



**JAPAN 2021: 100 YEARS OF JAPANESE CINEMA**

# **My Love Has Been Burning (Waga koi wa moenu)**

*My Love Has Been Burning* has in more ways than one a central position in Mizoguchi's suite of feminist films of the late '40s and early '50s, which stretches from *The Victory of Women* to *The Life of Oharu*. The film is drawn from the autobiography of Hideko Kageyama, a late 19th century pioneer in the fight for women's rights in Japan. Kageyama's book *Mekake no Hanshogai* (*Half a Lifetime as a Mistress*), provides the model for the film's central character, much of the contemporary political background, and a number of the film's plot details. In her book, Kageyama presents herself as a woman who behaved in as masculine a fashion as possible; Mizoguchi's chief departure from his source was, therefore, his *feminisation* of his own character Eiko Hirayama.

The notion of party politics had a long and difficult struggle to gain acceptance in Japan. The first attempts to form organisations in opposition to the national government were widely viewed as something like treason against the state, not least because they came hard on the heels of the Seinan civil war (background to the action of Mizoguchi's *Oyuki the Virgin*). The national government under the Emperor Meiji was very well aware that Japan was backward by international standards, and felt that only strong, patriarchal rule could bring the country up to a level of modernity and prosperity commensurate with western countries.

Liberal demands for representative government countered by asserting that such a reform was essential in any programme to *modernise* Japan. Early support for them was scattered but the strong nationalist bias of their argument won over more and more of the Japanese middle class, many of whom were benefitting from the introduction of compulsory education in 1872. But police raids on early political campaign meetings (such as are seen in the opening scene of the film) did actually occur quite often.

The first group that organised itself into a small political party was the *Jiyuto* (Freedom Party; the English term 'liberal' is a more accurate translation, but its connotations are distinctly misleading). It was fundamentally a party of middle-class capitalists anxious to defend their own interests, although many of its younger members were vocal on the subjects of citizen's rights in general and women's rights in particular. The *Jiyuto* was joined in 1881 by the *Kaishinto* (Progressive Party), founded by ex-government member Shigenonu Okuma, which had an even stronger capitalist bias. The two *opposition* parties were as hostile to each other as to the national government, and their internecine tensions made it relatively easy for the government to suppress them. But both parties survived, tenuously, under various names, and are the ancestors of the two conservative parties in post-war Japanese politics.

It is interesting to note the broad similarity between the plots of *My Love Has Been Burning* and one of Mizoguchi's earliest (and therefore lost) films, *Haizan no Uta Wa Kanashi* (*Sad Is the Song of Defeat*). The latter was made in 1923, and was the first of Mizoguchi's films to attract any critical attention. It concerns a young woman who leaves her home in a village to follow her student boyfriend to Tokyo; she returns home, chastened, when he rejects her. The 1923 film, of course, has no feminist bias. The girl is welcomed back by her stepfather, who eventually takes her away from the village to help her forget.

**Tony Rayns**

Made very cheaply and quickly (as is evident from the roughish visual texture of the film) *My Love Has Been Burning* was harshly criticised on its original release in Japan, being characterised as ‘a film made by a wild animal’; and in an interview with Tsuneo Hazumi, Mizoguchi wryly admitted that he had made a ‘Barbaric’ film, one arising from the frustrations of the war years and inspired by the paintings Picasso did just afterwards: ‘Or at any rate, I wanted to engage objects hand-to-hand.’ Something of this passion, the amalgam of rage and pity that makes for the jagged edges of a painting like ‘Guernica’, is evident: most notably in the factory sequence, where a kaleidoscope of contrasting moods and tempi – police dispersing rioters in the streets, a meeting in a tranquilly moonlit forest, Eiko’s stealthy infiltration of the factory, the lurid brutalities inside, the cleansing flames as it burns – are fused into a genuine fury of protest. Such moments are, for Mizoguchi, relatively rare here. Least satisfactory when it focuses on its formulary characters, *My Love Has Been Burning* touches brilliance whenever it withdraws into abstraction: the magnificent celebration of the opening sequence, for instance, with the welcoming banners raised by the Liberals on the quayside conjuring a complementary image as the sails bringing Toshiko Kishida to Okayama hove into sight.

**Tom Milne, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, September 1979**

## **Kinuyo Tanaka**

Kinuyo Tanaka was Mizoguchi’s key collaborator in the last decade of his career. In the late 1940s, they worked together on a sequence of feminist melodramas. In *Victory of Women* (*Josei no shori*, 1946), Tanaka played a lawyer defending a female client accused of murdering her child; in *Women of the Night* (*Yoru no onnatachi*, 1948), she was a prostitute in the inhospitable environment of war-damaged Osaka.

In *My Love Has Been Burning* (*Waga koi wa moenu*, 1949), a masterpiece of feminist melodrama, she played the wife of a 19th-century liberal politician whose enlightened values do not extend into his own home. Mizoguchi and Tanaka jointly produced one of the cinema’s most radical feminist statements – going far beyond the liberal expectations of the American occupiers. Yet Tanaka’s simultaneous air of vulnerability and resilience also made her indelible as the wise, tolerant, understanding and suffering heroines of *Ugetsu monogatari* (1953) and *Sansho the Bailiff* (*Sansho dayu*, 1954).

In fact, Tanaka gave outstanding performances for almost all of the great Japanese directors. Her range is typified by her collaborations with Keisuke Kinoshita: at the beginning of the 1950s, in *Wedding Ring* (*Konyaku yubiwa*, 1950), she was still able to play a sensual romantic lead, falling in love with the doctor (played by Toshiro Mifune) treating her ailing husband; by 1958, she was totally convincing as the old woman preparing for death in Kinoshita’s *The Ballad of Narayama* (*Narayama bushiko*). To bring verisimilitude to the harrowing scene in which she bashes out her teeth with a stone, the actress famously had several of her own teeth removed. Tanaka also became Japan’s first successful female director, realising an impressive series of feminist melodramas in the 1950s and 1960s.

**Alexander Jacoby, *Sight & Sound*, November 2017**

**MY LOVE HAS BEEN BURNING**  
**(aka FLAME OF MY LOVE) (WAGA KOI WA MOENU)**  
*Director:* Kenji Mizoguchi  
*Production Company:* Shochiku Co. Ltd.  
*Producers:* Hisao Itoya, Kiyoshi Shimazu  
*Production Manager:* Tomoji Kubo  
*Historical Research:* Sunao Kai  
*Assistant Directors:* Tatsuo Sakai, Mitsuo Okada  
*Screenplay:* Yoshikata Yoda, Kaneto Shindo  
*Based on the novel by:* Kogo Noda  
*Based on* Mekake no Hanshogai *by:* Hideko Kageyama  
*Directors of Photography:* Kohei Sugiyama, Tomotaro Nashiki  
*Lighting:* Shigeo Terada, Minoru Yoshikawa  
*Back Projection:* Shozo Kotsuji  
*Art Directors:* Hiroshi Mizutani, Dai Arakawa, Junichiro Osumi  
*Set Decorators:* Kiyoharu Matsuno, Sueyoshi Yamaguchi  
*Costumes:* Tsuma Nakamura  
*Hairstyles:* Yoshiko Kimura  
*Wigs:* Rikizo Inoue  
*Music:* Senji Ito  
*Sound:* Taro Takahashi, Takeo Kawakita

**Cast**  
Kinuyo Tanaka (*Eiko Hirayama*)  
Mitsuko Mito (*Chiyo*)  
Eitarô Ozawa (*Ryuzo Hayase*)  
Ichiro Sugai (*Kentaro Omoi, leader of Jiyuto party*)  
Sadako Sawamura (*Omosa, prisoner*)  
Kuniko Miyake (*Toshiko Kishida, feminist*)  
Koreya Senda (*Taisuke Inagaki, founder of Jiyuto*)  
Eijirô Tono (*Hirobumi Ito, councillor*)

Kappei Matsumoto (*Kusuo Arai, Jiyuto employee*)  
Mitsuo Nagata (*Okajima, Jiyuto employee*)  
Masao Shimizu (*Takeshi Sakazaki, editor*)  
Hiroshi Aoyama (*Ikeda, student*)  
Shinobu Araki (*Kaku Hirayama, Eiko’s father*)  
Ikuko Hirano (*Eiko’s mother*)  
Mitsuaki Minami (*Takashige Kanda, head of prison*)  
Jûkichi Uno, Haruo Inoue (*prison guards*)  
Shigeo Shoyuzama (*prison doctor*)  
Makoto Kobori (*restauranteur*)  
Henpei Tomimoto (*police commissioner*)  
Hirohisa Murata (*Chiyo’s husband*)  
Torahiko Hamada (*Silk-Mill factory owner*)  
Kenji Izumi (*Silk-Mill factory superintendent*)  
Miyoko Shinobu (*Tomii*)  
Kenzo Tanaka, Hideki Kato (*policemen*)  
Akio Miyajima, Mokutaro Minakami (*men who buy Chiyo*)  
Ryuji Tosa, Koji Nadada, Ichiro Katayama (*Okayama Jiyuto supporters*)  
Aizo Tamashima, Kanichi Kato, Sentaro Daito, Koji Tsuruta (*Tokyo Jiyuto supporters*)  
Shiro Niizuma, Fujio Sasagawa, Jiro Mori, Toru Maruno (*Chichibu Jiyuto supporters*)  
Hisako Araki, Kiyo Murakami, Yoshiko Sekiya, Michiko Murata, Junko Hara, Kazuko Satomi, Shizue Hiraku, Teruko Yasaka, Fumiko Yamada (*Silk-Mill factory employees*)  
Kimie Kawakami, Junko Kagami, Toshimi Nishikawa, Kazuko Aoyama, Fusako Suzuki, Mitsue Takigawa, Chigusa Maki (*prisoners*)  
Zeya Chida  
Shochiku Kyoto Orchestra

Japan 1949  
84 mins

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