

Document Citation

Title	Yoru no onnatachi
Author(s)	Donald Richie
Source	<i>Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Yoru no onnatachi (Women of the night), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1948

The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

11 West 53 Street, New York, N. Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

The Japanese Film
Thursday, April 30
2:00, 5:30

Yoru no Onnatachi (Women of the Night)

A Shochiku Production, 1948. Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi. Written by Yoshikata Yoda after the novel by Eijiro Hisaita. Photographed by Kohei Sugiyama. Art direction by Hiroshi Mizutani. Music by Hisato Osawa. With Kinuyo Tanaka as Kazuko; Sanae Takasugi as Natsuko, her sister; Mitsugu Fujii as Kenzo; Tomie Sumita as Kumika; Tamihei Tomimoto as Koji; Mitsuo Nagata as Shuichi; Fusako Maki as a woman reporter; Kimie Hayashi as a prostitute. 75 minutes. Courtesy of Brandon Films.

The Japanese sometimes think of Mizoguchi as being a "woman's director," pointing out that the majority of his best films have been about women and their various plights. To think of Sisters of the Gion, A Tale from Chikamatsu, Sansho the Bailiff is to think of women. Even Ugetsu is about two women rather than one man.

Like many Japanese of his generation, Mizoguchi was particularly interested in the prostitute and a number of his films -- including The Life of Oharu, Red-Light District, and this picture -- are about their plight. Until only little more than a decade ago, prostitution was legal in Japan and consequently the prostitute had a certain standing in society. It was the ambivalent attitude of society toward these "women of the night" which especially interested Mizoguchi.

He, however -- and like many of his generation, made a distinction between the courtesan, or the geisha, and the lowly street-walker. The former was taken for granted. She had a perfectly good position in her society. The latter excited his compassion. One of the points of Oharu, for example -- a point shared with the eighteenth-century novel upon which the film is based -- is not that the heroine becomes a prostitute but that she becomes a common prostitute. This occasionally led Mizoguchi into the position of moral reformer. (It was, in part, the influence of Red-Light District that pushed the Anti-Prostitution Bill through the Diet.) One realizes that the plight of the Japanese whore in 1948 was a serious one but, at the same time, one wonders if, indeed, it was this joyless.

D.R.