OSAKA ELEGY (Mizoguchi Kenji, Daiichi Eiga, 1936)

*Osaka Elegy* is an early sound film by Japanese film director Mizoguchi Kenji. It features elements of Mizoguchi’s trademark style, such as lateral tracking shots, staging in depth, and long takes. The film is famous for its sensational portrayal of the *moga* or “modern girl,” who embodied the (imagined) impact of Western fashion, commodity culture, and urbanization on gender roles in Japan. *Osaka Elegy* stars Yamada Isuzu as a telephone operator named Ayako, who becomes her boss’s mistress to pay back her father’s debts. Ayako reluctantly, though unapologetically, transforms into a materialistic *moga*, giving up her virtue for her family’s sake. Media images of *moga* flourished in the 1920s as women became increasingly visible in white-collar and service jobs. However, by showing how Ayako is forced into delinquency by her boss, boyfriend, father, and brother, the film ironizes the *moga*’s perceived threat to traditional family values and gender roles. While critical of the commodification of women’s sexuality, *Osaka Elegy* links the *moga* to newfound forms of female independence, and the film’s last shot shows Ayako walking boldly toward the camera after being expelled from home. *Osaka Elegy* showcases the ultra-modern spaces of glass-partitioned company offices, Ayako’s posh apartment, and department store displays. The film’s “Kansai realism”—use of landmarks and regional accents that identify the setting as Western Japan—is characteristic of Mizoguchi’s early sound films.

Further reading:

Kirihara, D. (1992) *Patterns of Time: Mizoguchi and the 1930s,* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Mori, T. (2009) ‘All For Money: Mizoguchi Kenji’s *Osaka Elegy* (1936)’, *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts,* ed. Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer, London: Routledge.

Sato, B. (2003) *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan,* Durham: Duke University Press.

Paratextual material?

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\*\* Please consult me by email if sending material by post, as I will be traveling in June and July.