

Theatrical Tradition and Japanese Cinema: Dramatic Artifice and Screen Realism in Kenji Mizoguchi's Theatre Trilogy (1939–1941)

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This paper will examine the influence of Japanese theatrical tradition on Japanese cinema. The work will begin with a survey of the influence of the traditional theatre on the early cinema of Japan, and how cinema adapted theatrical tropes to offer a form of entertainment which although new, allowed audiences to recognise the formalities of reportage and storytelling. This will be addressed by examining narration, and the role that both the benshi and kowairo, had on film production in the early part of the 20th Century. Benshi and Kowairo were a crucial element of early cinema, and for a number of years arguably became the main attraction at cinemas across the nation. It is important to address their role, and to question just how influential were they in deciding studio output. The paper will then go on to explore how both the modern (literature, shimpa theatre), and traditional (kabuki, bunraku, noh), informs a specifically Japanese film style, which relies heavily on these specifically Japanese art-forms. Finally, the work will undertake a close textual reading of Kenji Mizoguchi's 1939 film *Zangiku Monogatari*. Mizoguchi employed theatrical forms and subjects, particularly in his theatre trilogy (1939–1941). An analysis of this film in particular, will serve to illustrate how Japanese theatrical symbolism and stagecraft work as potent signifiers within a culturally specific film style. A culturally-informed analysis of the range and function of these theatrical devices enables a comprehensive appreciation of one of the director's most theatrically reliant films.

Japanese Theatre, Japanese Film

In his book *Japanese Cinema*, Donald Richie assesses the place of the theatre in Japanese cinema. Surprisingly, Richie remarks:

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

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

silent era and their persistence was remarkable well into the 1930s. Let us now explore the legacy of these theatrical traditions in more detail.

Theatrical Traditions and the Japanese Cinema

The Japanese cinema, like its counterpart in the west, plundered its own literary heritage for source material and narrative devices. Among these literary models it was the theatre that was predominant, especially the contemporary theatre dramas of shimpa. Many novels were adapted for the cinema through the intermediate process of a stage incarnation, and traditional kabuki plays were often influenced by the earlier bunraku (puppet theatre). The intertextual nature of various Japanese art-forms, both traditional and contemporary, provided a wealth of stories for the early film-makers. There is also a strong cinematic relationship with the theatre in terms of both style as during the advent of film in Japan, directors emulated the theatrical experience stylistically, with a fixed camera filming scenes from the same perspective as a theatre audience. Regarding performance, film actors wore kabuki theatrical costumes, traditional make-up and conventionally female characters were portrayed by male actors or oyama. The characters never made contact during fight scenes; when a character suffered an on-screen death, it was usual for them to perform a backward somersault out of shot. Another characteristic derived from kabuki was that when emphasising an important moment in the film, the action would freeze. These theatrical techniques, mannerisms and styles had a profound effect upon the emergent aesthetics of the Japanese cinema. In interview, Sawato Midori summarised the influence of theatre on the development of film:

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

Japanese films showed kabuki itself with no close-ups and with a camera shooting from a distance with the whole stage in shot. What is interesting here is because it is kabuki, the actors' movements are very stylised. So, in the 1910s, while Griffith and other people were experimenting with montage or doing something new, in Japan, we still had oyama.

The acting was not realistic at all, but very much akin to the kabuki style (personal communication, September 19, 2010).

Thus, for the first two decades, it pursued a path that was distinct from the trajectory of its western counterpart.

Cinematic Narration

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

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

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

A benshi would usually stand behind a lectern by the cinema's screen, explaining the events, commentating on the characters and sometimes making sound effects. Of

course, the benshi had their western counterparts, but the role was retained longer in Japan than anywhere else (2004, p. 40).

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

The endurance of the benshi role can be explained by these powerful traditional influences from kabuki theatre, in which the narrator was a central figure. Komatsu explains the effects of kowairo and benshi on the development of cinematic narration thus: “Responding to the meanings always provided from the outside, the narratives freely attach themselves to the images in these films. This open ended early Japanese cinema kept the western concept of fiction at a distance” (1992, p. 240). However, some critics argue that the cinema’s reliance on a strict kabuki narrative relayed the benshi, arguably had adverse effects. Many films were shot with benshi in mind, which, it has been suggested, suppressed the advancement of more sophisticated camera techniques and retarded the development of visual narration. In this way, Richie claims, that early Japanese cinema “lagged ten years behind that of the west” (1965, p. 16). Modern-day Japanese benshi Sawato Midori takes issue with this view:

People who say that benshi was the cause of such a lag are coming from a western point of view; this is why I cannot agree. Japan had its own way of filmic development and we had our unique expression ... In foreign films such methods did not matter so much; they sought realism. In Japan we cared more about theatrical style; when you compare with foreign films of the period, the kind of expression that we had in Japan was unique ... Benshi performed on structured and unrealistic films which were based on a totally differ-

ent concept to that of western films. There was also a band playing music. This kind of performance was probably exclusive to Japan at this time (personal communication, September 19, 2010).

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

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

Benshi commentary was not restricted to Japanese films and when western films were shown in Japan, it was the benshi's job primarily was to explain and translate the inter-titles. However this translation role was often augmented with disquisitions about western clothing, technology, the weather, or hairstyles, and these digressions often became of more interest to the audience than the film itself.

Therefore it can be clearly seen through the roles of certain players, that Japanese theatrical tradition had a major influence upon early Japanese cinema with regard to the structure of performance. The manner in which films were shot (as a stage), the subject matter and the staff involved ensured that there was a strong relationship between the two media. Finally the storytellers themselves, the kowairo and the untouchable benshi effectively carried on the traditions established by the narrators of traditional theatre. These early examples assist us in pinpointing certain relationships between the theatre and the cinema in terms of production and presentation.

Theatrical Adaptations

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

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

As I have suggested, such self-conscious incorporation of theatrical devices within cinema can be traced back to its origins. However, some in the nascent film industry reacted against the persistence of kabuki and bunraku traditions and sought to exploit the contemporary realism of shimpa. Shimpa (new wave theatre) troupes had begun to form during the early

1900s, and “made use of modern settings for a wide range of plays, with comedy and suspense among them. The shimpa mainstay, however, was melodrama, most often derived from domestic novels of unrequited love (McDonald, 1994, p. 24). McDonald further notes that the Nikkatsu company, formed in 1912, “became an early major studio thanks to a repertory of stereotypical tear-jerkers” (1994, p. 24). Despite its influential position, Nikkatsu were, however, “slow to replace its female impersonators with actresses”, which became a bone of contention for many film modernisers who had an eye on developments in the west. Drama critic Oka Kitaro complained “a film captures ‘reality’ ... Props, costumes, and settings are all real, but the female impersonator we have moving against this realistic background is unreal, and out of balance with the rest” (in McDonald, 1994, p. 25). Nikkatsu eventually only cast women in 1928, following the strike which precipitated the benshi demise. “Interestingly”, McDonald observes, “the rival Shochiku Company (established in 1920), [and] noted for its innovative approach for cinema, used ‘real’ actresses from the outset” (1994, p. 26).

Kenji Mizoguchi and Screen Adaptation

It was in the midst of these arguments about theatrical tradition and modernity, Japanese essentialism and western influence, dramatic artifice and screen realism, that Kenji Mizoguchi began his film career. In his first picture as director, *Ai Ni Yomigaeru Hi* (*The Resurrection of Love*, 1923), representations of adultery, illicit love affairs and suicide resulted in the film being considerably censored (Andrew and Andrew, 1981, p. 43). He also reworked the noh play *Dojoji* as *Joan no Chimata* (*City of Desire*, 1923). This was a story based on *Anchin*, *Kiyohime Densetsu* and (*The Legend of the Monk and Princess Kiyo*), which appeared in several stories dating back to the eighth century. The play has been seen and performed through many artistic media including bunraku, kabuki, jōruri (bunraku narration), and cinema. Among the eleven films Mizoguchi completed in his debut year, he also made film adaptations of western literature such as Maurice le Blanc’s *813* (*813: The Adventures of Arsène Lupin*, 1923), Jack Boyle’s *The Night* (*Yoru*, 1923) and Hoffman’s *Fraulein von Scuderi*, (*Chi to Rei*, 1923).

As his career developed, Mizoguchi used theatrical scenarios, or scenes set in or around theatres, actors, performers or plays in a number of films such as: *Kyokubadan no Jo* (*Queen of the Circus*, 1924) which is set in a cosmopolitan circus, *Kyoren no Onna Shisho*, (*The Passion of*

a *Woman Teacher*, 1926) with Sakai Yoneko playing the role of a drama teacher, and a number of shimpa melodramas at Daiichi and Shinko. However his move from Shinko Kinema to Shochiku Ofuna in 1939 heralded a trilogy of theatrical films which achieved considerable success, most notably, *Zangiku Monogatari*.

Zangiku Monogatari was based on a recent popular stage success which Mizoguchi, newly arrived at Shochiku studios, was keen to exploit. Based on a serial by Muramatsu Shofu and adapted for the stage by Iwaya Shinichi, this shimpa tragedy follows the lives of a kabuki theatre troupe. From the outset, Mizoguchi had a vision for the project, and as McDonald reports, when it came to casting, the director “insisted that no one but the famed kabuki actor Hanayagi Shotaro could play the hero” (1984, p. 56). This presented a considerable challenge for the seasoned performer since, at over forty, he had to play the twenty year-old Onoe Kikunosuke. Regular collaborator, screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda reports that Hanayagi brought along to a Tokyo screen-test a photograph of himself in his twenties and said to Mizoguchi: “If you can shoot me looking like this, I will give you everything I have.” But no amount of make-up or costume could disguise the problem. Mizoguchi suggested his performance be shot from a distance. In a comment that says much about Mizoguchi’s preferred shooting style, he complained that “audiences are tired of the 50mm lens, why should we not shoot in wide-angle”? His regular cinematographer Miki Shigeto readily agreed. Yoda recalls that it was the necessity created by this conundrum, and its solution, that really confirmed Mizoguchi’s faith in the one-scene-one-shot method (Yoda, 1970, pp. 95–96).

In *Zangiku Monogatari*, the effect is to recreate the space of the stage on which to record Hanayagi’s vital physical performance. According to Yoda, Mizoguchi wanted to draw out the best of the actors’ talent which shone on stage, rather than make him struggle to act like a film actor. Above all, it must be kabuki. For Mizoguchi, it was only by capturing the intensity of Hanayagi’s performance framed in long shot that a harmonious *mise en scène* could be achieved (1970, p. 96). Whilst the veteran actor had the experience to pull this off, casting his co-star to play the heroine Otoku, proved more difficult. Yoda observed that, “in general the film actors were so used to having many cuts, that this style of shooting tested their ability. They were not accustomed to acting continuously as you would on stage. This was especially true for actresses who had entered straight into film, because it was very rare that they had

the kind of acting training required, since there was no tradition of them performing in theatre (1970, p. 98). Thus, at least one audition for the female lead, that of Kitami Reiko, ended in tears under Mizoguchi's characteristically exacting demands, before Mori Kakuko got the part.

Zangiku Monogatari

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

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

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

We are then informed by means of an inter-title that four years have passed, and Kiku, who we last saw full of life and hope, has been eroded into a tired, washed up travelling actor, living in poor conditions. The company is on the verge of collapse and Kiku becomes violent towards Otoku. The scene in which he demands money is in striking contrast to the caring and devoted character we saw previously. It is also strange how quickly Kiku reverts back to his earlier self. Otoku hears that his old Tokyo troupe is performing in nearby Nagoya. She secretly visits the troupe's leaders and requests that Kiku be given another chance. This request is accepted, on the condition that if Kiku is good enough, then Otoku must end the marriage. Otoku returns to the modest hostel with Kiku's old friend Nakamura Fucusuke (Takada Kokichi), who requests that he come and try in the Nagoya performance. Kiku is a resounding success and Otoku realises that they are no longer to be together. Kiku returns to Tokyo, but Otoku is not aboard the train and the troupe members reveal the deal that they had made. In ill health, she returns to their house, her sadness at their parting is tempered, characteristically, by her sense of satisfaction for the self-sacrifice she has made.

Returning to Tokyo, Kiku is a huge success and is welcomed back by his family. This acceptance from both fellow actors and audience is crucial in the world of theatre and central to kabuki performance. As Thornbury notes: "There are few examples in world theatre where role types are so central to the dramatic art and developed with such complexity as they are in Kabuki" (1977, p. 35). The family troupe visit Osaka for the Tenjin Matsuri, an annual festival held in Osaka. The highlight is the boat parade on the Okawa River (also known as Yodogawa), and this event opens their season of performances in the city. Before Tenjin Matsuri commences, Kiku is informed of Otoku's whereabouts. His father overhears and tells him to go and fetch her, as his struggles and experiences have enabled him to mature as an actor. Kiku

rushes to the bed-ridden Otoku. She explains why she abandoned him, and he replies that his father has accepted her as part of the family. Proud to call Kiku her husband once more, she sends him off to take his place in the procession.

As Kiku greets the onlookers amid festival music and cheers, Otoku passes away. At that very moment, the camera returns to a solemn Kiku, who bows respectfully, as if with the knowledge of her death. The ending solidifies the connection between Otoku and Kiku. Like many of Mizoguchi's other male characters, Kiku is left to a life of contemplation. Saso views the ending differently however, noting that it is "cold, cruel and abnormal". He suggests that these events

reflect Mizoguchi's anger towards the rigidity of kabuki society. If you look deeper at the scene, you could argue that this is Mizoguchi challenging everything that he had previously portrayed, including the lives of the characters. They have bowed to the pressure of tradition (Saso, 2006, p. 107).

Zangiku Monogatari is a harsh critique of the social order which is amplified by its setting in the formulaic world of kabuki. As Sato notes, such rigidity is characteristic of rien (the closed world of kabuki):

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

As performers in the public eye, it is crucial that these unwritten laws of behaviour and expectation are maintained to ensure the future success and stability of the troupe. As is usual in a Mizoguchi drama, the film depicts forbidden romantic liaison between members of different classes, highlighting the difficult circumstances they must overcome and the sacrifices that must be made to keep order. Again, as is typical, the major decision is taken by the

female of the partnership (in this case Otoku, who decides to give up her love for Kiku's success). Characteristically, women are the catalysts of change. As with so many of Mizoguchi's films, a beautiful woman sacrifices herself for her love. But through this sacrifice we are forcefully reminded of the ineluctable power of Japanese societal demands and of the Japanese proverb bijin hakumei (a beautiful woman does not have a fortunate life). The sacrifice that Otoku makes to ensure Kiku's success is one which is rooted in the nature of the Japanese woman.

McDonald reports that *Zangiku Monogatari* won Mizoguchi an Education Ministry award and the chance to serve on the National Film Committee. Emboldened by this establishment approval, in July 1940 he set about a second film with a theatrical subject, in what was now planned as a trilogy (McDonald, 1984, p. 60). *Naniwa Onna* (*The Woman of Osaka*, 1940) is about the life of a bunraku shamisen musician, who falls ill and is nursed to recovery by the daughter of his co-performer, Ochika, played by Tanaka Kinuyo. This was Tanaka's first role for Mizoguchi and she brings to the character of Ochika, "a strong-willed wisdom and leadership" (McDonald, 1984, p. 61). During the difficult scripting process which was a Mizoguchi original crafted by Yoda, commentators report that through draft after draft Ochika became closer in character to his own troubled wife, Chieko (Andrew and Andrew, 1981, pp. 12–13). Sato further notes that "Ochika's character appears to be inseparable from Mizoguchi's own memories ... someone who relies deeply on a woman" (2008, p. 84). *Naniwa Onna* is a lost film, as is the final film of the trilogy *Geido Ichidai Otoko* (*The Life of an Actor*, 1941). This story, about the life of an illegitimate son of a kabuki actor, was considered inappropriate for war-time audiences. In a 1954 interview with *Kinema Junpo*, Mizoguchi recorded his disappointment, conceding that studio pressure restricted his freedom. The finished product was the best he could do under difficult industrial and political circumstances (1954, p. 52).

Nonetheless, films set in the theatrical world not only drew upon Japanese traditions which were likely to gain official approval at this time, but also represent Mizoguchi's microcosmic worlds circumscribed by its own accentuated practices, traditions, colourful characters and symbolic resonance.

Conclusion

Through this type of melodrama Mizoguchi is able to offer an audience a view much like the *shimpa* play. He is able to represent modern life and the struggles that accompany it in a setting which is heavily influenced by traditional theatre. Particularly in the films which cover the early parts of the 1930s and 1950s, this can be seen quite clearly in regard to both performance and *mise en scène*. To suggest, as Richie does, that the theatre has not had a discernable influence on filmmaking in Japan is especially contentious. As this work has established, the theatre has had a prominent and influential role on many levels, from style to narration, performance to shooting style. The paper has referred to a number of key works by a variety of directors, particularly Kurosawa, Ichikawa, Shinoda and of course Mizoguchi. It was argued that the theatre has provided crucial source material for film directors, which began during the silent era, and continued well into the post-war cinema. By highlighting Mizoguchi, the paper argued that Mizoguchi explicitly drew upon the rich and diverse heritage of Japanese theatre in a number of ways. He references theatrical forms, employs dramatic symbolism and incorporates stage devices at the level of film style, theme and narrative.

The recognisable tropes of the theatre serve both to heighten the emotional intensity of adaptations and melodramas. They promote a self-reflexive engagement with both artistic and social critique. In this way, theatrical allusions serve as an important technique in elaborating a heightened, melodramatic *mise en scène*.

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