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Kenji Mizoguchi: *Sansho the Bailiff*

Throughout the Edo period arranged marriages were practiced chiefly in the upper classes, and love marriages in the lower. With the Meiji Restoration the Confucian ideal of family sanctity began to be taught in the public schools, and arranged marriage spread to every class of society. Today it remains widespread, but since the American introduction of the ideal of freedom of choice since World War II, love marriages have gained a good deal of ground. Arranged marriages now take the children's preferences into account, and there is considerable freedom of choice within the system. But whether young people choose to marry for love or by arrangement, they are still subjected to heavy family pressure to marry within the common age range, and within their own social class.

Sansho the Bailiff

In the film series, *Sansho the Bailiff* provides a portrayal of the model family roles. The father is an idealized figure who is the occupational and moral example for his son. The mother has a nurturing and educating function for the children, as she reinforces the example set by the father. The son strives to live up to his inherited occupational duty, but he is finally enabled to see through his goals by his sister's self-sacrifice of her very life. The film supports the traditional family roles and the fulfillment of the obligations and goals of each member.

When a Woman Ascends the Stairs

A film set in the modern era, *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs*, shows that no one can escape family obligations, and that this can often be something that the individual experiences with very negative feelings. Keiko works at her bar not only to make a living for herself, but to provide her mother with a substantial monthly income. She dislikes the work, but she rebels against her mother's

demands that she quit because there is no other type of work that would enable her to provide for the...
 When her brother asks for money to settle...
 and then for his son's operation, Keiko...
 unable to refuse even though it is extremely...
 her to put together such an amount after her...
 She feels that her relatives are devouring her...
 still tries to meet their demands. Her family...
 tions are great burdens, yet a strong...
 compels her to endure.

For all the constraints that family obligations...
 the individual in Japan, however, there are...
 tary feelings of security and reassurance that...
 is as a family member that the Japanese...
 his place in, the society at large.

3 - The Community

Outside of his family, the Japanese is...
 organizations to which he belongs or has...
 feudal times these were the clan and the...
 modern times have been replaced by such...
 university and the company. Those organiza...
 up in a way similar to the family. Ultimate...
 resides at the top, and members of the...
 benefits in many areas besides the realm of...
 for work done.

The sense of belonging is very strong. Just...
 in the past would identify himself to a...
 his clan allegiance, a modern businessman...
 identify himself to a stranger by stating...
 affiliation. A university student is likewise...
 identified by the name of his school than...
 which he specializes. Membership is more...
 what a person does in the organization.

Kenji Mizoguchi: *Sansho the Bailiff*

society, but such feelings are not the sources of sustained drives towards achievement.

An overwhelming potential sense of guilt as motivation in performance and accomplishment becomes more apparent when manifest achievement behavior is more incisively analyzed in terms of childhood experiences with the mother as disciplinarian. Problems regarding shame are prevalent in Japanese sensitivity about awkwardness in social contacts, and hence concerns with injury to "face" on the part of oneself as well as others are more readily perceived situationally in Japanese behavior. But guilt is a stronger basic determinant of overall patterns governing a life-long dedication either to an occupational career or to one's sense of social purpose as a mother, wife, head of family, or other member of family and society.

Corporal punishment is conspicuously absent in Japanese child-rearing practices. In America and Europe, a potential for guilt very often results from having experienced corporal punishment in early childhood, and in some instances arouses a desire to hurt others in return. In many cases, corporal punishment—rather than inducing a sense of guilt—simply makes an individual fearful of some potential punishment should he indulge in forbidden behavior.

American psychologists have found in recent studies that a sense of causing suffering to parents as well as fear of being abandoned by or losing the love of their parents, are positive forces capable of producing types of guilt that induce conformity to internalized expectations. Fear of loss of love can also cause sensitivity to shame, and indeed one notes among Japanese a propensity for concern with social disapproval. However, what is more important and less noted in terms of childhood development is the Japanese capacity to sense one's own potential propensities to hurt one's parents and other family members by improper behavior.

The Japanese mother, through self-sacrificing behavior, demonstrates to her child—not through anger or punishment directed towards the child but through a passive display of her own painful sense of responsibility for her child's misbehavior—how her child can hurt her as a dedicated mother by continuing to behave improperly. Moreover, the Japanese mother has perfected the technique of inducing a sensitivity to guilt in her children by quiet suffering. An American mother may repeatedly tell her children how she suffers from their misbehavior, but in her own behavior reveals her selfish motives. In notable contrast, the Japanese mother is not so inclined to verbalize her suffering in the presence of her children, but rather tends to live out her suffering before their eyes. She assumes the burden of responsibility for her children's behavior, and will often manifest her self-reproach to them if they conduct themselves badly. Such quiet, masochistic remonstrations cannot fail to impress the Japanese child of his mother's sincerity and selflessness about the purposes of life towards which her maternal nurturance destines him.

Sansho the Bailiff

In the film series, the character of Zushio in *Sansho the Bailiff* exemplifies the relationship between guilt and repentant behavior. While he matures under the influence of Sansho's cruel methods of treating people, he strays from his father's moral precepts of kindness and equality. He becomes cruel in order to serve his own ends of avoiding punishment and winning approval from Sansho.

However, when he is reminded of his father's teaching and example by his sister, Zushio begins to reform. She appeals to his sense of filial duty by asking: "Have you forgotten our father?" Realizing he has failed his parents in his moral and occupational role responsibilities, all of his subsequent actions serve to expiate this failure. These



include a personal apology to the man he once branded with a hot iron under Sansho's instructions, freeing the slaves who were his fellows and whom he helped Sansho to exploit, and saving the life of an old woman who helped him when he was a young newcomer to Sansho's domain, but whom he later neglected.

It is noteworthy that Zushio fulfills his inherited occupational duties before he goes to find his mother. He proves himself worthy of his father's name and example, expiating his former callousness and unquestioning subservience to the evil Sansho. Only then can he present himself to his mother as a dutiful son.

Ugetsu

The potter Genjuro in *Ugetsu* can also be seen as changing his behavior to expiate guilt over failures in occupational and familial roles. His involvement with the ghostly Lady Wakasa constitutes a serious breach of family duties as father and provider. But the real weight of his actions is brought home to him most strongly by the fact of his wife's death during his absence.

The realization that his neglect of duty has caused the loss of his wife sets him on the path to atonement through reform. He devotes himself completely to his work as a potter and his responsibilities as a father, reshaping his character to fit the image his wife had hoped he would exemplify. Like Zushio in *Sansho the Bailiff*, Genjuro seeks to prove himself as a consequence of the devotion and self-sacrifice of a woman.

Guilt and atonement are not unfamiliar concepts to Westerners, who usually associate them with religious principles. The so-called Protestant work ethic, which encouraged diligent pursuit of occupational goals, is not

so very different from the Japanese work ethic. The difference is that laziness or neglect of duty was seen in the Western concept as a failure to live up to one's responsibilities to God, while the same deficiencies in Japan are seen as failures to live up to one's responsibilities to one's parents and one's expected social role.

5 - Suicide

Suicidal behavior, in Japan as in other countries, involves many social and cultural factors that compound the psychological motives contributing to an individual's decision to take his own life. It is thus extremely difficult to find the motive in a given case of suicide, for what makes life worth living for an individual is a very personal, often incommunicable feeling. An outsider may not be able to ascertain what overwhelming sense of loss, frustration, or defeat another might have suffered that would lead him to suicide.

While Japan has at times had one of the highest suicide rates in the world, some European nations have had consistently higher suicide rates than Japan. But despite the fact that Japan's general suicide rate has averaged notably less than highest in the world, Japanese are frequently stereotyped as the world's most suicidal people.

The exaggerated popular conception of Japan as a nation of suicidal behavior is due in large part to the manner in which certain spectacular Japanese forms of suicide have been sensationalized abroad. But as seen in the films of the PBS television series, these same spectacular forms of suicide tend to be highly dramatized and romanticized in Japan itself.

Seven of the films in the series contain one or more examples of suicide, a number that indicates the importance of suicide as a theme in Japanese literature and