

## Document Citation

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**FLOWING**

(NAGARERU), 1956, 116 min., b/w.

**Production:** Toho Company **Screenplay:** Sumie Tanaka and Toshiro Ide, based on a story by Aya Koda **Cinematography:** Masao Tamai **Art Direction:** Satoshi Chuko **Music:** Ichiro Saito

**Cast:** Kinuyo Tanaka, Isuzu Yamada, Hideko Takamine, Mariko Okada, Haruko Sugimura, Sumiko Kurishima, Chieko Nakakita, Natsuko Kahara, Seiji Miyaguchi, Daisuke Kato, Nobuo Nakamura et al.

A widow (Tanaka) who is forced to work for a living becomes a maid in the somewhat run-down geisha house owned by geisha Tsutayakko (Yamada). Modest and polite, the new maid quickly observes that her employers are in financial trouble. Shops in the neighborhood refuse to extend credit, Tsutayakko's half-sister Otoyō (Kahara) wants the money she lent back, the house is mortgaged to an older geisha, Ohama (Kurishima). Even resident geisha Someka (Sugimura) owes money to Ohama. The maid watches as Tsutayakko tries to keep things going without having to get a new patron or sell her body, but all the women in the household seem to have devastating relations with men, and no money. Tsutayakko's younger sister Yoneko (Nakakita) has a sick daughter, and a husband (Kato) who only stops by once to leave money. The father (Miyaguchi) of a geisha who ran away from home

seeks damages and causes an incident with the police. Tsutayakko's disgusted daughter Katsuyo (Takamine) takes in sewing work because she sees the end while her mother does not, and the loyal maid refuses when Ohama asks her to take over the house and make it a restaurant.

A very sensitive film about the turning point for a geisha who is growing old, and about the decline of the geisha world as a whole. The episodic, disconnected quality derives from the original story as told through the eyes of the maid, but it suits Naruse's style and highlights the different characters under the same roof in the same way *Lightning* did. 1956 was the year prostitution was outlawed in Japan; it was also the year Kenji Mizoguchi made his last film of adoration/condemnation of such women, *Red Light District/Street of Shame*. Naruse looks instead at another aspect of the demimonde: the middle-ranking geisha who is a skilled musician but no longer young enough to be much in demand for parties. The character of Tsutayakko recalls Naruse's earliest geisha, Kikue in *Apart from You*, but now he portrays the woman coldly, clinically, without the least trace of melodrama. Indeed some of the women who are her foils are strictly humorous, such as Someka, and some of the incidents, such as the embarrassment of having to be a police witness, undercut a suggestion of tragedy. Tsutayakko's determination typifies the Naruse heroine as much as her daughter's determination to be different from her mother—all the characters end essentially alone. The reluctance to fashion a maudlin ending as a Mizoguchi would have done shows Naruse much closer to the reality of life: it rarely grants great happiness or great sorrow.

**Flowing**