

# When Adultery Meets Democracy: The Boom of Adultery Genres in Japan around 1950 and the Ethical Standards on the “*Fujinkaiho* ( 婦人解放 )”

**Bokyoung KIM**

Global Institute for Japanese Studies, Korea University

Chungsan MK Culture Center, Inchon-ro 108, Seongbuk-gu, Seoul, Korea

Email: rosewood7b@gmail.com

**Abstract** Around 1950, middlebrow novels and “adultery films” enjoyed enormous popularity in Japan. Primarily targeting female audiences, both genres became more common as various social and cultural changes occurred in postwar Japan. This growth in adultery-related storytelling is particularly interesting in light of the fact that Japan was under U.S. occupation and unethical themes such as adultery were discouraged by the Motion Picture Code of Ethics. Furthermore, these popular adultery genres were thought to represent the unspoken “inner minds” of the women they targeted. Focusing on “adultery films,” this paper argues that although they offered vicarious pleasure by pretending to deviate from oppressive social norms, they often reinforced the dominant ideology of the time. The majority of adultery films follow a similar plot pattern: (a) The heroine is generally a victim of the feudalistic marriage system of old Japan; (b) she meets a man who respects her as an independent individual; (c) with his *help*, she “liberated” from a repressive husband and marriage life. Focusing on the above features, this paper examines how the theme of adultery was represented in cultural spaces under the ethical standards built upon postwar American democracy.

**Key words** Adultery Literature; Literary Cinema; Adultery Film; Film Censorship; Emancipation of Women (*Fujinkaiho*)

**Author** **Bokyoung KIM** is a research professor at the Global Institute for Japanese Studies, Korea University. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of Tsukuba. Her research interests include Japanese studies and film studies. She has recently published “Crossing Boundaries: Kenji Mizoguchi’s ‘Fallen Women’ in

*Yoru No Onnatachi* and Film Censorship in Occupied Japan” in *Art Research* (March 2014) and “Film Censorship in Japan under the U.S. Occupation and the Regulation of Sexual Expression: Focusing on *A Hen in the Wind*” in *Korea-Japan Military and Culture Studies* (2015). A part of this paper was adapted from Bokyoung Kim’s dissertation.

## Preface

Around 1950, middlebrow novels and “adultery films” enjoyed enormous popularity in Japan. Primarily targeting female audiences, both genres became more common as various social and cultural changes occurred in postwar Japan. This growth in adultery-related storytelling is particularly interesting in light of the fact that Japan was under U.S. occupation and unethical themes such as adultery were censored by the Motion Picture Code of Ethics. Furthermore, these popular adultery genres were thought to represent the unspoken emotions and hidden desires of the women they targeted.

Until recently, no academic attention had been paid to these adultery genres. This paper examines the nature and influence of adultery films. First, in most adultery films, the heroine’s marital infidelity is limited to platonic affairs, and the two male rivals often symbolize the old values (e.g., feudalism and patriarchy) and new values (e.g., democracy and gender equality) of Japanese society. Second, these films targeted a particular gender, age, and class: young housewives. This paper will clarify how the theme of adultery was represented in cinema under the ethical standards built upon postwar American democracy (戦後民主主義, *Sengominshushugi*).

## The Chatterley’s Case and the Growth in Female Readership

In early 1950s Japan, almost every newspaper and magazine published a story about “The Chatterley’s Case,” a trial in which the publisher and translator of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, a novel by D. H. Lawrence, were accused of publishing obscene content (ワイセツ文書). Ironically, however, this intensive control over the book aroused the public’s curiosity. Although no book stores in Japan carried *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, the book was sold at a premium price on the black market. Even forged copies were circulated due to its soaring popularity. When *The Weekly Asahi* (週刊朝日) announced the bestsellers of the first half of 1950, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was on the list (July 2, 1950 issue).

The famous literary critic Masato Ara (荒正人) made a suggestive comment

about this phenomenon (Ara, 44-5). First, Ara categorized *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as pornography, along with *Jin Ping Mei* (金瓶梅, *The Forbidden Legend Sex & Chopsticks*), *Ideal Marriage: Its Physiology and Technique* (*Het volkomen huwelijk*), and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. *Jin Ping Mei* is a Chinese novel written during the late Ming Dynasty that includes explicit descriptions of adultery and sexual behavior. *Ideal Marriage* is the best-selling sex manual published in 1926 by Dutch gynecologist Theodoor Hendrik van de Velde, a work that was introduced to Japan in 1946. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, part of *The Kinsey Reports*, analyzes the sexual activities of men and had a profound influence on the public perception of sexuality.

Each of these three books deals with sex as a subject to explore and present to the general public. Ara pointed out that the primary audience of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* consisted of women around the age of twenty. He attributed this phenomenon to the “sense of liberation” among Japanese women in postwar Japan, a mindset that made them think it is okay to do the same things and read the same books as men. He concluded his article by suggesting that it is important to appeal to women readers in order to be a bestseller (44-45).

In other words, postwar democracy and the “emancipation of Japanese women (婦人解放, *Fujinkaiho*)” under the American occupation created space for Japanese women to access to forbidden media, such as pornographic content. A new desire to consume “taboos” had emerged in Japanese women. The controversy around “The Chatterley’s Case” sheds light on this new social and cultural climate in early 1950s Japan.

Since the late 1940s, the number of women readers had gradually increased in Japan. For instance, the results of a vote conducted by *Yomiuri Newspaper* (読売新聞) for the ten best books of the year 1951 shows that votes from women were up to 43.9 percent (2). In a short comment about the vote, critic Samitaro Uramatsu (浦松佐美太郎) explained that novels such as *Gone with the Wind* and *Lady Musashino* were selected because they had “something that appealed to women’s hearts.” (今年の良書 2) This idea suggests the influence that women readers had over the publishing market at the time.

### Popularity of Film Adaptation of Adultery Literature

Interestingly, at the beginning of the 1950s, the changes in cultural mood that Ara pointed out were also evident in the Japanese film industry. In its August 1951 issue, the editorial board of *Kinema Junpo* (キネマ旬報) published a list of films since 1945 that were adapted from literature (13-14). In addition, film critic

Hideo Tsumura (津村秀夫) wrote an article titled “A Short Essay on Cinema and Literature (映画と文学に関する断章)” in the same issue. He stated that film adaptations of novels had been increasing over the previous two to three years (10).

Based on this list from *Kinema Junpo*, film adaptation of literary works was a high priority of the Japanese film industry during this time. Of the films produced around 1950 in Japan, a large number were called “literary cinema (文芸映画, *Bungeieiga*),” a term used to categorize films adapted from literature. More important is that this tendency was especially common in film productions for female audiences. Along with *Shochiku* (松竹), which was renowned for its signature women’s films from the 1930s, *Toho* (東宝) and *Shintoho* (新東宝) concentrated on making literary cinema for women in the new postwar era.

*Shintoho*’s literary cinema or literary melodrama (文芸メロドラマ), often called “Koi Melodrama” after film producer Eisei Koi (児井英生), included several exemplary works: *A Dream Once Again* (夢よう一度), which is based on the novel by Seiichi Funahashi (舟橋聖一), *Virgin Treasure* (処女宝, 1950), and *The Munekata Sisters* (宗方姉妹, directed by Yasujiro Ozu in 1950), which is based on the novel by Osaragi Jiro (大沸次郎). Koi also produced several literary melodramas at Toho, such as a film adaptation of Yasunari Kawabata’s (川端康成) *The Dancing Girl* (舞姫, directed by Mikio Naruse in 1951) and Kenji Mizoguchi’s (溝口健二) 1951 film, *Lady Musashino* (武蔵野夫人), which is based on the novel by Otsuka Shohei (大岡昇平). More popular were Mikio Naruse’s films from *Toho*. They achieved commercial success due to themes and stories that were closely related to the daily lives of ordinary people and aroused sympathy from female audiences. One of the main reasons that Naruse’s films, usually called “*Tsumamono* (妻もの, Wife stories)” or “*Fufumono* (夫婦もの, Husband and wife stories),” were able to achieve this appeal is that they dealt with marital problems and common issues that families face. In particular, the heroines agonized over their married life because of routine and ennui, the cinematic portrayal of which appealed to female audiences.

No single genre name emerged to categorize these types of films.<sup>1</sup> Various terms surfaced, such as “literary cinema (文芸映画),” “literary masterpiece (文芸巨篇),” and “romantic melodrama (恋愛メロドラマ).” Among them, films that focused on the extramarital relationships of “*Shufu* (主婦, housewife) heroines,” “*kantsu* (姦通, adultery),” or “*furin* (不倫, marital infidelity)” were advertised

1 These adultery films had received no academic attention until recently. To my knowledge, Marie Kono (河野真理江) was the first to explore this genre, focusing only on films produced from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s (Kono, “Bungei” and “Ryojyu”).

using terms such as “*kantsu eiga* ( 姦通映画 ),” “*kantsu-mono* ( 姦通もの ),” or “*fujin-mono* ( 夫人もの , wife stories) (Kono, “Bungei” 27).”

Marketing campaigns for these adultery films used words such as “femme covert ( 人妻 ),” “widow ( 未亡人 ),” “adultery ( 不倫 ),” “lust ( 愛欲 ),” “sensuality ( 官能 ),” and “female body ( 女体 )” to arouse the sexual curiosity of potential audiences. However, the biggest reason that adultery films found favor with female audiences is that they described “emotions involved in romance ( 恋愛心理 )” of modern Japanese women. Moreover, as Ara has pointed out, in the context of “emancipation of Japanese women” policies established by occupation authorities (i.e., revision of the Civil Code and abolition of adultery laws), heroines of adultery films made positive impressions on audiences because they were considered a “new” type of woman, independent individuals who were different from the Japanese women restrained by the institutions of family and marriage. Hideo Tsumura wrote, in an essay titled “The Boom of Adultery Films ( 姦通映画ブーム ),” that these films did not merely sensationalize extramarital sex to gain public attention. Rather, they expressed, through an art form, the emotions, desires, and choices of married women that had long been repressed by conservative morals or economic hardship (Tsumura, “Kantsu” 106-9).

Literary cinema reached the peak of its popularity in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the middlebrow novel ( 中間小説 ) was also commercially successful. Satoko Kan ( 菅 聡 子 ), a researcher of modern Japanese literature, calls this phenomenon “the boom of *yoromeki* ( よ ろ め き , A Japanese term referring to a woman’s extramarital affair )”(56). Kan suggested two reasons for this boom: (a) “liberation” of female sexuality in postwar Japan, as symbolized by the abolition of adultery laws, and (b) the Americanization of consumption by Japanese wives, a change in material circumstances that enabled them to engage in “*yoromeki*”(56). Like Ara, Kan thought that changes in the social situation of Japanese women in postwar Japan made adultery genres popular in the 1950s and 1960s.

As discourse surrounding the “adultery genres” popular around 1950 suggests, these works were not simply enjoyed as specimens of indecency. Rather, they were considered works of art that (a) explored the *inner minds* ( 内面 ) of ordinary women and (b) offered vicarious pleasure to readers and audience who wanted to project their secret desires for free love ( 自由恋愛 ), which were difficult to fulfill in their real lives. At the same time, because the term “ordinary women” typically refers to “housewives” in this discourse, these kinds of films tended to reinforce the ideology that created the desire for vicarious pleasure in the first place. In this sense, adultery films might be said to have instilled ideas that would perpetuate the social

and moral restrictions that they seemed to challenge, not only exploring but also strengthening the hold of oppressive ideas in their “inner minds.”

### The Film Censorship and Representations of Adultery

Advocating for free love on the surface, most adultery films use conventions that criticize and exclude heroines who express desires that deviate from normative sexual morality (as well as the female audiences who experience pleasure in the process of sympathizing with these heroines).

Early on, the majority of literary melodramas, including adultery films, were based on novels. As their popularity increased, adultery films with original scenarios increased, securing a market independent of middlebrow novels.

The genre conventions of adultery films are particularly clear in two exemplary works: *The Naked Face of a Flower* (花の素顔, 1949), by Minoru Sibuya (渋谷実), and *A Jealousy* (嫉妬, 1949), by Kozaburo Yoshimura (吉村公三郎).<sup>1</sup> *The Naked Face of a Flower*, a film based on Seiichi Funahashi's novel, explores the extramarital affair of the heroine, Mamiko (麻美子), a married woman running a dressmaking shop with a painter on a back street of Ginza.

On June 6, 1949, at a meeting about *The Naked Face of a Flower* with Harry Slott from the CIE<sup>2</sup> and few people from *Shochiku*, Slott issued instructions for film production. *Shochiku* representatives explained that the purpose of the film was to “indicate the difference between new home life after the war and the old feudalistic family system.” Slott required them to avoid eroticism and sensationalism and emphasized that portraying adultery in film, despite recent changes in Civil Law, was not desirable.<sup>3</sup> These instructions from the CIE censor likely explain why the relationship between Mamiko and her lover never exceeded platonic love. They do not become sexually involved in the film. Interestingly, however, the film does depict the sexual relationship between her husband and his lover, presenting his infidelity as forgivable because the sex happens “only once.” Suggesting a clear

---

1 Unfortunately, *The Naked Face of a Flower* is not available for screening. Thus, analysis of this film is based on the scenario housed in the Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum at Waseda University (Saito). Analysis of the film *A Jealousy* is based on the Videocassette release in 1993 (Yoshimura).

2 Civil Information and Education Service (CIE) was a section of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), which functioned as the central agency for this propagation policy.

3 General Headquarters, United States Army Forces, Pacific. Historical Articles on the War in the Pacific, GHQ and Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP) Records in the National Diet Library (*Kokuritsu kokkai toshokan*), Tokyo, Sheet no. CIE (D) 01447, Box 5305.

double standard, punishment for marital infidelity in early adultery films depended on the gender of the character who committed it.

The reason the CIE censor did not strongly object to the production of this film, despite its sensational topic, was the purpose of the film explained by *Shochiku* representatives. In the film, Mamiko is mistreated and repressed by her in-laws. This mistreatment highlights an intention to advocate the new concept of family life in postwar Japan and paint the old feudalistic family system in a negative light. In order to make the heroine's adulterous behavior suggest liberation from the feudalistic family system, the repressive treatment of her in-laws had to be depicted as damaging and unjust.

This critical tone is apparent in *A Jealousy* as well. In the opening sequence of the film, the heroine, Toshiko ( 敏子 ), is clearly enslaved to her husband, Kosuke ( 耕介 ), whose attitude toward her is oppressive and arrogant. Toshiko constantly revolves around Kosuke, who is positioned in the center of the frame, and their facial expressions communicate the inequality of their relationship. Most importantly, Tsukazaki ( 塚崎 ), a military acquaintance of Toshiko's younger brother and the man with whom Toshiko has a platonic affair, is a foil to Kosuke. This soldier respects Toshiko's individuality and looks after her. Whenever Toshiko is with Tsukazaki, they are arranged in parallel, in sharp contrast to the scenes with Toshiko and her husband, symbolizing the gender equality between the two men. In other words, this film describes the adulterous partner of the heroine as an "ideal man" of postwar Japan. In this way, *A Jealousy* exemplifies the cultural conditions that made adultery, in many novels and films, a tool to represent the liberation of Japanese woman from an oppressive marital system and the pursuit of a new form of personal fulfillment.

However, Toshiko's liberation develops in a strange direction. At the end of the film, Tsukazaki proposes to Toshiko, who has left home and decided to start a new life. At first, she says to him that she wants to be alone for a little while and establish her economic independence, a line that apparently does lip service to CIE censors who wanted to encourage the emancipation of Japanese women. She finishes, however, by promising to accept his proposal in the near future, and the film ends showing the new happy couple anticipating a bright future together. After all, the freedom and independence that Toshiko has achieved by leaving her oppressive husband is only temporary. Starting over on her own terms is only a transition to happiness through another marriage. Using two opposing male characters, *A Jealousy*, like other adultery films, criticized the feudalistic system of marriage and pointed to a new kind of marital relationship based on postwar democracy.



However, this image of new gender relations, despite its democratic flavor, does not liberate women from the role of “wife” or from the institution of marriage.

*A Jealousy* satisfied CIE censors, who highly praised its treatment of “women’s liberation” in postwar Japan (General, CIE (D) 00227). In other words, they took the bright future promised to Toshiko, being a “housewife” married to an ideal man, as “liberation.” Beyond this outcome, they likely did not care about the heroine’s freedom, only attending to the way the film presented Japanese feudalism as evil and democratic gender relations as good. Of course, the binary opposition between the two is the narrative of occupation they wanted to propagate, that America had successfully liberated Japanese women from the feudal system of old Japanese society.

### Conclusion

This article examined how adultery films during the U.S. occupation of Japan represented the “emancipation of women.” Most of these films present two opposing male characters, one representing old Japan and the other representing the American democratic values of postwar Japan. Also, the advocacy of freedom and liberation for women in these films is limited to the extent that the heroines maintained their sexual chastity. In addition, the liberation only occurs when a (platonic) extramarital lover, who symbolizes postwar democracy, “saves” her from her oppressive husband through a new marriage.

Aiko Ogoshi (大越愛子) has argued that the “emancipation of women” propagated during the early stages of U.S. occupation weakened when the social structure of postwar Japan was established (51). The ideal family model in postwar Japan was a salaryman husband and a housewife who would support him and their children. While the liberation of women had been held up as a progressive idea, the idea that women should return to the home simultaneously gained traction.

Scholars have suggested that in Hollywood, a large number of films were produced to persuade women to return to the “home” as a countermeasure against sharply increasing male unemployment (Kato 137). However, these Hollywood films never used obvious propaganda methods. Instead, they underscored maternal love, the everlasting ideal of femininity, and the guilt felt by mothers amidst family tragedy to generate intense pathos. A similar intention might be seen in Japanese adultery films produced during postwar U.S. occupation. Pretending to express the emotions and desires of housewives, they deftly channeled specific ideas into the minds of female viewers, just as Hollywood films did. By arousing the emotions of housewives, adultery films made them feel liberated when, in fact, they were



encouraged to confine themselves to a home provided by a husband.

## Works Cited

- 荒正人「チャタレイ夫人の恋人」『雄鶏通信』1950年8月号, 44-47頁。
- [Ara, Masato. “Lady Chatterley’s Lover.” *Ondoritsushin* Aug. 1950: 44-47. ]
- キネマ旬報編集部「原作者別文芸映画目録——1945年～1951年前半」『キネマ旬報』1951年8月号, 13-14頁。
- [The editorial board of Kinemajunpo. “Gensakushabetsu bungei eiga mokuroku: From 1945 to the first half of 1951.” *Kinemajunpo* Aug. 1951: 13-14.]
- General Headquarters, United States Army Forces, Pacific. Historical Articles on the War in the Pacific, GHQ and Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP) Records in the National Diet Library (*Kokuritsu kokkai toshokan*), Tokyo, Sheet no. CIE (D) 01447, Box 5305.
- , Sheet no. CIE (D) 00227, Box no. 5140.
- 井桁碧・大越愛子編『戦後思想のポリティクス』青弓社, 2005。
- [Igeta, Midori and Ogoshi, Aiko, ed. *Sengo Shiso no Politics*. Tokyo: Seikyusha, 2005. ]
- 菅聡子「〈よろめき〉と女性読者——丹羽文雄・舟橋聖一・井上靖の中間小説をめぐって」『文学』9巻2号、2008年、54-68頁。
- [Kan, Satoko. “<Yoromeki> to jyoseidokusha: Niwa Fumio, Funahashi Seiichi, Inoue Yasushi no Chukanshoshetsu wo megutte.” *Literature* 9.2 (2008): 54-68.]
- 加藤幹郎『映画 視線のポリティクス——古典的ハリウッド映画の戦い』筑摩書房, 1996。
- [Kato, Mikiro. *Eiga Shisen no Politics: Kotenteki Hollywood Eiga no Tataikai*. Tokyo: Chikumashobo, 1996.]
- 河野真理江「文芸メロドラマの映画史的位置——「よろめき」の系譜、商品化、批評的受容」『立教映像身体学研究』1号, 2013年, 25-44頁。
- [Kono, Marie. “Bungei Melodrama no eigashiteki ichi: 「Yoromeki」 no keifu, shohinka, hihyoteki jyuyo.” *Rikkyo review of new humanities* 1 (2013): 25-44.]
- , 「『猟銃』論——「文芸メロドラマ」の範例的作品として」『映像学』90号, 2013年, 57-75頁。
- [—, “『Ryojyu』 Ron: 「Bungei Melodrama」 no hanreiteki sakuhintosite.” *Japanese journal of image arts and science* 90 (2013): 57-75. ]
- 斎藤良輔『花の素顔』渋谷実演出、早稲田大学坪内博士記念演劇博物館所蔵シナリオ（請求記号：ロ 05 6676 b、ロ 05 6676）。
- [Saito, Ryosuke. *The Naked Face of a Flower*. Dir. Sibuya, Minoru. n.p., n.d. Collection of Waseda University Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum. Scenario.]

津村秀夫「映画と文学に関する断章」『キネマ旬報』1951年8月号, 10-12頁。

[Tsumura, Hideo. "Eiga to bungaku ni kansuru dansho." *Kinemajunpo* Aug. 1951: 10-12. Print.]

—。「姦通映画ブーム」『婦人公論』37巻12号, 1951年, 106-109頁。

[—, "Kantsueiga bumu." *Fujinkoron* 37.12 (1951): 106-109.]

吉村公三郎演出『嫉妬』高峰三枝子・佐分利信出演、SHV、1993年（初出1949年）。

[Yoshimura, Kozaburo, dir. *A Jealousy*. Perf. Takamine, Mieko and Saburi, Shin. 1949. SHV, 1993. Videocassette.]

「今年の良書ベスト・テン決るーー本社主催大衆投票、人気呼ぶ「一般書」」『読売新聞』1951年12月30日, 2面。

“Kotoshi no ryosho besto ten kimaru: Honsha shusai taishu touhyo, ninki yobu 「ippansho」.”  
*Yomiurishimbun* 30 December 1951: 2.]

责任编辑：柏 灵