

## Women Doctors in American, Japanese and Chinese Cinema

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The opinion pole taken in 1996 by the "Globe project 21," a research team of one of the biggest Japanese newspapers, disclosed the prevailing opinion among the Japanese that the top three countries most influential to Asia in the 21st century would be the United States, China and Japan.<sup>1</sup> It has proved right so far. These three countries are culturally quite different from one another, and each of them presents a unique image of women intellectuals. I find women doctors particularly meaningful as a model to clarify the way society treats women when they are intellectually prominent and professionally successful. Films about women doctors provides a glimpse into the distinctive culture and society of a country where they are produced.

Various books and articles have been written to explore female figures in cinema. But none has ever taken up women intellectuals as a leading theme despite the fact that they have constantly been present in cinema since the silent era in the three countries that this essay is concerned about. In American cinema, one of the earliest examples is *It* directed by Clarence Badger in 1927, in which an established middle-aged woman writer, Elinor Glynn, is introduced as the author of a best-selling book titled *It*, which is the title of the film itself. In this film Glynn is an important figure who gives the definition of the word "IT," without which the whole film does not make sense. There are quite a few women writers, including newspaper writers, in the examples such as *Rich and Famous* (directed by George Cukor, in 1981), *His Girl Friday* (directed by Howard Hawks, in 1940), and the *Superman* series (in 1978-87), but they are only one type of the class component in society, which can be labeled as women

intellectuals. We have a variety of professions such as astronauts (the *Alien* series in 1979-92), scholars (*Another Woman* directed by Woody Allen in 1989; *Grumpy Old Men* directed by Donald Petrie in 1994; *Jurassic Park* directed by Steven Spielberg in 1993), attorneys (*The Client* directed by Joel Smatcher in 1994; *Curly Sue* directed by John Hughes in 1991) and, as the most relevant case to us, women doctors (*Spellbound* directed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1945; *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* directed by Henry King in 1955; *The Last Best Year* directed by John Erman in 1990; *Scenes from a Mall* directed by Paul Mazursky in 1991).

Japanese women intellectuals are also quite common as protagonists in film. A woman doctor in Shiro Toyota's *Spring in an Island* (1940) is based on the real story of a woman doctor (Masako Ogawa), who dedicated her life to healthcare of the islanders. This well-received film glorifies the woman because of her spiritual valor and intellectual supremacy and, together with other films such as Kenji Mizoguchi's *The Female Triumph* (1946) about a woman attorney, proves that Japan was producing films to give a serious look at women involved in intellectual professions at the time when women stuck in reality were suffering from unfair treatment. The woman attorney in *The Female Triumph* exposes evil patriarchy in a feudal family institution in defending a woman blamed for a murder of her baby boy.

Women intellectuals in American and Japanese films enjoy, to a certain degree, social advantages such as lifestyle stability thanks to their high earnings and respect for their intelligence and privileged background. But Chinese cinema takes a different approach to this category of women. They were infrequent and uncommon compared with the American and Japanese counterparts. It is true that an elementary school teacher appears as a protagonist in a silent film *A Rosy Dream* in 1932 and a talkie *People in an Alley* in 1948, but these teachers are regarded as working-class people who work for money or a social reform. The paucity of women intellectuals in Chinese film is explicable by the lasting effect of the Cultural Revolution based on Zedong Mao's ideas, which debased intellectuals. Even if they appear, they do not enjoy the same economically stable

life as the American and Japanese examples do. They are no different from soldiers, peasants, housewives, prostitutes, and manual workers. They suffer and die. *At Middle Age*, the Chinese Golden Rooster Best Picture and Best Actress Awards winning film in 1984, is not exceptional in that it shows the hard luck of a woman doctor, whose intelligence does not prevent her from suffering unreasonably.

In this essay I will focus on women doctors and compare the way they are represented in films in the U.S., Japan and China, clarifying cultural and social frameworks as determining factors of detectable differences. The films to be discussed are John Erman's *The Last Best Year*, (1990),<sup>2</sup> Yoji Yamada's *Torajiro's Salad-Day Memorial* (1988),<sup>3</sup> and Wang Qi-Min and Sun Yu's *At Middle Age* (1982).<sup>4</sup>

### Looking at Oneself: *The Last Best Year* (1990)

*The Last Best Year* is a film about a relationship between two middle-aged women, Wendy, a psychotherapist, and her patient with a liver cancer, Jane. The increasingly strengthening bond between the two women makes each change under the influence of the other. The story of Jane is quite simple. With Wendy's encouragement, she accomplishes three things important to her: visiting the only relative alive in her home town, getting contact with her son whom she gave up for adoption twenty years ago, and celebrating the last Christmas with her friends. She finally dies, satisfied.

The story of Wendy, that I am going to focus upon, is not so simple. She is an excellent therapist highly evaluated by her doctor friend, and she is excellent at home, too, as mother, wife and daughter. Her son carries on good conversations with her; her husband loves and respects her; and her aged mother relies upon her. Wendy seems to enjoy a happy professional and personal life. But her association with Jane begins to reveal her vulnerable aspect, which is related with her past traumatic experience.

At the age of five, Wendy underwent a traumatic experience of spend-



figure 1



figure 2



figure 3



figure 4

ing hours and days in agony outside of her beloved dying father's room. It has left a deep mark on her life; she is unable to see any dying patient whose approaching death indescribably frightens her. The film can be read as a story of this Wendy liberating herself from the haunting fear of losing someone she is attached to. It clarifies the connection between her five-year-old fear of losing her father and her present fear of losing her patient, Jane, by inserting the scene of a vision of herself as a five-year-old girl while she, visiting hospitalized Jane, walks through the dark hospital corridor (figures 1-4). This scene of the five-year-old girl is edited on by an ominously echoing nursery song, and marks the beginning of Wendy's inner journey back to her traumatic past. The girl disappears as soon as Wendy reaches her and nothing more happens here, but the evoked gloomy mood is carried over to Wendy's crucial confrontation with a mysterious man who has never appeared before (and after) in the film.

We are not given much information about him. Who and what he is

remains undisclosed. We only know that he looks like the age of Wendy's father if the father were alive, and that she decisively confronts him and becomes a spiritually strong woman. I interpret the film as expressive of a peculiarly American aspect of feminism, that is, a disclosure of psychic repression which, when overcome, leads to an acquisition of self-liberation or self-reliance. One of the characteristics of American feminism is its emphasis on women's spiritual liberation, as Emma Goldman points out in as early as 1911 that "[true emancipation] begins in woman's soul."<sup>6</sup> An American feminist strategy of consciousness-raising is hardly successful or even seen in the feminism of Japan or China, where Confucian culture would not let women acquire Emersonian self-reliance, and to such a process of gaining this self-reliance I will confine my attention in *The Last Best Year*.

Wendy begins a confession to the mysterious man. In the confession, she overlaps the old fear of losing her father with the present fear of losing Jane. While she is talking to the man, the camera captures her in a medium shot, panning 360 degrees around her and completing the scene with almost the same shot as the first medium shot (figures 5-22). The circling camera gives the central position to Wendy, reducing the man only a part of the background. The man remains silent and in a way non-existent, and the camera always shoots him unfocussed. Only to him she lets herself reveal her vulnerability or what she calls the "five-year-old" fear of losing Jane. She never reveals her helpless fear to anyone else, not even to her husband. The mysterious man is like a shadow, only sitting still without moving or speaking. The fact that this father-like figure appears a few sequences after Wendy's vision of the five-year-old girl suggests its visionary nature; the figure can be a vision evoked by Jane. The vision of her father (-like figure) enables her to undergo a ritual of reliving the past; she can do now what she was unable to do at the age of five - that is, to confess face-to-face to her beloved father how much she was afraid of losing him or Jane as a substitute for him.

The ritual is over and significantly the ending of the sequence is marked by a cut to a complete black frame, which indicates that some-



figure 5



figure 6



figure 7



figure 8



figure 9



figure 10



figure 11



figure 12



figure 13



figure 14



figure 15



figure 16



figure 17



figure 18



figure 19



figure 20



figure 21



figure 22

thing is ended there (figures 21-22). This is the only place in the film that the whole screen turns black. What is ended can be easily known from the way the plot develops: it is Wendy's traumatic "five-year-old" fear of losing someone she is attached to, because her attitude towards Jane begins to change. She is no longer afraid of confronting the approaching death of Jane. On the contrary, she actively begins to commit herself to Jane and, when told by her husband that "Sorry now you've got involved," she answers confidently: "I'm glad."

The dominant image after the end of the haunting "five-year-old" fear is the "lady of perpetual help" who, according to Jane, reaches out her arm to invite people into warm light. Perceiving that Jane is approaching the last moment, Wendy is ready to watch her and encourage her to die with no regrets about leaving this world. She assures Jane that everybody has come to love her and, when Jane resists "I can't [die]...not yet," encourages her to go to the lady of perpetual help who beckons her into her light: "It's all right. You can walk into the light." With these words, the face of Jane fades out as if it were mingled with the light of the lady (figures 23-28). The white frame, indicative of the light of the lady of perpetual help, makes a contrast to the complete black frame at the end of the vision sequence and can be taken as a result of filling that black void with the light of Jane's dedicated lady.

Wendy overcomes her traumatic experience and gains strength through her interchange with Jane. The female protagonist's spiritual maturation through her relationship with another woman is a motif often





figure 23



figure 24



figure 25



figure 26



figure 27



figure 28

expressed in American film. In the female quest into herself, the protagonist is often supplied with “another woman” (just as Wendy is with Jane), who occasions the protagonist’s inner journey. A middle-aged philosophy professor of a university in Woody Allen’s *Another Woman* is another example of the construction of Wendy-like woman. She is represented as a confident woman, as she proudly confesses, “If someone had asked me when I reached my 50 to assess my life, I would have said that I had

achieved a decent measure of fulfillment both personally and professionally." But overhearing confessions of "another woman" who is a patient in a neighboring psychiatrist's apartment triggers the professor's journey back into her past fifty years. As the film evolves, she discovers that her happy marriage, her close relationship with her brother, her good relationship with her best friend all prove to be false. She is reduced to "a pitiable woman who does not have anything" as is commented by her neighbor. Intending to renew her life, she decisively leaves her husband and concentrates on writing a book. The film thus describes this intellectual woman's mental maturation and ends with the strength that she shows.

### **Difficulties in Staying Married: *Torajiro's Salad-Day Memorial***

The mindscape of an American intellectual woman can be exposed and analyzed, just as anyone else's can. In American cinema women intellectuals and housewives, for example, could change their positions. But Japanese women intellectuals are not an object to be examined but something to be kept at a respectful distance. They are not given as much variety of configuration as Japanese housewives but are invariably defined as failures in their personal lives, no matter how successful they may be in their pursuit of brilliant careers.

The world longest-run film series directed by Yojiro Yamada, *Tough Being a Man*, which was suddenly terminated by the death of the leading actor Kiyoshi Atsumi in 1996, has the unvaried plot each time, that is, traveling Tora meets with a woman, develops a friendship with her, and parts with her though they have secretly come to love each other. Its fortieth film made in 1988, *Torajiro's Salad-Day Memorial*, chooses a woman doctor for Tora's partner. Machiko is a middle-aged widow living alone in a small town in the suburbs of Tokyo, and pays a visit every weekend to her son, who is taken care of by her aged mother in Tokyo. Satisfied with her busy professional life as a doctor in a local hospital, she does not want to marry again.

Her niece Yuki, a university student, often comes to Machiko's apart-

ment to spend time together. But their relationship does not develop along the line of Wendy-Jane, because Yuki does not trigger Machiko's inner journey but only functions as a deliverer of conservative messages of Machiko's aged mother, among which the most prominent one is to encourage Machiko to accept a certain arranged marriage:

Yuki: I've brought you a picture of your prospective husband.  
Grandma said I should deliver it to you.

Machiko: I already said "No" to Mom over the phone.

Yuki: It's crazy to reject him without seeing his picture. It's a good deal. His wife has been dead, and he has no kids. Besides, he is a manager of a hospital.

Yuki does not understand Machiko's rejection of a perfect man as a husband, nor does she appreciate Machiko's satisfaction with her profession. Machiko's mother, too, believes that woman's happiness rests on a married life with husband and children. She prefers a life as a common housewife to Machiko's life as a career doctor, and advises Machiko: "It's for your son, too, that you should get remarried. It is unnatural to remain single." Machiko decisively answers: "I have no intention to quit my hospital. There are many patients who depend on me. I am fully satisfied with my life." Her mother retorts: "You may be happy as a doctor. But how about as a woman?"

The camera skillfully films Machiko's encounter with Tora in the way it supports the mother's view. It first presents Michiko meeting Tora, whom she meets in the house of her aged female patient during her regular house call. With Tora's encouragement, the aged woman accepts Machiko's advice to be hospitalized. Grateful, Machiko takes Tora to her home for lunch. With a sad, sentimental music, the camera then shoots her quietly seeing the aged woman in the hospital, cutting to departing Tora on a train, and cutting back to her now at home. It peeps into her room from outside through the opening of the curtains. Machiko is occasionally covered and eclipsed by the window frames. That a protagonist is

covered or overshadowed by a thing or another person can be taken as a sign of something negative about him/her. The shots of Machiko's eclipsed figure, being edited right after the shots of departing Tora, to whom she has come to be attached, express her loneliness and the lack of a man like Tora whom she can rely upon in her life (figures 29-36). The mother, the niece, the camera and the music are all against Machiko's remaining single.

Tora functions as a motive for Machiko to shift a priority from a profession to a personal life. She visits Tora in Tokyo during her routine visit to the city, and reveals the symptom of being affected by her mother's tenet of woman's happiness, for she confesses to Tora when her memorable day with him is closing:

Machiko: Why am I so happy when I'm with you?

Tora: Because I always speak something funny, as my sister complains.

Machiko: No, it's not true. You remind me of the fact that I am a woman.

Machiko's transformation is clearly seen in the sequence of her last meeting with Tora. At the death of the aged woman patient, Machiko blames herself for not having let her die at her own house. She confesses to Tora the sense of loss, anxiety and incompetence, which is singular in the depiction of this usually confident woman doctor and momentarily makes the film analogous to *The Last Best Year*, where Wendy confesses her haunting five-year-old fear to the father-like figure. Behind Machiko's confession, there has been a problem about terminal care, which she has occasionally expressed. She cannot decide which should be more desirable, to give a consent to an aged female patient to live all alone in her house or to put her into the hospital to give full care. Instead of being solved, however, this problem of hers swerves into an unrealistic move: Machiko leaves her hospital and, along with it, her professional problem altogether. It is Tora's plain words of consolation, "You must be tired. You'd better



figure 29



figure 30



figure 31



figure 32



figure 33



figure 34



figure 35



figure 36

rest a while," that triggers Machiko's decision to quit her work. At these words Machiko literally rests her head on his shoulder (figures 37-42), and further arranges, literally again, to rest herself in Tokyo with her son. She further takes them seriously and Machiko may have taken seriously Tora's words that she should rest a while, and that may be why she abruptly decides to quit her hospital and to live with her son in Tokyo. The confession of the Japanese woman doctor does not lead to her inner quest, nor does it develop a plot of her professional anxiety. The exploration of the mindscape of a woman intellectual is hardly seen in Japanese cinema.

Tora implicitly conveys a message that it is far better to seek for a married life than a professional career if you are a woman. He actually gives a startling statement to Yuki towards the end of the film: "Your aunt [Machiko] is a woman. She needs a man who can find a solution for her when she runs into something sad and painful. Try to find such a man for her." Tora regards women as creatures protected by men. It remains a mystery that Machiko falls in love with Tora, for she is presented as an advanced feminist. She does not call the aged woman's husband by the common and traditional term "shujin" which means "master" or "owner." Instead, she uses "tsureai," which is one of the new, feminist terms to indicate "partner" with an emphasis of equality between wife and husband. Tora, on the other hand, shows sexual discrimination quite clearly even at the beginning of the film when he first meets Machiko's niece. Tora says to Yuki, meaning to flatter her: "You must be bright for a woman to be able to be accepted by Waseda University."

Machiko does not gain Tora. Her husband has been dead. It is a remarkable feature of the representation of Japanese women intellectuals to be deprived of husbands. Even if husbands exist, the spectator cannot get a glimpse of them; they may be briefly mentioned but are frequently not presented visually on the screen. It is probably difficult for Japanese film directors, who are mostly men, to visualize husbands of women intellectuals. The existence of women intellectuals like Machiko is recognized at least, but they are not represented positively.



figure 37



figure 38



figure 39



figure 40



figure 41



figure 42

Women intellectuals in Japanese film are mostly deprived of their husbands. The brilliant woman attorney, a graduate of Tokyo University Law School, in Yoshitaro Nomura's *Doubt* (1982) is divorced, and is compelled to give up her small daughter to her ex-husband, who is happily remarried to a humble and homely woman. The woman scholar in Kei Kuma's *Sandakan No.8: Nostalgia* (1974) seems to have a very cooperative husband, who undertakes the whole household work and the care of their

daughter while the scholar stays away from home for several months to acquire first-hand information of the wartime, overseas prostitutes. But significantly, the husband is never shot in the film. How he manages the household work remains unknown. Such a male figure subservient to or cooperative with his intellectual wife is difficult to be visualized. The newspaper editorial writer in Nobuhiko Obayashi's *The Prime of Womanhood* (1994) is successful in her profession but, again, has no husband though she has a daughter.

These women intellectuals represented in Japanese film do not reflect reality, but the way they are represented tells something about the common wish of men or directors that bright women should give up pursuing a career. If they do not give up, then they will not get a happy personal life. I suspect that Confucian culture has been nurturing such a wish, for the Confucian tenet of "good wife, wise mother" expects women to stay home and to be obedient to husbands and enlightening to children.<sup>4</sup> Good and wise women should never be self-assertive but contentedly labor as useful servants to their husbands and children. The exploration of the inner world of women intellectuals is not important, and their mindscape remains a black box, which the cinematic apparatus cannot penetrate.

### **Sufferings in a 40 Square Meter House: *At Middle Age***

Films in China do not just imply the tenet of "good wife, wise mother" but clearly declares it. The female protagonist, Wentin, is trapped by the tenet in *At Middle Age* directed in 1982 by Wang Qi-Ming and Sun Yu. The film deals with her as an intellectual who suffers in modern China. She is a middle-aged, distinguished doctor but is currently bedridden. The film explains why she fell seriously ill, and shows at the end her miraculous return to life though it keeps its usual dark tone to imply that her future should remain shadowy as nothing in society changes. Winning the Chinese Golden Rooster Best Picture and Best Actress Awards, the film was admired as an accurate portrait of the life of intellectuals.

Wentin is the most distinguished oculist in her hospital, whose opera-



tions are so renowned as to attract fellow doctors to visit and observe them. Though spending much time for the hospital work, Wentin does not neglect the cares for her husband and children at home. She eats dinner with her family and values her family time, just like her American counterpart Wendy does in *The Last Best Year*. But interestingly Wentin harbors the sense of failure as a wife and mother. I wish to clarify how the film introduces the traditional Confucian teaching of "good wife, wise mother" in its depiction of the social and economic problems in China today.

The film begins with Wentin critically ill in bed in her hospital. In continual flashbacks, it illustrates her past eighteen years since she was first employed as a healthy and ambitious woman. Eighteen years have proved that she is capable of undertaking any complicated operation and that she is the most important person in the ophthalmology department in the hospital. She successfully performed three difficult operations the very day she collapsed of a cardiac infarction. It is clearly stated in the conversation between the director of the hospital and a senior oculist that Wentin is the victim of modern Chinese society, which requires such stressful overwork without a proper payment. Despite her achievements Wentin must be content with the title and salary of a mere intern because her promotion to a regular doctor is impossible when there is no vacancy in the regular personnel in the hospital. She gets paid only sixty-five yuan and fifty jiao (about US\$ 8) per month, which is an unreasonably meager salary.

In the early 1980s when the film was made, the Economic Reform had already started but the Salary Reform was yet to come. Intellectuals were located at the lowest in the salary scale, as the director sarcastically comments, "Doctors are inferior to barbers." (The intellectuals even after the Salary Reform do not get much higher salary, either. In 1996, professors at Peking University, for example, get 600 yuans or US\$70 per month at the age of 40 for full-time work. Housing is provided with a minimum fee such as 30 yuans or US\$3.50 per month for one bedroom apartment of about 40m<sup>2</sup>. It is very crowded for parents and a child to share one room

for studying, eating, and sleeping. Such a situation has not been improved since the time *At Middle Age* was made, though in the film the number of children is two while it is not allowed to have the second child in current China.)

The film visually presents poverty undermining Wentin's family life by shots of a tiny studio-type house of about 40 square meters with no bathroom but only one small bed and one desk. Some chief items that catch the eyes of the spectator are empty pans with no crumbs of food around, a cracked toy-like clock on the desk, and a ragged, worn undershirt that Jiajie the husband wears. But most remarkably, the clothes that Wentin and her husband wear remain the same for almost twenty years. Wentin wears one white shirt and blue pants in summer, putting two more layers of clothes (grey shirt and blue overshirt) in spring and fall, and one more layer (a overjacket) in winter. Wentin and Jiajie can afford only one basic pattern of clothes. The economic poverty makes a sheer contrast to the exuberant luxury expressed by Machiko's clothes in *Torajiro's Salad-Day Memorial* and Wendy's in *The Last Best Year*. *Torajiro's Salad-Day Memorial* covers only one season, but Machiko is clothed in a new dress every time she appears. She never wears the same clothes twice, except for her medical white robe.

It is not only the clothes but also the conversation topics of Wentin that are always the same. Wentin seems to have no desire to talk except about guilt she feels for making her husband do household work and take care of their children. She does not give much credit to herself for her medical achievements but is obsessed with the sense of failure: "I am selfish.... I push my husband in the kitchen and put my children to trouble. I am disqualified for a wife. Disqualified for a mother, too." We can clearly see Wentin bound by the tenet of "Good wife, Wise mother." In every family conversation in the film, Wentin refers to herself as a bad wife. The spectator keeps hearing Wentin playing the same tune to her husband: "I ruined you by making you do housework" or "I'm selfish, thinking only of work. I have been overlooking my family, having failed to fulfill my duties." The "duties" are, needless to say, to serve as a good wife to her hus-

band and a wise mother to her children.

Jiajie answers to Wentin, "No, it is not your fault" or "Don't be silly" or "only I know how much you've sacrificed yourself." Though he once sarcastically comments that "You think about the hospital even when you are at home," Jiajie understands that their economically disintegrated society requires Wentin, the only capable oculist in her hospital, to overwork despite her wishes. He concludes, "it is almost impossible to accomplish anything in China today." Jiajie locates their misery in the social and political context of China, while Wentin blames herself, regarding the present misery as a personal matter. Under the pressure of the household work, Jiajie refers to the Cultural Revolution as the cause of delay in his completion of a research paper on metal engineering: "one-day loss is nothing compared with the loss of ten years." It is striking that the film makes Wentin entrapped by the sense of wife's duties while it assigns critical eyes to her husband. The difference in views between Wentin and Jiajie is not taken as meaningful by Chinese spectators, for they tend to group a married couple as a whole unit and not two individuals. Wentin's continual and intense self-reproach informed by the tenet of "good wife, wife mother" is too common a sight to draw a particular attention.

Jiajie's analysis of social vice is taken over by another male, who is married to Wentin's closest girlfriend. In an eloquent speech, he emphasizes that middle-aged intellectuals have lost their prime time due to the Cultural Revolution: "We are an unfortunate generation. It is the misfortune to sacrifice our golden time because of the ten years of the Cultural Revolution." He defines the middle-aged as a generation whose spring and summer were ruined by the Revolution and whose autumn is being appropriated by modernization. Having decided to stop sacrificing himself, he will leave China to try a new life in Canada with his wife. Escaping to a foreign country seems to be the only solution to the middle-age tragedy. The film thus gives an objective observation of the misery of Wentin, Jiajie, and other intellectuals through the mouth of a third party, and Wentin could condemn the government for her improper salary. However, she is too deeply bound by the Confucian tenet of "good wife, wise mother" to

direct critical eyes to social system. She criticizes her own life pattern and, being blind to social and political circumstances, suggests that Jiajie should start living in his office alone in order to have much time without being bothered by household work and the care of two children.

The Confucian restraints are climactically brought up by Wentin's two monologues that she gives before and after her collapse. The burden of behaving as good wife and wise mother is getting so heavy that in the first monologue she questions her marriage itself:

It may have been a mistake to get married. I should have thought at that time whether I could endure the burden of a family. I could have avoided bearing a heavy cross.

This "burden" is visually highlighted when she gives the second monologue while bedridden. In her dim consciousness at the verge of death, she wonders if "it might be restful to fall asleep eternally with no more thought, understanding, sorrow, worry, and trouble." The monologue is edited on the shots of visionary Wentin collapsed on the sleep mountain, along which she tries to climb upward. This sequence of the mountain begins with an interesting superimposition of Wentin's close-up upon the visionary mountain (figures 43-48). The superimposition implies that Wentin herself may be the metonymy of the mountain, which itself is a metaphor of the hardship for her to overcome. The mountain sequence therefore indicates that her life may be a long struggle to conquer herself, who has been brainwashed by the Confucian tenets. It will be a very difficult task, for she is still so deeply caught by the idea of "good wife" even when she bids farewell to this life. The majority of the second monologue is an elaboration of her regret for being "unable to take care of you [Jiajie]":

A little time given, I could have fulfilled the duties of a wife, returning home on time and preparing meals for you. I wanted to let you use the desk and finish your paper. It is too late now.



figure 43



figure 44



figure 45



figure 46

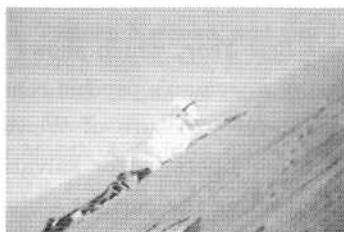


figure 47

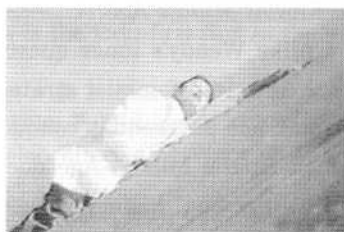


figure 48

The gloomy mode of the film is partly aroused by the continual, frequent use of a pathetic melody. The leitmotif in a film indicates the beginning of some significant sequence. The leitmotif in *The Last Best Year* plays six times, and that in *Torajiro's Salad-Day Memorial* three times, while that in *At Middle Age* plays as many as thirteen times for a long duration each time. It is heard when Wentin's body is eaten away by poverty and overwork. In other words, the whole film is overwhelmed by the

same pathetic, gloomy mode without much change.

## Conclusion

In the cross-cultural examination of the three films, it becomes clear that the American example features an exploration of the inner world of a woman intellectual, and that such an inner journey does not take place in the Japanese example. The Japanese camera does not dare to explore the mind of a socially and intellectually distinguished woman. Neither does the Chinese camera, which appears as if it began to disclose feelings of a woman doctor but actually ends in importing her social degradation and economical exploitation. The sequences that I have previously quoted tell much of the differences ---- that is, the sequence of Wendy's vision of a five-year-old-girl in the hospital corridor in the American film *The Last Best Year*, the sequence of Machiko watched from outside through the opening of the curtains in the Japanese film *Torajiro's Salad-Day Memorial*, and the sequence of visionary Wentin climbing up the mountain in the Chinese film *At Middle Age*.

Unlike Wendy's inner quest in *The Last Best Year*, which shows the typical American feminist strategy of disclosing a woman's psychic repression and her succeeding conquest of it, whatever exposure of Wentin's mind in *At the Middle Age* does not lead to her liberation or salvation. Wentin's personal history is not at all as focused as the current Chinese social conditions. Wentin is made endlessly to tread a thorny path on the mountain with the burden of unbearable poverty, miseries, and the tenet of "good wife, wise mother" due to the social inadequacy of financial, housing, and mental support.

The mindscape of American Wendy is not climbing a mountain but walking through a mysterious corridor. The corridor with many doors represents inner self. At the end of a corridor Wendy sees herself as a five-year-old girl. The silent little girl is a metonymy of a traumatic wound that Wendy received in the past, the wound that is to be overcome eventually. Another film about a woman intellectual *Another Woman* also uses a

corridor for the female protagonist's inner quest. Problems of women intellectuals are exposed, analyzed and finally solved. These problems are the kind to expose their personal history or childhood.

The Japanese camera does not enter the labyrinth of the inner self of a woman doctor. Instead, it peeps in her room from outside the windows between the curtains. A woman intellectual is regarded as a mysterious being in a different world and should be kept at a respectful distance. Her inner self remains a black box. No one would dare to explore it. It is even implied that the best alternative for a woman intellectual would be to give up her career and become a housewife.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The Asahi Newspaper*, November 9, 1996, p.19.

<sup>2</sup> *The Last Best Year*. 1990, U.S.A., 97 minutes, color, directed by John Erman, starring Mary Tyler Moore, Bernadette Peters, Curmen Matthews, Kate Reid, and Kenneth Welsh.

<sup>3</sup> *Torajiro's Salad-Day Memorial*. 1988, Japan, 83 minutes, color, directed by Yoji Yamada, starring Kiyoshi Atsumi, Yoshiko Mita, Chieko Baisho, Hiroko Mita, Tomoko Naraoka, and Gin Maeda. This is the forty-first film in the world longest-run film seires, *Tough Being a Man*.

<sup>4</sup> A detailed account of the tenet of "good wife, wise mother" is given by Noburu Haga, *Good wife, Wise mother* (Tokyo: Oyamakaku Publishing Co., 1990).

<sup>5</sup> *At Middle Age*. 1982, China, 83 minutes, color, directed by Wang Qi-Min and Sun Yu, starring Pan Hong and Da Shichang.

<sup>6</sup> "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation," from *Anarchism and Other Essays*, in *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman (New York: Random House, 1972), p.142, quoted in Sarah Slavin Schramm, *Plow Women rather Than Reapers: An Intellectual History of Feminism in the United States* (Metchen, N.J. & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1979), p.42.