film, only one of the two is a geisha. The film's excellence lies substantially

in the way in which it undercuts the expected binary opposition between good heroine and transgressive anti-heroine.

In the first place, the film problematizes the traditional equation between foreignness and immodest (or liberated) behaviour. Younger sister Taeko (Fujita Yasuko) dresses consistently in Western-style clothing and works for the city's tourist board. At a time when employment in the crafts and professions traditionally associated with Kyoto was declining, Taeko's occupation associates her with the old capital's modern status as a tourist destination, both for Japanese and foreign visitors. Yet despite her Westernized dress and manner, Taeko maintains conservative sexual mores. She hopes to marry Koji (Kobayashi Keiju), the son of a rival family, but his mother, Chiyo (Murata Chieko), forbids the match; when he nevertheless makes sexual advances towards her, she recoils from him with horror. Combining a profession oriented towards modernity and a conservative sexual modesty, she contrasts with her sister, Kimicho (Kyo Machiko), employed in the archetypal Kyoto trade of geisha, a traditional Japanese profession associated with sexual availability. Kimicho is promiscuous and materialistic; she seduces Chiyo's wealthy lover, Isehama (Shindo Eitaro), who becomes her patron and gives her the 200,000 yen needed to prevent the family house being repossessed. The film lacks an equivalent of Umekichi in *Sisters of Gion*, the geisha typified by modesty and fidelity to a patron. By implication, the old "virtues" have vanished; the profession is now a licentious, and purely commercial, enterprise.

One is initially tempted to read Kimicho as a woman of purely material motives. In the opening scene, she tells one patron that "money is our only link" and breaks up with him because he can no longer afford to keep her. Subsequently, she forcefully criticizes her mother for lending money to Watanabe (Kawazu Seizaburo), the son of her former lover, and decries her mother's assumption that she is bound to Watanabe as kin; when her mother reminds her that "he is your half-brother," Kimicho retorts that he is only "the son of your lover." This leads Taeko, for the first time, to intervene in the conversation, criticizing her sister for being "so nasty."

Yet Kimicho's commercial outlook clearly springs from laudable motives. Her primary concern

is not for herself, but for her family's security and happiness. When it appears that Koji will not marry Taeko, she offers to support them with her own earnings, telling him that "the only thing which keeps me going is that I want a normal life for my sister." This self-sacrificial gesture resembles the behavior of Miyoharu (Kogure Michiyo), Mizoguchi's heroine in the slightly later *Gion bayashi*; in both films, the older, more experienced woman makes a physical sacrifice to keep the younger, more innocent one pure. Similarly, while her coldness towards Watanabe seems reprehensible, it is also practical. Her mother, having remortgaged her house to support him, has jeopardized her own financial security and that of her daughters. The viewer may have some sympathy when Kimicho declares that "My mother has done something very stupid." Kimicho, unswayed by a sense of duty to a more distant relative, is able to act in the interests of her immediate family.

A key scene in this light is the sequence of the death from tuberculosis of the loyal servant, Fukuya (Yanagi Emiko). Just after her death, the phone rings; Kimicho hesitates before answering but eventually accepts a commission to go to a teahouse. This scene could have been played to present Kimicho as heartlessly indifferent to the servant's death. But Taeko's suggestion that she take a night's holiday is met with the reminder that the mortgage payment on the house is due tomorrow; by placing Fukuya's death at this specific point in the narrative, Yoshimura and Shindo present Kimicho as a victim of circumstances. (The scene is superbly acted; Kyo Machiko's shifting expressions as she ponders whether to answer the phone brilliantly suggest her mixed feelings.) Later in the film, Kimicho meets an old friend, Kasama (Tonoyama Taiji), who has opened a roadside refreshment stall. He fills a glass for her and attempts to decline payment; she refuses to accept the gift, saying "You won't last long with that policy." Here Kimicho insists on paying for the item she has consumed, despite her own financial insecurity. We may read this as a gesture of friendship, or as a decision to abide by the commercial rules of the society Kimicho inhabits, rather than merely exploit them for her own ends. Either way, the action is one of integrity.

The urban topography of Kyoto is used expressively throughout the film, and at times with

explicit symbolism. The most obvious example is at the climax, when Kimicho is attacked by her vengeful former patron Yamashita (Sugai Ichiro). The motive for the attack is again financial: Yamashita has been fired for embezzling money to pay for her services; Kimicho has refused to lend him money. Fleeing from the theatre, where the attack begins, into the city streets, Kimicho manages to outrun her pursuer but is trapped by the barriers of a level crossing, which descend as a train approaches, barring her way and allowing Yamashita to catch up with her. The connotations of entrapment, both literal and momentary (the heroine cannot now escape her pursuer) and figurative and lasting (the heroine cannot ever escape Kyoto) are obvious. But it is remarkable that the object that traps Kimicho, a railway barrier, represents the modern world ([Figure 5.2](#)). The detail hints that modernization in Kyoto is not liberating, or at least, that the superficial trappings of modernity have in fact left archaic attitudes intact.

Figure 5.2 No escape from Kyoto: Kimicho (Kyo Machiko) is trapped as she tries to flee a violent former patron. *Clothes of Deception*, 1951. Yoshimura Kozaburo, Daiei.

The theatre, where Yamashita first attacks Kimicho, is an unambiguously traditional milieu that in this scene may be taken as a microcosm of Kyoto culture and the geisha system. On the stage of the Kyoto Odori, female performers are presented as objects for the delectation of male spectators. In this, the theatre may be taken as a milder version of the physical exploitation that the geisha must endure as a matter of course (the fact that geisha are *officially* professional entertainers rather than sex workers makes the parallel closer). The topography of the stage restricts movement – the dancers cannot leave their demarcated area, just as Kimicho and those of her profession are trapped in the oppressive milieu of Kyoto. Yamashita’s physical attack on Kimicho seems a continuation of this theatrical spectacle: he attacks her when she is in full makeup, about to perform; as he chases her into the auditorium, the dancing geisha on stage remain visible in the background. Moreover, as the disturbance breaks out in one part of the theatre, the eyes of the audience naturally turn from the spectacle on stage to this new spectacle of violence. While it would be dubious to draw too close an equation between two very different situations, Yamashita’s action can be interpreted as the extreme manifestation of a system that demeans and objectifies women.

One topographical fact of significance in this scene is that the theatre has a gallery – hence, it is so arranged that its audience can look down from a height at the stage. This is one of several key scenes in the film whose significance is visually marked by the choice of a high angle – a trope that stands out amidst Yoshimura’s generally rather subdued *mise-en-scène*. The first of these is the opening scene – indeed, the opening shot. *Clothes of Deception* begins with an image of apparent liberation: the pulling back of *shoji*, followed by the opening of curtains and windows. But this sense of liberation is undermined as the camera then pans over the landscape of the Kamogawa. Here, Yoshimura establishes his theme: the dark line of the river seems a restrictive boundary, with, at first, no means of crossing in sight. Throughout the film, Kimicho will remain confined within the boundaries of the city. Finally, the camera comes to rest on a bridge spanning the river; this implies the potential for liberation, but only through departure – the option finally chosen by Taeko and Koji. The later scene of their illicit tryst significantly takes place on the stony river bank approached via one bridge, with another visible in the distance. Here Koji announces that he cannot marry Taeko, but, to her horror, propositions her in any case. The bridges suggest the possibility of departure, but crossing leads only as far as the other side of the river; the idea of leaving Kyoto is judged impractical or impossible. Taeko’s only option, if she wishes to pursue a sexual liaison with Koji, is to opt for the kind of sexual availability that, for her sister, is a professional obligation.

This situation, however, is temporary: Taeko and Koji finally depart. Taeko’s willingness and ability to leave Kyoto is metaphorically signaled by her visible mobility earlier in the film, her ability to navigate the city. Yoshimura records her journey by bicycle to the office – a sequence superfluous in narrative terms – in a style that sets it substantially apart from most of the film (only the violent climax displays a comparable stylistic rhetoric or pace of editing). Pans and tracking shots follow the bicycle in motion, and Yoshimura opts for an unusually rapid montage, interspersing long shots of the surrounding streets with medium close ups of Taeko’s upper body, her pedaling feet, and the turning wheels. This decision to underline this sequence stylistically

emphasizes its symbolic function, and the choice of the bicycle as means of transport has connotations of activity and effortful propulsion. By contrast, Kimicho travels on foot or in a rickshaw; these journeys are not marked by rhetorical camerawork and are often partly elided. In an early scene, we witness Kimicho answering a phone call in which her sister instructs her to return home, but we do not see her en route (in her next appearance she is already seated at the table in the family home). By withholding a scene in which Kimicho would necessarily have been mobile, Yoshimura emphasizes her entrapment.

This tension between Taeko's mobility and Kimicho's stasis is carried over into the film's conclusion. The last shots answer the first images: again Kimicho looks down from the height of an upper floor through an open window, the window of the hospital room. She remains confined within the hospital, but as Taeko and Koji depart, they pass through the narrow, restrictive alleyway, its traditional wooden buildings characterized by dark colors and shade, and out into the broader streets of the city with their contrasting daylight brightness. The level crossing, which had closed to trap Kimicho, now opens to let them pass. And while, in the opening scene, the dark line of the Kamogawa had seemed a barrier, in the last shot Taeko and Koji pass over the river on a bridge – not the same one as in the opening shot, but parallel nonetheless – that will carry them to the freer, more flexible lifestyle of Tokyo.

The implicit rejection of Kyoto in these closing scenes is made more explicit in another, pivotal scene, in which, again, female characters look down over the city from a height. In this case, the setting is the roof of a multistory building, and Kimicho is not present; the scene focuses on Taeko and her friend Yukiko (Kitakouchi Taeko), who is visiting from Tokyo. The building itself suggests the intrusion of modern Japan into the historic city, just as Yukiko is a modern Japanese woman entering the old capital. Symbolically it is in this modern outpost within Kyoto that the city's values and traditions can be criticized. Yukiko, having learned of Taeko's plight, encourages her to defy Koji's mother and marry him anyway. When Taeko tells her that it is difficult, Yukiko responds by blaming the city itself. "That's what I hate about Kyoto. You used to be more of a modernist. Now

you're old-fashioned. Why not bring him to Tokyo? I'll arrange it. It's up to you to make your own happiness." Crossing to the fence at the perimeter, Yukiko surveys the old wooden *machiya* houses that still, at that date, typified Kyoto, and begins to speak. As she does so, Yoshimura's camera tracks forward to focus exclusively on the cityscape, excluding Yukiko from the frame, before cutting to further shots of the tiled rooftops, filmed from an elevated angle as if approximating Yukiko's point of view. Over the onscreen image of Kyoto's traditional architecture, we hear her comment: "Kyoto was not bombed during the war, but I'm not sure that was entirely a good thing. Hundreds of years of history have survived, but old ideas survived, too. Beneath those old tiled roofs are lots of old tired ideas." In a film made only a few years after the mass bombings of Japanese cities, the audacity of this statement is remarkable. And while one should be careful about taking one minor character as a mouthpiece for Shindo and Yoshimura's own opinions, these lines are the film's single most explicit statement about the old capital. The catastrophe of the war has permitted the rest of Japan to make a fresh start; Kyoto, spared that catastrophe, has also been denied that opportunity. Tradition has become stagnant and oppressive, and Kyoto does not offer any opportunity for liberation. It would be better if it had been destroyed.

Night River

In an early scene in *Night River*,⁴ two women again survey Kyoto from the height of a modern skyscraper overlooking the old city. One is the heroine, Kiwa (Yamamoto Fujiko); the other is her former school friend, Setsuko (Ai Michiko). They are accompanied by the young artist Okamoto (Kawasaki Keizo), whose exhibition Kiwa has just attended. As in *Clothes of Deception*, the women discuss the war: seeing their old school in the distance, they remember their childhood during the conflict, and Setsuko comments, "I can't think of the past without tears." As in *Clothes of Deception*, they discuss romantic matters: Setsuko, somewhat to Okamoto's embarrassment, suggests that Kiwa should marry him. Kiwa, who has already confided that she hopes to marry, but not yet, tells Setsuko that her lover is the mountain, Hiei-zan, whose colors she strives to reproduce in her art.

It is worth beginning our discussion of *Night River* with this sequence because the film, despite its realist narrative and understated acting, is a curiously reflexive work. Its basis in Sawano Hisao's novel notwithstanding, it seems self-consciously to revisit and rework *Clothes of Deception*. The last scene, too, recapitulates one of the closing shots of the 1951 film – again, the heroine looks out of an upper-floor vantage point onto the city streets. I shall discuss this ending in greater detail later; for the moment, I merely want to stress the way in which it recalls Yoshimura's earlier work.

Night River also displays a marked self-referential quality, a feature commented on by its *Kinema Junpo* reviewer, Takizawa Osamu, who noted “the childlike qualities of Yoshimura's playful use of colour,” which he relates to the formal experimentation sometimes apparent in the director's prewar work ([Takizawa 1956](#): 63). Kiwa, a dyer and designer of kimono, is herself a visual artist. The parallel is perhaps strengthened by the fact that rayon, the “artificial silk” commonly used to make kimono in the Showa period, is derived from cellulose, also the basic material of film stock. Certainly, Yoshimura repeatedly makes us aware that we are watching a film. Kiwa and the entomologist Professor Takemura (Uehara Ken), who will become her lover, are literally brought together by a camera – the camera that his daughter Atsuko (Ichikawa Wako) proffers, asking Kiwa to photograph them, when they first meet, by chance, at a Nara temple ([Figure 5.3](#)). This, indeed, again refers back to *Clothes of Deception*, in which Koji and Taeko are first seen together in the darkroom at their office, where Koji is developing a photograph of Taeko herself. This scene depicts their decision to tell Koji's mother of their plans to marry, but when Koji attempts to kiss Taeko, she breaks free and flees outside, letting light into the room and threatening to spoil the developing photograph. This detail foreshadows the fact that their hopes for a smooth marriage will soon be dashed, and the scene in *Night River*, where Takemura and Kiwa's meeting is mediated through photography, seems a deliberate reference to and revision of this scene. But it is also part of a more general set of metacinematic elements visible throughout the film.

Figure 5.3 Kiwa (Yamamoto Fujiko) “behind the camera” in *Night River*, 1956, Yoshimura Kozaburo, Daiei.

One key self-referential element, as noted by Takizawa, is the use of color. *Night River* was Yoshimura's first color film, and given its stress on costume, design, and painting it is perhaps unsurprising that he chooses to foreground the technique, particularly in the recurrent use of red, which is the main hue seen in the dye house, the color of the flags of the workers' parade that ends the film, and the color of the flies that Takemura is seeking to isolate in his laboratory and that become the model for one of Kiwa's patterns. This imagery has the effect of drawing attention to the material qualities of the film, as does the scene in which, on the way back from Nara, Kiwa, Takemura, and Atsuko catch sight of a rainbow through the train window – a spectacle that would be underwhelming, if not invisible, in black and white. Kiwa later deliberately makes a rainbow with the spray from a water pipe in the dye house, creating her own lighting effects in a manner that seems more directly to evoke the technique of the filmmaker than of the costume designer. Equally self-conscious is the scene on top of the skyscraper described above: Kiwa aims to reproduce the colours of Hiei-zan in her art, just as they are reproduced in the film by Yoshimura's camera.

This self-consciousness is appropriate to a work of art with an artist as protagonist set in an artistic milieu. Foregrounding his own status as a creator, Yoshimura draws attention to his heroine's ability creatively to interpret her surroundings ([Figure 5.4](#)). This is one reason why the portrait of Kyoto in *Night River* is more positive than that in *Clothes of Deception*. Unlike Kimicho, Kiwa is not trapped by practical circumstances. This relative freedom surprised readers of the source novel: the character of Kiwa was received as “a new type of ‘Kyoto woman’, who changed the image of the women of the capital” ([Kōno, 1997](#), 173).

Figure 5.4 The artist at work: kimono dyer and designer Kiwa (Yamamoto Fujiko) concentrates on her craft in *Night River*, 1956, Yoshimura Kozaburo, Daiei.

The contrast in terms of the relative freedom available to the films' characters may be illustrated by comparing of the experiences of the heroines' sisters. Both Taeko in *Clothes of Deception* and Miyo (Ono Michiko) in *Night River* marry and move to Tokyo. In the former, however, this marriage is impeded by cultural pressures specific to the old capital and can take place only when Taeko leaves

Kyoto. In *Night River*, the marriage is unimpeded (hence taking place much earlier in the narrative), and the move to Tokyo is voluntary and pragmatic, determined by the husband's career prospects. Because of the couple's departure, their married life is a peripheral narrative element, but the fact that the union takes place early on, rather than forming its resolution, allows Yoshimura to contrast the wedded Miyo with the unmarried Kiwa, and the former's socially approved relationship with the latter's adulterous one. While Taeko's marriage forms the happy ending to *Clothes of Deception*, the marriage portrayed in *Night River* is neither idealized nor damned. Miyo expresses no regrets, despite a certain dissatisfaction with her husband's constant obligations at work. This neutral presentation of the married couple allows the viewer a considerable freedom of response; we are invited to weigh the small pleasures and disappointments of a housewife's routine existence against Kiwa's more exotic and turbulent lifestyle. It is significant that Miyo's role as a salaryman's wife – by then a more common model for Japanese women than the employment in traditional craftsmanship essayed by Kiwa – places restrictions on her behavior from which Kiwa is free. A traditional job in a traditional city offers Kiwa an unexpected degree of latitude in permissible behavior. While she does finally relinquish her adulterous lover, this is a voluntary decision on her part, motivated primarily by affection for Takemura's daughter rather than by external pressures.

Although Atsuko appears in relatively few scenes, she is thus a character whose significance outweighs her prominence in the narrative. It is she who informs Kiwa that the affair has repercussions for a third party, her own mother (Takemura's wife), who is ailing; this revelation precipitates Kiwa's decision to break off the relationship. This decision is not guided by traditional cultural assumptions but by the personal affection between Kiwa and Atsuko. Crucially, after Mrs. Takemura's death, Kiwa attends the funeral to say a prayer and makes an offering of flowers, carrying out the traditional obligation of paying her respects when her relationship with Takemura might conventionally have rendered it impossible for her to do so. We may compare Yoshimura's earlier *Sisters of Nishijin*, when the majority of the family react angrily when the deceased patriarch's mistress come to their house to pay her respects at his shrine.

Superficially, *Night River* establishes a contrast between tradition and modernity. The old capital is juxtaposed with three others: Nara, the even older capital; Osaka, the commercial capital; and Tokyo, the political capital. Location footage records the visual contrasts between the cities – the imagery of Kyoto focuses on its traditional wooden streets, and the Nara scene takes place in an ancient temple; by contrast, Tokyo is typified by neon lights and Osaka by multistory department stores. Osaka, too, is the location of Takemura’s laboratory and university; the city is associated with science, in opposition to the arts associated with Kyoto and personified by Kiwa and by her other potential suitor, the artist Okamoto.

But this contrast is not clear-cut. *Night River* repeatedly undercuts any absolute divisions between Kyoto and the other cities, between art and science, and between tradition and modernity. Significantly, Kyoto sets the fashions: Kiwa chooses to hold a show in Tokyo precisely because the new capital is, in matters of dress, behind the times, so that kimono is still popular there. Moreover, both Okamoto’s art and Kiwa’s kimono are avant-garde (as indeed is composer Ikeno Sei’s discordant musical score for the film). Okamoto’s painting, a stylized female portrait that, he admits, is meant to depict Kiwa herself, is visibly influenced by Picasso. Kiwa applies innovative designs to the traditional form of costume. The apparent opposition between art and science is eroded by the fact that, when Kiwa first meets Takemura, he is wearing a tie she has designed; later, she will base one of her patterns on Takemura’s red flies.

One may read in this a more positive attitude to tradition. In *Clothes of Deception*, tradition is the repressive geisha system, and there is no means of achieving happiness within Kyoto. The suggestion that it might have been better had Kyoto’s old streets been destroyed during the war implies that tradition cannot be sustained alongside a progressive way of life. *Night River*, by contrast, suggests that it is possible for aspects of tradition and modernity to survive alongside each other. It is true that *Night River* is set in a declining milieu: at a dinner, one member of the industry comments that, “To exist in this Westernised era and survive with our traditional garments, we must have kind help from all our customers.” Yet despite this, and despite the explicit acknowledgement

by Kiwa and her family that several comparable businesses have recently closed, Kiwa's own business remains solvent. This is partly due to her adaptability and opportunism: she arranges to exhibit her work in Tokyo, and, when a shop in Osaka turns down her request to exhibit her designs on the grounds that kimono are outdated, she ignores the refusal and begins to address the customers directly. But by portraying her success, Yoshimura asserts that the traditional business model still has a place in the new postwar dispensation, alongside the corporate model represented by Miyo's salaryman husband.

The theme of the validity of tradition in postwar Japan is strengthened by a political subtext that relates directly to the constitutional changes of the era. In the opening scene, a worker, Toshio (Takakura Ichiro), leaves the dye house, which he dismisses as a "feudalistic" workplace, to work in a factory. The American-influenced constitution is directly mentioned: Toshio asserts that provisions regarding workers' rights permit him to refuse to work overtime. After his departure, when the May Day workers' parade passes outside, Kiwa and her father remark that he must be at the head of the procession.

Yet the film raises this explicitly political issue only to dismiss it. The specific objectives of the workers' movement are not discussed, and Toshio's departure is only temporary. At the end of the film, economic recession leads to the closure of the factory that has taken him on, and he returns to his original position at the dye house. As I have mentioned, the film's last scene, where Kiwa and Toshio climb up to the upper floor to watch the procession from the balcony, may be taken as a deliberate reference to the ending of *Clothes of Deception*, in which the heroine also watches events in the street from a height. But more subtly, it also inverts the climax of the earlier film, where Kimicho's lover attacks her at the theatre. In that scene, the setting for an aesthetic spectacle – the geisha's annual dance – was transformed into the backdrop for an act of violence, with the implication that the tradition of the geisha system is itself the source of violence. At the end of *Night River*, by contrast, Kiwa and Toshio turn the parade – a political activity – into aesthetic spectacle. The specific political implication of the parade is neutralized, its red flags becoming

simply another element in Yoshimura's formal design, a means of giving the audience (and Kiwa and Toshio, who now stand in for the audience within the film) visual pleasure. The last shot, reframing the image, completes the process of aestheticization; the camera comes to focus not on the red flags of the parade, but on the recently dyed red cloths hanging out to dry behind the characters. These cloths fill the screen so that one can no longer make out what they are, and Kiwa seems to be standing against an abstract red background.

One might interpret this as expressing a rejection of politics, on Yoshimura's part as well as on Kiwa's. Discussing this scene in his autobiography, the director himself moves from the political to the aesthetic. The background behind Kiwa includes not only red, but also white and blue cloths, and Yoshimura initially mentions that these three colors reflect the values of "liberty, equality and fraternity." But a page later, having described the practicalities of shooting the scene, he concludes the chapter by concentrating purely on its aesthetic impact: "Under a clear blue May sky, the red flags surrounding Kyoto's old row houses were beautiful" ([Yoshimura 1985](#): 351–352).

Nevertheless, the implication of this coda, as indeed of the film's failure seriously to discuss politics, is not as conservative as it might seem. Yoshimura and screenwriter Tanaka imply that revolution is unnecessary because the tradition itself allows space for progressive elements. These include relative freedom for women working within traditional professions. If *Clothes of Deception* had ended with Kimicho presiding over the construction of the heterosexual couple in the persons of Taeko and her lover, *Night River* ends instead with a single woman accompanied, not by a future husband, but by a colleague. After the failure of Kiwa's affair with Takemura, the film concludes with the implication that traditional crafts allow a space where a woman can, through her work, achieve personal fulfilment. That implication will be made explicit in the last film in Yoshimura's Kyoto tetralogy.

A Woman's Uphill Slope

The tentative positive elements of *Night River* suggest an effort to reconcile tradition and modernity,

in the face of widespread assumptions that to become modern is to outgrow or repudiate tradition, and that adapting to modernity involves a traumatic rupture with established modes of conduct.

Maria Constanza de Luca gives voice to such assumptions:

If Japan's enthusiasm for modernization dates back to the final decades of the nineteenth century, one must not be led to think that every aspect of it has always been agreeable and well-suited to Japanese sensitivity. It must always have been difficult for it to accept the coexistence of traditional values, even though they were already to some extent set aside, with achievements from the West which, though useful, were essentially alien. The shock of defeat in World War II caused, on the one hand, the complete failure of some traditional but by then meaningless beliefs, such as militarism and the virtues of obedience, because they were too closely linked to the dishonoured past; and it raised, on the other hand, the question of what principle should then be followed for the nation's proper growth – full modernisation, or a, for many reasons improbable, return to a “True Japan.”([Constanza De Luca 1981](#): 1)

Yet the either/or choice that De Luca posits is belied by the actual circumstances of modernization in Japan. Just as the militarist values that had been dominant in the Japan of the 1930s and 1940s drew on European models – nineteenth-century Prussian militarism, Italian and German fascism – in addition to the codes of *bushido*, so in the postwar era the coexistence of surviving elements of tradition with the “alien” constitutional achievements of the West was, however difficult to accept, a fact of life. The latter two films in Yoshimura's tetralogy enquire whether it is possible to find productive ways of reconciling modernity and tradition in the lives of individual Japanese.

De Luca claims that in modern Japan, where politics and education have begun to follow a Western model,

Tradition claims its rights more in the private sphere of inner, familiar feelings. A

Japanese can recover and realize himself anew as a person only when he is again in contact

with the reassuring steadfastness of what is worthwhile in the past of himself and his ancestors. This can be seen in the survival of ceremonies that may have lost their importance for people with different experiences, but fully maintain their meaning for those who are involved in them. I am referring to such well known arts as the tea ceremony, ikebana and bonsai, which are related to Zen spirituality. All of them help concentration and offer the possibility to their practitioners, even abroad, of regaining their own inner harmony. ([De Luca 1981](#): 3)

De Luca's argument is that traditional values, excluded from the public spheres of politics and education, remain powerful and meaningful in (but only in) the private sphere of pastimes and the arts. Implicitly, tradition can survive and be useful to its practitioners, but only at the cost of its marginalization. While this view of tradition is more positive than that expressed in *Clothes of Deception*, where even traditional art forms seem to be incriminated in the repression of female characters by conservative social systems, it excludes the possibility of a positive reconciliation between tradition and modernity in the public sphere. Yoshimura's later Kyoto-set films, I contend, advance precisely that possibility, suggesting that a traditional environment can be a fertile medium for the modern, arguably "foreign" concept of female liberation.

We have seen that Yoshimura in *Night River* dramatizes a situation whereby the liberal, Western-influenced constitutional guarantees of female rights are best served by a woman's active, professional engagement with tradition: a job, not a hobby, liberates Kiwa. In that film, the suggestion of liberation through work in a traditional profession is tentative and qualified; it becomes dominant in *A Woman's Uphill Slope*. Again, Yoshimura refers to his earlier Kyoto-set films, recapitulating certain plot elements and reversing others. The most significant reversal is the fact that *Clothes of Deception* and *Night River* include characters native to Kyoto who finally leave the city. By contrast, Akie (Okada Mariko), the heroine of *A Woman's Uphill Slope*, though a member of a Kyoto family, was raised and lives in Hakone near Tokyo, and moves to Kyoto upon inheriting the Kagimura shop and factory, which manufactures and sells traditional sweets ([Figure](#)

[5.5](#)).

Figure 5.5 Akie (Okada Mariko), a modern woman in a traditional profession in *A Woman's Uphill Slope*, 1960, Yoshimura Kozaburo, Shochiku.

The centrality of the traditional arts and culture of Kyoto to the narrative is signaled in the credits, which are interspersed with cutaways to images of its celebrated stone and moss gardens and other elements of its heritage. These are incongruously juxtaposed with the assertive modernism of composer Mayuzumi Toshiro's musical score. This contrast initiates the film's complex analysis of tradition, presented as something flexible and adaptable. The key question it poses is how tradition can adapt to modernity, and what role it has in Kyoto at the dawn of the 1960s.

It is perhaps significant that the traditional product in which the business specializes is by nature transient, because consumable. The kimono of *Night River*, even if subject to the whims of fashion, might last until the material wears out; *wagashi*, like any foodstuff, can be made to an established recipe (the business's star product, "Kyoshigure," has, we learn, been made for two hundred years), but each individual sweet must be new. The point is stressed by Akie's decision to devote herself to confectionery after her initial reluctance to do so – early in the film, she goes to study at a school for tailors and considers switching the business to dressmaking. Her rejection of this option is an acceptance of filial duty – she has gone to Kyoto at her parents' instruction – but it also conveys a specific attitude to tradition as something that must be actively revived and renewed. This attitude is conveyed in the scene where Akie reopens the long unused kitchen of the factory, and Yoshimura's camera dissolves from the cold, blackened stove to an image of the same stove, now open and flaming. There follows a fairly lengthy sequence depicting in detail the manufacture of "Kyoshigure." In this profession, where the product cannot be preserved, tradition must be constantly revitalized if it is not to disappear.

This idea of renewing tradition is reflected in the art of another character, a ceramic artist (Nakamura Ganjiro) who is one of the trustees of the business that Akie inherits. His status as heir to a lasting tradition is emphasized by his name, Kiyosei XIII, and Yoshimura stresses the

traditional aspects of his work in his first scene, where the camera tracks with the feet of a visitor past an array of old-fashioned pots on the floor. But Kiyosei proceeds to show his acquaintance an object that is distinctly modernist in design; his companion tells him that he has never seen such a design before, and Kiyosei remarks that the avant-garde sells. The partial erosion of the boundaries between tradition and modernity is reflected in the urban landscapes that Yoshimura chooses to show; although old wooden districts still predominate, there are some remarkable shots in which traditional architecture is juxtaposed with the concrete, brick, glass, and neon then becoming a feature of the old capital.

Most remarkable among these juxtapositions of tradition and modernity is the sequence in which Akie, awake late at night after her arrival in the old capital, is given a tour of the factory by an elderly servant. Yoshimura marks the importance of this scene by opting for an unusually stylized use of framing and lighting. For most of the scene, the lantern that the servant carries is the primary or sole source of ambient light, so that sharply defined areas of light and shade give the shots a near-expressionistic ambience. In this wan light, Akie explores the building; suddenly the set is dramatically illuminated by red and blue light filtering from outside through the translucent paper of the *shoji*. Akie pulls back the *shoji* and peers outside (the camera tilts to a striking expressionistic diagonal to imitate the leaning angle of her head), and we cut to a flashing neon-lit concrete tower and two metal aerials, which contrast strikingly with the old wooden building containing the factory. Sugiyama Heiichi, in his *Kinema Junpo* review, describes this scene and comments on its recapitulating the experimentation with color that Yoshimura had attempted in *Night River* but does not explore the function of Yoshimura's experimentation ([Sugiyama 1960](#): 83). In fact, the employment of this kind of visual rhetoric in a generally naturalistic film suggests the symbolic importance of the scene, which emphasizes that tradition and modernity now coexist in Kyoto.

Likewise, the character of Akie herself blurs the customary distinction between traditional and modern woman. It is significant that she is played by Okada Mariko, an actress whose association

with liberated and modern female characterizations Yoshimura's film helped to cement (she was subsequently to star in a number of implicitly and explicitly feminist New Wave films directed by her husband, Yoshida Kiju). She is introduced in a situation of surprisingly masculine connotations – driving a three-wheel truck along a country road. Her clothing underlines her status as an ostensibly modern, Westernized young woman: in contrast to the kimono sported by her mother Keiko (Otowa Nobuko), she wears a smart Western-style jacket, brightly coloured sweater and scarf, and blue jeans. She quaffs, direct from the bottle, a soft drink whose dark hue evokes that archetypal symbol of Americanization, Coca-Cola. In Kyoto, her efforts to repopularize the traditional product involve adopting modern methods such as advertising and delivery by car – twentieth-century technology and the methods of postwar capitalism are enlisted in the service of tradition. In one scene late in the film she comments directly that “tradition is very important, but so is innovation”; here, again, the two are regarded as complementary. Akie, like Taeko in *Clothes of Deception*, is characterized by her mobility – her freedom to navigate the city by car and bicycle. But while Taeko's freedom was somewhat circumscribed – her bicycle only carries her to and from work, and she is obliged to leave the city in order to escape its moral and social strictures – Akie's ability to navigate the city is more decisively liberating, permitting her to revitalize the business and, in turn, allowing her the option of sustaining a career. It is notable that, while Taeko merely *rides* a bicycle, Akie in one scene actually *repairs* a car. The image of her emerging from underneath the vehicle, spanner in hand with blouse and face stained with oil, again imbues the character with conventionally masculine connotations. Moreover, the vehicle is used to make deliveries and painted with the name of the business; Akie's repair work here seems a microcosm of the way in which her intervention restores the business to commercial success.

Among the film's most remarkable attributes, indeed, is its progressive attitude to the heroine's status as a working woman. Like *Night River, A Woman's Uphill Slope* dramatizes a woman's personal and professional life; like Kiwa, Akie opts for an affair with a married man, the artist Yaoi (Sada Keiji), who is visiting Kyoto to sketch geisha. Again, like Kiwa, Akie renounces him, and

again the choice is motivated by moral considerations rather than social stigma. Just as Kiwa's affection for her lover's daughter motivated her renunciation, so Akie leaves Yaoi after visiting his family's home in Tokyo. Here, Yoshimura conveys an emotional transition through a variation on an Ozu-like pillow shot. The image of washing hanging out to dry, recurring in Ozu films from *Tokyo no korasu* (*Tokyo Chorus*, 1931) to *Sanma no aji* (*An Autumn Afternoon*, 1962), is used to refocus the attention of audiences from the drama to the inanimate world. In Yoshimura's film, however, the shot of washing on the line has a direct narrative significance: the clothes that Akie sees are those of Yaoi's children, and the image is juxtaposed with the offscreen sound of Yaoi's wife calling the children to lunch. Yoshimura uses a pillow shot not to distance the viewer from the action, but to crystallize that viewer's sense of a character's motivation.

Yoshimura and Shindo consciously present Akie's life choices as one of several possible paths open to women in the Japan of 1960. Various subplots dramatize alternative choices and ways of life made and accepted by other women. Yaoi has come to Kyoto to sketch geisha; thus, the film juxtaposes Akie with another kind of working woman in the old capital. Akie describes geisha as "beautiful, but such a tradition-bound profession"; yet although they are a peripheral presence, the film problematizes the notion of their being "tradition-bound." While modeling for Yaoi, a geisha is offered a drink and requests the distinctly modern, Western-inspired beverage of "fruit punch." This scene economically highlights the ambiguities in the film's conception of what it means to be a traditional woman.

Akie's position is more clearly thrown into relief by comparison with other female characters. Akie's mother Keiko seems early in the film to be a relatively minor figure, existing mainly to impel Akie to accept her inheritance. However, it later transpires that in her youth she was herself briefly Yaoi's lover, renouncing him when her parents instructed her to marry another man. Thus, although mother and daughter both finally reject the artist as a lover, their motives in doing so diverge. Akie's mother acted out of filial duty, in accordance with tradition; Akie's decision is not taken under coercion, but is personal in impetus, inspired by her private sense of morality.

The complexity of the film's depiction of female experience is deepened in that Akie's experiences are narrated in parallel with those of two other women of her own generation, who opt for contrasting paths. One of these is Chiho (Takachiho Hizuru), daughter of the potter Kiyosei, who, like Kiwa's sister Miyo in *Night River*, opts for marriage and family. The fact that she is also a member of a family active in the traditional arts makes the parallel more precise, placing greater emphasis on the divergent options chosen by each woman. The contrast is driven home when Chiho, after her marriage, tells Akie: "I used to think pottery was my love – but a real man's better." Akie, by contrast, makes confectionery her first love after deciding not to pursue her affair with Yaoi. Except insofar as Akie, not Chiho, is the film's heroine, Yoshimura and Shindo do not suggest that the decisions made by one woman are to be preferred to those made by the other. To borrow Robin Wood's phrase, both achieve "self-determination within the available possibilities" (Wood 1976: 243). Akie's comment before Chiho's wedding that the heavy makeup must itch might be interpreted as a mild implicit criticism of her decision, but it may merely suggest Akie's personal desire not to marry. The contrasting choices of the two women are expressive of their divergent characters.

Figure 5.6 Three women and the changing face of Kyoto in *A Woman's Uphill Slope*.

The actions of the third young woman, however, are subjected to criticism, through which Yoshimura indicts the more oppressive elements of Japanese tradition. Yumi (Kochi Momoko), another friend of Akie, has also been involved in an unhappy romance: the prospective bridegroom's parents disapprove of the match. The circumstances resemble Taeko's in *Clothes of Deception*; the fact that Yumi's lover, like Taeko's, works for the municipal government strengthens the parallel. The resolution of the two stories, however, is very different: while Taeko's romance finally reaches a happy ending, Yumi ultimately takes her own life in a suicide pact (*shinju*) with her lover. This is, indeed, a "traditional" ending; as Yaoi observes, "it has been the stuff of plays for hundreds of years." Yumi's choices have been tragically circumscribed by expectations shaped by

traditional narratives of female conduct, of which the film seems sharply critical. Yet Yoshimura also evokes, with more positive implications, a recent, living tradition of film narrative. If the director has been called an heir to Mizoguchi, then this narrative, echoing the romantic tragedies of *Yuki fujin ezu* (*Portrait of Madame Yuki*, 1950) and *Musashino fujin* (*The Lady from Musashino*, 1952), might be taken as a deliberate recapitulation of Mizoguchian themes. *Portrait of Madame Yuki* (a title arguably evoked in Yumi's similar name) ends with the heroine's friend rebuking her for her cowardice after her suicide; similarly, Yumi's fate contrasts with Akie's response to her own plight. Akie explicitly rejects the option of suicide, declaring: "Unlike Yumi, I won't die for love. I'm stronger than that. I'll dedicate myself to work. I'll make the best sweets ever." As soon as she has delivered this line, Yoshimura cuts to the Kagimura kitchen, where we see her hard at work, shaping dough into individual sweets, her apron stained with the residue of the sweet-making process. Professional fulfilment is her salvation.

This resolution reverses the ending of *Clothes of Deception*, in which the geisha Kimicho resolved to leave the trade, and the modern Kyoto woman left for Tokyo. Here Akie accepts her position within the traditional industry and finds fulfilment in her work there. But the film does not resolve the central paradox of Yoshimura's Kyoto. The city's traditional culture, as Yumi's fate shows, can still be repressive; yet it is through work in a traditional industry that Akie finds comfort and liberation.

Conclusion

The changing attitudes towards tradition in Yoshimura's postwar work arguably reflect changes in the cultural situation within Japan over the ten-year period they span. The difference in tone between *Clothes of Deception* on the one hand, and both *Night River* and *A Woman's Uphill Slope* on the other, can obviously be ascribed in part to the differences in subject matter: *Clothes of Deception* focuses on a woman whose occupation is repressive and demeaning, while the latter two films focus on women working in respectable professions. Nevertheless, the choice of subject matter is itself significant: the switch from the depiction of geisha to the depiction of women

working, with a measure of autonomy, in traditional crafts, enacts a reevaluation of native tradition, and may be related to the specific historical circumstances of the time.

While *Clothes of Deception* was produced in the context of a foreign occupation that was actively encouraging Westernization at the expense of local traditions, the poised outlook of *Night River* expresses the ambiguous position of a newly independent, yet still modernizing and Westernizing Japan. Subsequently, the predominantly positive attitude to native tradition in *A Woman's Uphill Slope* may speak for its production at a time of resurgent anti-American sentiment. After all, 1960 was the year in which Japan was convulsed by demonstrations against the ratification of the Anpo Security Treaty with the United States. But the ambiguity of the latter film, in which tradition is instrumental in a woman's moral regeneration yet also implicated in a suicide, is unsurprising in view of the fact that Westernization was still preceding, both in terms of changing attitudes and in the changing architectural textures of Japanese cities, a change visibly acknowledged in *A Woman's Uphill Slope*. The continuing ambiguity should caution us against oversimplifying the trajectory of Yoshimura's evolving attitude to Kyoto and to Japanese tradition. His work explores conflicting narratives and poses questions, rather than offering answers, about the values embodied by the city. In depicting the experiences of women in the old capital, Yoshimura engages in a complex and unresolved exploration of the relation of women to tradition and modernity.

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¹ For a discussion of the concept of *ryosai kenbo* in English, see [Uno 1991](#): 38–39. In Japanese, see [Koyama 1991](#).

² For a discussion of the ambiguous role of the geisha and the history of the institution, see [Dougill 2006](#): 173–196, and [Downer 2000](#).

³ For a contemporary account of the first ten years of Daiei's operation, see (1951) *Daiei junenshi*. There is also useful material on Daiei's Kyoto studio in Hayashi 2007, a sound engineer's autobiographical account of his work at Daiei. In English, the most detailed account of the studio's work during the early postwar years is still that found in Anderson and Richie, *passim*.

⁴ *Undercurrent* is the title on the circulating Japan Foundation subtitled print, but the film is referred to as *Night River* in some English-language literature. Hence, I have chosen to use the more literal translation. Nevertheless, the English title "Undercurrent" effectively conveys the sense of repressed or hidden emotion at the heart of the film's drama.