

WAR MEMORY AND MIZOGUCHI'S FILM

*Fumie Yatagai**

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the Japanese film director called Kenji Mizoguchi who worked not only the making films but gave the caricature impact to the Japanese society. He was touching with the Japanese philosophy and spirit before and after the World War II.

He described the common life of the Japanese life, especially tracing on how the women were dis-treated because of the context of the machismo in the public and at home. Also, the women were prohibited to have good education. The Japanese women at that time had a harsh moment to find their identity.

For instance, as I experienced the poverty and discriminations just to be a women, Mizoguchi's film encouraged me and opened a door to the new life.

INTRODUCTION

After 300 years of exclusion of foreigners since seventeenth century, Japan had a great effort to learn and absorb the technology of powerful countries such as Europe and America. Since Japan participated in the World War I (1914-18) in the month of August, the political and economic relationship between Japan and the Western countries was enhanced and diplomatic negotiations with the West European countries started to be further accelerated. On the basis of the economic power gained by supplying weapons to the war-participant countries and the

* Mr. Yatagai is an Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Journalism and Communication, University of Madras, Chennai, India

development of heavy industries, Japan in this period started changing from the agriculture-centered system to industry-centered system.

Inflow of people from farming regions to cities increased the population of city consumers, which led to the appearance of a new working class people in the city areas who wished for new popular entertainment. The new popular entertainment was nothing but film. The concept "Lewisian Turning Point" which was proposed by Arthur Lewis, an English Economist in the year 1945, became popular in the country. According to this concept, when there is a lack of opportunity for the laborer in the industry, the capitalist may give them job; however, reduce the payment for the laborer. The laborers change their profession of agriculture to industrial workers. In case of Japan, a good number of villagers who were doing farming became city laborers.

However, the prosperity in the industrial arena and giving up of agriculture in the villages led to the surplus of labor population. Later, due to the Great Depression of economy, Japan took its route towards the World War II (1939-45) along its imperial mission. The reason is that the laborers, who did not get job in the Japanese cities, had to leave the country and go to other Asian countries for the sake of labor. Japan's trade in the Asian countries and the desire to colonize the Asian countries led them towards Asian Hegemony. It is the reason that the most of the Japanese did not object their government joining a war because they had been living in feudalism and patriarchal society.

The twentieth century was the era of wars. In particular, the WW II destructed numerous cities in Japan. Many cities in Japan, except Kyoto and Hokkaido, were bombed by the US Army. Because of this almost all areas in Japan were destructed by fire. After the end of the war, the US Army occupied Japan and established and reformed the constitution of Japan. Since Japan was bombarded twice by nuclear

bomb attack, we Japanese had to reconstruct and rehabilitate our life from a pile of ruins. Japanese worked very hard with a desire to build up the country. The revolution of development started from nothing.

At the same time, Japan had developed the feeling of extreme nationalism and started the invasion to other Asian countries under the slogan of Asian hegemony. As a result of Japanese invasion, the culture and life of the people became miserable in China, Korea and Taiwan during this period.

Now, I introduce a Japanese film director, Kenji Mizoguchi, who worked throughout Japan during this period. He has described the mentality and philosophy of Japanese through his film from the pre-war to post-war period.

In the period of pre-war, Mizoguchi made a film called '*The Osaka Elegy*' in the year 1936. This film was directed by Mizoguchi and it was produced by the Daiichi Eiga. The story of the movie revolves around the suffering father; the young daughter quits the job of telephone operator and begins to work as a prostitute. Immediately after she fails to repay the debt, she returns home but her father and brother did not warmly receive her. Therefore, she once again gets out of the family and lives all alone. She develops an innate impulse to go back home.

Through this movie, Mizoguchi portrays a woman who has lost place to live in the family, a woman who is standing alone at the time of difficulties in resistance to the patriarchy ideology of Japanese society. She, at last, brings herself to a great ruin. There is no warm-hearted family existing in the themes of many of Mizoguchi's works in this period.

Mizoguchi himself was brought up in a feudalistic and a patriarchal family. The heroines in his films in their depressions rely on their fates. In the same period, he also made a film entitled "*The 47 Ronin*," It recounts a historical event in the backdrop of imperial influence in the

East. He encouraged the Japanese government towards war, Considering it a necessity. Indeed, it was obvious that Japanese government in this period forced all directors to make films and stories which prompt the war; it was only Mizoguchi who recaptures the Japan's motivation to war. Other film directors were producing only action movies during this period.

However, after the war, Mizoguchi shifted his style. Let us analyze the new style through the movie '*Women of the night*'. The heroine of this film lives in Osaka, and her child is killed in an air raid. She also loses her husband in the war. In a great despair, she sells herself for money. Later, she meets her sister who came back from North Korea and works as a night club dancer. While they live together, they face severe problems from the male members of society. Hence, they determine to take revenge on all men. In order to take revenge, they become prostitutes. One day, they find out the heroine's sister-in-law, who also turns herself as a prostitute. At the last scene of this film, these women begin a new life and return to the society. However, there is no hope that they can come back to normal life. Ordinary women at that period, like the heroine, have no technical skill because they did not go to school or colleges. As a result, they do not get appropriate professions. It was after the defeat of the WW II under the advice of U.S. occupation forces that it was assured of the equality of man and woman in Japan. The constitution of Japan was adopted accordingly.

The social status of Japanese women in the past was limited and it was categorized to wife (housekeeper), daughter (helper of the housekeeper), concubine, and harlot. Working women, such as typist, or telephone operator, were advanced-thinking women, but they were not accepted by the majority of men. In such a situation, heroines in Mizoguchi's film go against the society and deny the past traditions in which women were subordinated. Mizoguchi sensibly picked up the important elements in the Japanese society and portrayed them in his

films. He became one of the earliest directors who describe new types of women during this period.

Although there is no consistent thought reflected in Mizoguchi's film, he appropriates theme with people's needs and expectations in visual representation. Now, after his death, when we have the overall view of his works, he explores what the Japanese people were expecting from pre-war to post-war. In Japanese history, it was the period that people faced most drastic change in their mindsets. It is very vivid that the works of Mizoguchi mirrored the condition and situation of Japan.

Here, I would like to pen down my own experience of war. There was a great misery and difficulty in my life due to WW II. When my father was working in North Korea as a doctor, I lost my 3-year-old brother due to the bombing of North Korea by Soviet Union. Due to the bombing of Soviet, they had to escape to Manchu, a district of China on 8 August, 1945. It took a month to reach Manchu on foot. In Manchu, they were taken as prisoners for 3 years by Maoist army only because they were Japanese. They did not have good enough to sustain their lives while living under the threat of Maoist Army. It was after the potential victory of Chiang Kaishek in the civil war of China, they could come back to Japan. My father began to work again as a doctor in a government hospital; however, the salary was 1,000 rupees while 1kg of rice would cost 300 rupees. My mother collected the fish which the fisherman threw down. She also knitted sweater by hand and sold it to make money. We could hardly survive without food and clothes. It is a very sad memory of my family.

For Japanese who undergo a miserable situation, films have been good sources of entertainment. Films give a hope to live and create dreams for better lives. Though Mizoguchi's films were sophisticated, yet it comes up with creative and social themes. Thus, it won numerous awards during the film festival of Vanezia for three subsequent years.

After the defeat of WW II, Japan took loans from IMF, World Bank and America. Especially, Japan received food supply from America. Japanese government spent all loan for infrastructures. Later, due to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950s, the US placed an order of materials from Japan, so Japan obtained special procurements. This boom swept across Japan. Japanese worked really hard to have a good food and pursue better life. Even today, Japanese cannot stop working hard for a better quality of life. Our working time is not from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. It is from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. We never leave the workplace until the task is completed. This has motivated to bring a complete socio-economic transformation.

WORKS CITED

- Hideo Kobayashi (2010). *Review of Japanese Modern and Current History*. Tokyo: Shinnihon Oraisha.
- Akira Imatani (1978). *The Historical View of Civilization in the Feudalism*. Tokyo: PHP.
- William Arthur Lewis (1976) *Evolution of the International Economic Order*, Kenzo Mizukami trans. Tokyo: Bunkashobo Hakubunsha.
- Hideo Thumura (1977). *A Man Called Kenji Mizoguchi*, Tokyo: Haga Shoten.
- Tadao Sato (1982). *The World of Kenji Mizoguchi*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo.