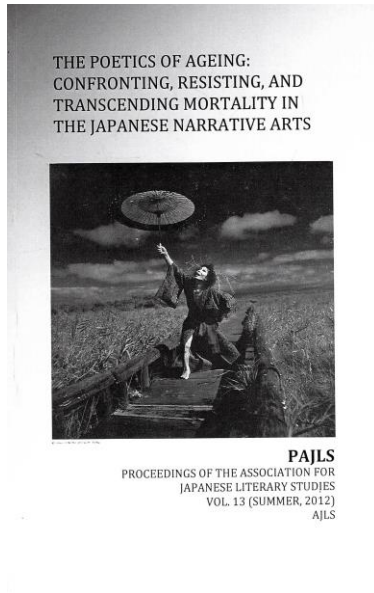


“Senescence and the City: Decline and
Regeneration in Yamasaki Toyoko’s *Noren*”

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**Senescence and the City:
Decline and Regeneration in Yamasaki Toyoko's *Noren***

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Transwar literature and cinema of Osaka record contemporary tensions between local and national forms during a period when the city's political, economic, and cultural subordination to the nation was being completed and confirmed. These tensions manifest themselves with particularly clarity in *Noren*, Yamasaki Toyoko's novel of transwar life in Osaka's merchant quarter, published in 1957, and in Kawashima Yūzō's film adaptation of the same name, released the following year. Both novel and film trace the economic fate of the city within the pre- and postwar nation, as represented by two generations of a merchant household; but they do this to different effects. By virtue of the themes common to novel and film, the differences in their treatment, and the process by which the novel becomes a film, *Noren* invites us to reflect on themes of decline, adaptation, and regeneration. In this essay, I consider how the novel employs generational change to imagine Osaka's regeneration, and how the film expands the role of the senescent father to adapt the story for a narrative of the city's decline as part of the nation's progress.

Throughout the Tokugawa era, Senba served as the commercial heart, not only of Osaka and western Honshū, but of a trade network connecting Edo, the samurai domains, and foreign lands. Even after political power shifted from Osaka to Edo, economic power remained concentrated in Senba, the center of commodities trading and money exchange. Later authors seeking to write about Osaka's former glory and its decline and subordination within national administrative, economic, and cultural forms centered in Tokyo turned their attention to Senba and to its archetypal denizen, the merchant.

One such author is Yamasaki Toyoko 山崎豊子. Born in Osaka in 1924, Yamasaki published her first novel, *Noren* 暖簾 (The Shop Curtain), in 1957. The following year, she was awarded

the Naoki Prize for her second novel, *Hana noren* 花のれん (The Flowered Curtain, 1958). She went on to become a remarkably prolific and successful author. For roughly the first 20 years of her career, Yamasaki wrote exclusively of Osaka and made Senba, in particular, her subject across several works. In themselves and in their extensive afterlife in adaptation, these works have played a large part in memorializing Osaka's merchant culture and locating it in the popular imagination.

***Noren*, the Novel**

Noren traces the economic fortunes of Senba over the course of Japan's imperial project and its aftermath. The novel is divided into two books, the first running from the end of the first Sino-Japanese War to the end of World War II, the second set in the post-war. The books follow the careers of two merchants, father and son, as they build and then revive the family business. In the first book, the father, Gohei, as a boy, becomes an apprentice in a Senba merchant house, the Naniwaya. He is eventually allowed to open a branch of the shop, which he manages until the end of the war, when it is all but destroyed in the firebombing of Osaka. In the second book, Gohei's son Kōhei returns from the front to revive the business's fortunes in the postwar. It is a story of the ideal merchant as an embodiment of the culture of Senba, and the damage done to him and to that culture by the imperial project directed out of Tokyo. As Japan militarizes, the central government comes to see trade as essentially unproductive and even parasitic, and under the wartime economy it quickly moves to introduce controls that effectively outlaw the merchant's livelihood. More than the individual careers of Gohei and Kōhei, this forms the subject of Yamasaki's novel: the culture of trade symbolized by the shop curtain, rent by militarism and Tokyo's concomitant ascendancy.

The name of the company whose fate *Noren* traces, Naniwaya, suggests the importance of locality to the novel. The Naniwaya's business reiterates this: the firm deals in *konbu*, which is the basis of Kansai-style stock and is therefore one ingredient that fundamentally distinguishes Kansai cuisine from that of Kantō. The story, then, follows the flavor of the local through the turbulent political economy of the modern era, with the war as

watershed. In the process, it traces two related shifts: in the model of business, from merchant house to corporation; and in the broader economy, from a trading network with Osaka as one node, to a national economy centered in Tokyo.

One important aspect of the shift is a change in the model of succession, from affiliative to filial. In the prewar story, Gohei travels from the island of Awaji to Osaka at the age of fifteen. There he meets the master of the Naniwaya, also a native of Awajishima, who takes the boy into the shop as an apprentice. The opening chapters establish the character of Gohei through a contrast with the young master, the biological son of the main house. While Gohei throws himself into even the most menial tasks and displays a native business sense, the young master devotes himself to *jōruri* and neglects his responsibilities. The master's son will eventually inherit the main shop, but that filial succession happens in the wings. If the young master is the blood heir, the first book clearly identifies Gohei as the spiritual heir by focusing on the *noren-wake* by which the old master grants Gohei license to open his own shop under the main house's name. In contrast, the second book of *Noren* focuses on a filial succession from Gohei to his second-born son. Returning from the front, the laidback Kōhei takes over despite reluctance on both sides, his more business-minded elder brother having died in the war.

This shift from affiliative to filial is part of a broader adaptation in the organization of the business, from merchant house to corporation. When the story opens, the Naniwaya is conducting both processing and sales from its one location in Senba. After the *noren-wake*, Gohei begins marketing his products through other retailers—first a sort of gourmet shop run by the famous *ryōtei* Nadaman and then through department stores, starting with the Mitsukoshi in Kōraibashi. The narrative notes that when Gohei began selling in the department store, “his eyes were opened to the modern institution [of business].”¹ By 1930, Naniwaya's konbu is famous throughout the provinces. In 1937, Gohei opens a boutique in the new Hankyu department store in Umeda, gateway to the recently developed western suburbs. To

¹ Yamasaki Toyoko, *Noren* (Shinchōsha, 1957), 44. All translations are mine.

meet increased demand, he builds a processing plant and makes a fundamental change in the organization of the business, employing workers for the plant as wage-laborers rather than apprentices.

The Naniwaya also adapts to developing tastes and buying habits. When Kōhei is preparing to move into the Tokyo market, he schools his father, Gohei, on the difference between Osaka and Tokyo, saying that, while Osakans value what is good and cheap, the people of the capital believe something is good only if it is expensive. Kōhei's discourse suggests that another shift is taking place. The first book has Gohei, in 1924, traveling to Hokkaido to meet with suppliers; he builds the business on his relationship with them and his ability to judge the quality of the konbu itself. In the post-war, Kōhei travels to Tokyo and revives the business through his understanding of consumer desire and a sensitivity to packaging and convenience as much as taste. The shift from merchant house to corporation thus accompanies a shift from connoisseurship to consumption.

These shifts in the business model respond to a broader economic shift, from a networked regional economy with Osaka as one node, to a national economy centered in Tokyo. The opening scene of the novel, in which the young Gohei arrives in Osaka and meets up with the master, who made the same migration in his youth, establishes the geographical aspect of this shift. In the prewar, Osaka is a regional metropole to which provincials flock. Later in the first book, the description of Gohei's trip to Hokkaido emphasizes Osaka's place in a far-flung mercantile network—one to which Tokyo is not central. An episode at the time of the Great Kantō Earthquake underscores this. Gohei is returning with an assistant to Osaka from Hokkaido and has stopped in Tokyo on the way when the earthquake hits (53). His shipment of konbu is destroyed in the fires that follow. Gohei sends the assistant home to Osaka but himself heads back to Hokkaido to replace the lost shipment. Tokyo here is little more than a way-station, and the signal event in its modern history (which is to say national history) is reduced to an interruption in the supply chain. By the second book, though, Tokyo has become the metropole, and Osaka has been provincialized in turn. Visiting the capital, Kōhei is stunned to see the scale of the retail districts there.

The control economy imposed during the war serves as the occasion for these related shifts. In the penultimate chapter of the first book, the narrative records that “the new wartime economic system was announced, and suddenly it became more difficult to do business” (81). When the new controls are explained to Gohei, he cries, “That can’t be! Are you saying I can’t do business freely? That’s absurd. Why, it’s as if you couldn’t treat your own wife as you see fit. It’s ridiculous!” (82). The narrative then goes on to explain precisely the effect of the controls on Osaka merchants as a class.

Until now, konbu from Hokkaido and Karafuto had passed right through Tokyo and Nagoya to Osaka, due to the particular fondness for konbu and the skill of processors there. But although the executive plan attempted to ration konbu uniformly according to population, surpluses developed in those provincial cities where there was no particular taste for it (82).

Distribution was rationalized in a way that treated the population as a national whole, ignoring local tastes. Merchants were made obsolete, their *raison d’être* in trade, outlawed. Forced to choose between selling konbu or processing it, Gohei keeps his store and gives up the processing plant, which he rents to a munitions manufacturer. His resentment surfaces when he turns the plant over to the manufacturer and says, in his strong Osaka dialect, “Take care of that plant, at least. I didn’t get it by riding the wave of munitions-manufacturing nouveau riche like you. I made it through grain upon grain of suffering” (85). The munitions manufacturer, not incidentally, speaks standard Japanese, though one detail, the use of the suffix “-han” instead of “-san,” betrays his Kansai roots—roots he betrays in another sense by speaking in *hyōjungo* to a fellow Osakan.

The recognition of the economic injustice visited upon Osaka by the control economy motivates Kōhei’s struggles to revive the company. The novel ends with a remarkable combination of political-economic analysis and emotional appeal,

as Kōhei recognizes what has been done to Osaka and resolves to reverse it.

Beginning with the wartime economy, the center of the Japanese economy had shifted to Tokyo. Furthermore, with the loss of China and Manchuria, Osaka's business activity, centering as it did on trade, had been snuffed out like a flame, and with it Osaka's core companies....

... His father, Gohei, had said that Osaka was the navel of Japan. That Osaka was losing its economic strength—the Osaka that had nurtured capitalism through its infancy in Meiji and Taishō, the Osaka that had done business under the same noren for hundreds of years. 'I won't accept defeat like this,' he thought. 'With the help of each and every merchant, I'll return Osaka to its former economic strength. If we persevere ten more years, just ten more years, we'll show you the old Osaka!'—Kōhei whispered it in his heart (211-212).

Such sentiments of patently futile determination are easily recuperated into the sort of nostalgia that sustains, rather than challenges, Osaka's present subordinate status. Coming at the end of Yamasaki's novel, though, Kōhei's whisper punctuates a careful account of the process of subordination and a plea for its reversal. The Naniwaya under Gohei's ownership is already modern before the war, as Great Osaka was already responding to new economic models of industrial production and mass consumption. After the war, Kōhei's vividly imagines the regeneration—of the family line, of the business, and of Osaka.

Adaptation and Regeneration

It is fitting that this novel, which hinges on the ability of a shop and a city to adapt to wartime and postwar conditions, was written by an author whose work has itself proven to be so remarkably adaptable. Like *Noren*, Yamasaki's second novel, *Hana noren*, was adapted for film a year after its publication, by

Toyoda Shirō. A third novel of Senba life, *Bonchi* ほんち (1959), was adapted for film in 1960 by Ichikawa Kon. Perhaps the best example of Yamasaki's adaptability, however, is *Shiroi kyotō* 白い巨塔 (Ivory tower), the story of two doctors at an Osaka hospital, which became a phenomenal success across several media. It was originally serialized in the *Sunday Mainichi* starting in 1963, then published as a novel in 1965, and made into an award-winning film the following year.² A sequel was serialized from 1967 to 1968. The story has been adapted for Japanese television four times (in 1967, 1978, 1990, and 2003) and was adapted for Korean television in 2007. *Karei naru ichizoku* 華麗なる一族 (A splendid family, 1973), a best-seller about a Kobe steel dynasty, was adapted for television in 1974 and 2007. One tally lists 48 TV and film adaptations of Yamasaki's works between 1958 and 2009.³

One reason for the enduring appeal of Yamasaki's works is the ethnographic detail they provide. *Noren*, for example, painstakingly describes the apprenticeship system in Senba, down to the appropriate costume on New Year's Day for each class of worker. More generally, her works reproduce a rich local language, including the general Osaka dialect as well as terms specific to the Senba merchant class.⁴ In her Kansai works, this elaboration of detail functions as a self-ethnography of the local.

This local ethnography can be considered a response to the relentless homogenization and centralization pursued in modernity. Rethinking ethnography through Laura Mulvey's notion of "to-be-looked-at-ness," Rey Chow has argued that "The state of being looked at not only is built into the way non-Western cultures are viewed by Western ones; more significantly it is part of the *active* manner in which such cultures represent—ethnographize—themselves."⁵ The non-West's act of subjective

² It was awarded the Mainichi Concours for Best Film and named Best Film by *Kinema Junpo*, which also named Yamamoto Satsuo Best Director.

³ *Yamasaki Toyoko: zenshōsetsu o yomitoku* (Yosensha, 2009), p. 109.

⁴ Yamasaki's story "Senba-gurui" 船場狂い (Crazy for Senba, 1959) in particular thematizes the language of the merchant quarter.

⁵ Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press,

self-ethnography, through looking, Chow argues, is informed by the memory of its objectification by the West, its “to-be-looked-at-ness,” which “destroys the operational premises ... of classical anthropology,” of a world divided between viewing subject and viewed object.⁶ Yamasaki’s ethnography of the local similarly decenters the relationship between local and national. Informed by a recognition of its own objectification by the nation, this ethnography challenges the assertion of transcendence by which the nation attempts to objectify and subordinate the local.

***Noren*, the Film**

In 1958, a year after the publication of Yamasaki’s novel, Tōhō released a film adaptation of *Noren* directed by Kawashima Yūzō 川島雄三 and starring Morishige Hisaya, Yamada Isuzu, and Otowa Nobuko. A comparison of the two illustrates how the film turns this story of the locale’s regeneration into a story of its decline. In the first significant change, Kawashima’s film fundamentally restructures the first half as a romance built around the triangle of Gohei; his childhood sweetheart, Matsu, whom he meets when he comes to the Naniwaya as an apprentice; and Chiyo, the master’s niece and daughter of another Senba merchant house, whom he is destined to marry in a financially advantageous match arranged by the master. The frustrated love between Gohei and Matsu resurfaces in the second half and the next generation, when Matsu’s daughter charms Gohei’s son, Kōhei. The film poster plays up the romantic triangle, showing Morishige flanked by Otowa as Matsu and Yamada as Chiyo.

This restructured storyline necessitates a vast expansion of Matsu’s role. Although she appears briefly at the beginning of Yamasaki’s novel, she is incidental to its story; there is no suggestion that Gohei harbors any special feelings for her, and no mention of a daughter. In the film, early scenes establish the friendship between Gohei and Matsu. After they grow up, Matsu goes to work for Gohei in the shop he opens. A scene there establishes the grown-up Matsu’s character. Returning to the shop

1995), 180.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

to find two young apprentices trimming konbu, scraps littering the floor, Matsu blithely picks up a broom and sweeps the scraps into the street. When Gohei arrives moments later, the sight of the precious konbu lying in the dirt outrages him. The scene sets up a clear contrast between love and business. While Matsu is the object of Gohei's affection she is a questionable marriage prospect from a business standpoint, Chiyo is the opposite: a cold fish, but a savvy alliance.

The climax to this romantic triangle comes at the annual Tōka Ebisu festival to honor the god of commerce and pray for prosperity in the new year. On festival day, the old master summons Gohei to the main house and expresses his wish that Gohei marry Chiyo. Gohei tries to explain that he loves someone else, but the master and his wife put a stop to such talk. Coming out of the meeting, Gohei heads to the festival and finds Matsu there. As festival music plays, and the crowds in the temple precinct chant "*Shōbai hanjō de sasa motte koi*" ("So that business will thrive, fetch the bamboo"), Matsu smiles bravely and congratulates Gohei. Gohei protests and tries to explain his feelings, but Matsu, recognizing what is best for him, runs away. As he chases after her, they are separated by a procession of men carrying a festival palanquin—the two lovers driven apart by Ebisu, the god of merchant ambition.

The film contrasts this prewar pragmatism with post-war desire. In the second half of the film, Gohei and Chiyo encourage a romance between their son Kōhei and Matsu's daughter, but Kōhei ignores them and chooses his own bride. That contrast is new: in Yamasaki's novel, both generations, Gohei and his son Kōhei, agree without any difficulty to marriages arranged on the basis of the advantageous connections they bring. The film thus introduces a conflict between responsibility and desire, of the sort associated with literary tradition, with Osaka *as* tradition. It relegates the practice of arranged marriage to the pre-war world of the Osaka merchant and links the modern love match, and its associations of individual subjectivity and personal choice, to the post-war world of the Tokyo (-aspirational) corporate manager.

In another significant change, the film moves abruptly from pre- to postwar, largely ignoring the war itself and the pivotal phenomenon of the novel, the control economy. The film

minimizes the central economic lesson of Yamasaki's novel: that Osaka's subordination was dictated by central planners in Tokyo. The shift in economic power from Osaka to Tokyo remains, but the causal role of the wartime economy is elided. The film naturalizes the process of national centralization and Osaka's subordination; it becomes something that simply happened between scenes. Kawashima's *Noren* also distorts the chronology of economic change. In the film, the Naniwaya does not begin selling its products through department stores until the post-war, at Kōhei's instigation. In the novel, this happens under Gohei's management in the prewar, as it would have done historically, since the suburbs of the Hanshinkan and the train lines that served them were developed as early as 1910 (the Hankyu Department Store at the Umeda terminal opened in 1929). By shifting this development to the postwar, the film associates the growth of consumer culture with Tokyo's domination.

The most significant change, however, is that the film reframes *Noren* as one man's life story, keeping the father alive until the end. In the novel, Gohei dies early in the second book, and most of Naniwaya's postwar success is realized by Kōhei on his own. In the film, on the other hand, the father lives to witness (and meddle in) his son's innovations and the shop's revival. The film ends with Gohei's death at a party to mark the opening of the Naniwaya's new shop. Gohei wanders off to the warehouse, where he suddenly collapses. He is found dead, his clenched fists gritty with sea-salt. While the novel, by tracing the career of one master, his death, and then another master's career, narrates Osaka's modern history as a tale of regeneration, the movie reframes the narrative, containing the son's story within the father's decline.

Altogether, the changes that the film introduces to the story of *Noren* shift the story's focus from a class to an individual, and from economics to romance. To the extent that economics still plays a part in the film, it becomes the story of a nation's economy, rather than a city's. The changes sharpen the contrast between the prewar and postwar, associating the first with tradition and the second with modernity, so that a novel of Osaka's economic regeneration, spurred by the father's death, becomes a film of Japan's graduation to a new economic order centered in Tokyo. By living, the father prevents the regeneration that the novel so

stirringly imagines. The lingering presence of the senescent merchant drafts Yamasaki's novel into a narrative of national progress.

Haunting the Narrative

The presence of the father can be read in another way, however, if we take him for a ghost. The appearance of Morishige Hisaya 森繁久彌 (1913-2009) in the roles of both Gohei and Kōhei encourages such a reading. Morishige's entrance in the role of the son at the opening of the second half of the film, after he has appeared as the father in the first half, has the disturbing effect of an apparition. The film prolongs that effect by using a split screen to allow Morishige to appear as father and son side-by-side. This gimmick reaches its limit in a series of shots in which Morishige, as son, carefully measuring out ingredients with scales and test-tubes on the right-hand side of the screen, develops new products for the company while Morishige, as father, watches doubtfully from the left side. Here, the Osaka merchant confronts himself. The film calls further attention to this effect with several winking comments. When a clerk at the warehouse meets the grown Kōhei for the first time, she immediately guesses who he is: "You must be the young master of the Naniwaya. You're the image of your father!" Later, someone at the buyers' market comments on the resemblance: "*Yō niteharu na!*" Giving both roles to Morishige produces a temporal confusion that troubles the progressive history the film tries to tell. And, since that history proceeds from a past that is local to a present that is national, Morishige's ghostly doubling also troubles the spatial order. The lingering presence of Gohei, avatar of the urban, frustrates its subordination to the space of nation.

Similarly, the most pervasive element of Yamasaki's written ethnography, the local voice, haunts the visual in adaptation. The stars of *Noren* were all native speakers of Osaka dialect and mainstays of films set in Osaka. Yamada Isuzu was born and raised in Osaka. Otowa Nobuko was raised in Osaka and Kobe and became a star with the Takarazuka Revue. The film also features Nakamura Ganjirō II, star of the Kamigata kabuki, as the old master and, as his wife, the incomparable Naniwa Chieko (whose stage name labels her as local). Above all, there is

Morishige, who starred in a string of major postwar Osaka films.⁷ Although he was one of Japan's greatest *national* film stars, he must also be considered a leading exponent of Osaka masculinity—and its voice—in postwar film. Morishige's voice introduces a fluid, elusive element into the Osaka of postwar Japanese cinema, disrupting the homogenizing, nationalizing historical narrative into which such films as *Noren* attempt to draft that imagined city through their visual narrative.⁸

As an old man himself, Morishige described his determination to exploit the potential of the local voice. In an autobiography, the actor recalls his excitement at winning a role in *Meoto zenzai* three years before *Noren*: "I was eager to emancipate Osaka-ben, which had for quite some time been held in contempt by the people of Edo, from a 'dialect complex' (*hōgen konpurekkusu*) and let it into the language of Japan (*nihon no kotoba ni irete yaru*)."⁹ If, in making the decline of the local supplementary to a narrative of national progress, the adaptation betrays the source novel's dream of regeneration, the local voice then infiltrates and undermines that narrative, betraying in turn the nationalizing tendency of film. Morishige's performance in *Noren*—of a role and of a language—demonstrates the power of the merchant and the city in decline to haunt the narrative of graduation to a new order. It uses the occasion of adaptation to highlight that narrative's dependence on the specter of the local.

⁷ These include *Meoto zenzai* (1955), *Neko to Shōzō to futari no onna* (1956), and *Hana noren* (1959), all directed by Toyoda Shirō, as well as Ozu Yasujiro's *Kohayagawa-ke no aki* (1962).

⁸ On voice as distinct from speech, see Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006). Although Dolar discounts accent as an aspect of voice, I would argue that dialect shares in the "elusive" and "elapsing" quality he ascribes to voice.

⁹ Morishige Hisaya, *Sukima kara sukima e* (Nihon tosho sentā, 1998), 73.

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