

**Women's empowerment: Staging power resistance in *Oshin* (2013)**

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**ABSTRACT**

Fictional movies captivated the audience in many ways through their stories and audio-visual. The stories of fictional movies often reflect what happens to our society, and we savor the purification of the hero's tragic flaw. One of which is power relations between males and females. This study explores women's empowerment in *Oshin* the movie (2013). The narrative is about a seven-year-old girl called Oshin, who is made to work as a maid by her father due to the family's poverty. At first, she is against her father's idea of being separated from her family. She struggles to become a maid until she is accused of stealing and runs away. By watching her mother's efforts as the household pillar, she finally realizes the importance of being an independent female. The movie shows power relations issues regarding filial duty and social stratification. Yet, with the help of Foucault's theory of *The Subject and Power* (1982), power resistance is a more eloquent outcome to discuss. Thus, this study proposes the stages of power resistance and how the protagonist declares her resilience through traditional gender roles. Moreover, this study uses an interpretative method by scrutinizing each scene that shows power resistance; the discussion reveals that Oshin participates in staging power resistance for women's economic empowerment, which subsequently contributes to her family's economic development. This study concludes that financial independence and women's empowerment are inextricably linked.

**Keywords:** Cinematic elements; *Oshin*; power relations; power resistance; women's empowerment

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**Article history**

*Submitted:*  
11 December 2023

*Accepted:*  
18 March 2024

*Published:*  
27 March 2024

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**Citation (APA Style):**

Tisnawijaya, C., & Kurniati, G. (2024). Women's empowerment: Staging power resistance in *Oshin* (2013). *LITERA*, 23(1), 105-117. <https://doi.org/10.21831/ltr.v23i1.68729>.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The term empowerment has been used widely and is often attached to the women's movement for equal rights. It is a topic that is still a talking point as patriarchy is deeply rooted in our society and prolonged not only by men but also by women themselves. Therefore, understanding women's empowerment is crucial to acknowledging and ending gender inequality that has disadvantaged women in many aspects of life. Biewener and Bacque, in their article *Feminism and the Politics of Empowerment in International Development* (2015), expose the origin and the development of the term women's empowerment: first, women activists initially used it in the 1970s in South Asia, referring to "self-actualization and/or self-determination" against "authority of large scale" (p. 59); second, the Development Alternatives with Women for New Era (DAWN) at the United Nations' 1985 conference used the terminology to change women's socio-political position to eradicate any inequality based on class, race, and gender (p. 61); and third, feminists within World Bank policy in Washington Consensus from the 1980s-1990s drew upon the term "women's increased decision-making power within the household, ... in market-oriented activity, ... mobility, or their capacity to generate more income" (p. 62). Therefore, to use the term *empowerment* means acknowledging *disempowerment*, that power relations create inequality - the stratification of superior and inferior in social interactions. Foucault explains that power relations refer to how someone determines someone else's actions or behaviors, and every power relation prompts the struggle to escape from being orchestrated or the resistance of power (1982, p. 780). In this case, before the term women's empowerment, there was a situation in which women lacked *power* or lost their subjectivities as individuals; in other words, women's socio-political actions had been restrained. Here, in the relationship of power, women then are subjects to power, men.

When the term women's empowerment arises, it does not mean that gender inequality or women's struggles to achieve equality and equity have vanished; the phrase merely signifies a consciousness that women have been put into a disadvantageous position. Women's empowerment implies a change from denied power to accessible power; here, the systemic patriarchy that restrains women from making choices in private and public spaces transforms into a community that grants "education, employment, and political participation" for women as well as for men (Kabeer, 2005, p.13). Therefore, women's empowerment is a consciousness that women have the same rights, opportunities, and freedom in any socio-economic-political relations; that the *power* is not *given to* but *within* themselves as individuals.

Women's empowerment is increasingly a common development issue. Women have endured more adversity throughout history than any other marginalized group. Their pain has risen exponentially regardless of culture, race, geography, or religion. A range of studies on women's empowerment is reviewed to draw significant methodological inferences regarding how to gauge empowerment. Hancock (2006) provides examples of conceptualizations of women's empowerment as factory workers in export processing zones in Sri Lanka. Cornwall (2016) highlights the complexities and conundrums surrounding women's empowerment in IDS Bulletin's articles. Specifically, Edward (2012) explains how *Precious* promotes the emancipation of black women – black pop feminism. The self-empowerment process that Muslim women in Israel, both religious and non-religious, underwent while pursuing higher education is illustrated in Gilat (2015). Alkhaled and Berglund (2018) delve into the life experiences of female entrepreneurs who can liberate from certain gendered limitations. The impact of messages that purport to empower women's post-exposure sensations of empowerment and self-objectification is measured by Bue and Harrison (2019). These previous studies emphasize the dimensions and dilemmas around women's empowerment.

The issue of women's empowerment is portrayed in many movies. Here, films have the same narrative style as literature and sometimes use historical events such as wars and natural disasters as the setting; through the captivating audio-visual, they communicate ideas massively more effectively and efficiently than printed literature (Keles, 2015). Through cinematic techniques such as "framing, angle, camera movement, sound, and editing" and theatrical elements, namely "costumes, props, sets, and acting choice", the audience can grasp the depth and nuance of the issues represented by the narrative (Golden, 2015, p. 1). In other words, films capture our socio cultures with political issues as much entertainment as education mode. In this case, movies as products of popular culture are the best media for enhancing women's empowerment, one of which is *Oshin* (2013). This Japanese movie depicts the women's empowerment issues above. The condition in which women strive to survive and resist oppression resonates with similar conditions in this Japanese movie, *Oshin* (2013). Then, it is crucial to discuss the movie as the protagonist symbolizes women's empowerment in terms of self-determination to break the cycle of patriarchy within a household by proving females' capacity to generate more income, which means achieving self-actualization as an independent individual. In other words, *Oshin* is a symbol of women's emancipation (Valentya, 2015).

*Oshin* the movie (2013) was directed by Shin Togashi with Kota Yamada and Sugako Hashida as the scriptwriters. The film is a remake of the serial with the same title aired in NHK from 1983 to 1984. The film was nominated for *Asia-Fukuoka International Film Festival* and *Hawaii International Film Festival* (2013). While the TV series presents the life of Oshin from childhood to adulthood until she becomes a successful business woman, *Oshin* the movie plays the life of a seven-year-old girl who must earn a living for her family. Oshin faces many difficulties serving as a maid until it comes to her attention that her mother sacrifices even more as the pillar of the family. She no longer tries to run away or objects to the obligation to work for the family, but she accepts the situation for the good of her own sake. The movie, thus, portrays women's empowerment under the pressure of patriarchy and traditional gender roles.

A study by Wanda Kirana Valentya (2015), entitled "The Depiction of Women's Roles and Positions of the Two Families in *Oshin* film by Shin Togashi," explores women's positions based on their families' financial situations. Female characters in *Oshin* are classified into low-income families, Oshin and her mother, and wealthy families, Mino and Kuni. This study shows women's roles in Japanese society are as housewives and breadwinners. Moreover, two studies discuss *the Oshin* TV series. Yusnida Eka Puteri and Yusy Widarahesty wrote the first study (2017) entitled "Reproduction of Cultural Myth on 'Japanese Ideal Woman' through *Oshin* TV Series by Sugako Hashida 1983". Their paper discusses how the movie represents Japanese values, *ryousai kenbo*, that being female means

being a good wife and wise mother. As the TV series plays from 1983 to 1984, the show, according to them, is the case of cultural reproduction. Based on Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, the paper states that the *Oshin* TV series, as a mass media, is a tool to construct the ideal characteristics of Japanese women, who always put their husbands and children first. Although this study explains *ryousai kenbo* historically, it does not evaluate the narrative thoroughly. This paper only mentions two examples of Japanese women's characteristics represented by the show. The second study was written by Elisabeth Scherer and Timo Thelen (2021) entitled "Following *Oshin* and *Amachan*: Film Tourism and Nation Branding in the Analogue and Digital Ages." Their article discusses how the *Oshin* TV series, a morning drama, *asadora*, was used as "Japan's cultural and foreign policy"; the show used local places and traditional cultures, which both were looked for by the audience (Scherer & Thelen, 2021, p. 135). The location of the story's setting was selected to increase tourism, and the show's merchandise was sold to raise public interest in the story. The article does not analyze the intrinsic elements of the story as in the literary study. Yet, it introduces how the apparatuses use mass media to promote the nation's image. In this case, the *Oshin* TV series represents Japan's landscape and culture to its local audience and foreign spectators.

None of the studies above explores the staging power resistance in women's empowerment in *Oshin the movie*. Discussing *Oshin the movie* (2013) requires evaluating the female characters, Oshin and her mother, and considering how the story portrays them. Essentially, the portrayal of female characters in the movie offers a distinct perspective from that of the general public since it paints a more accurate portrait of empowered women from the feminist perspective. *Oshin the movie* serves as a mirror of social conditions and a source of knowledge about how power resistance is staged during the process of women's empowerment in a patriarchal society. In *Oshin the movie*, gender and power-related conflicts are particularly embodied in Oshin and her mother – two women who experience oppression in both their domestic and public spheres. Therefore, this study posits the following research question: how are Oshin and her mother exemplary of women excessively dominated as a means in a patriarchal system? The answer to this question may provide insights into how women's empowerment is first staged within the domestic sphere and is further projected in the public sphere, namely Oshin's workplaces.

## METHOD

The study was conducted using the interpretative method to better understand the subject matter at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Since the object of this study is *Oshin*, the movie (2013), all data are in the form of scene pictures and characters' lines. These data were collected by selecting the events that show power relations and power resistance issues according to Foucault's theory (1982). Each event was analyzed by evaluating the narrative elements, such as characters and characterizations, setting, plot, and point of view, and examining cinematography elements, namely angle, shot, lighting, color, and sound. Both elements sporadically support the arguments in this study. Thus, the discussion of women's empowerment is informed by several relevant theories, such as gender studies, feminism, power relations, and literary elements.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

This study, "Women's Empowerment: Staging Power Resistance in *Oshin* (2013)", evaluates both narrative and cinematography elements of selected scenes showing how the protagonist, Oshin, develops her sense as an independent individual. Her struggles against various kinds of power relations, namely father-daughter, supervisor-subordinate, and employer-employee relations, depict the issues of power relations that cause power resistance, leading to women's empowerment. It is essential to understand the concept of power to discuss resistance. Foucault proposes three types of power: "sovereign power", "disciplinary power", and "biopower", each with specific characteristics (as cited in Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014, pp. 107-108). First, *sovereign power* means all related to law-making and the usage of law (Foucault, 1978); only certain positions or professions in social functions have the privilege to create the law. Second, *disciplinary power* means the ability to control the subject; what to think, do, say, and do otherwise is "abnormal" and, thus, punishable (Foucault, 1991). Third, *biopower* means the capacity to "take charge of life" (Foucault, 1978); the power holder decides who gets to live or how to reproduce life and who does not. Meanwhile, resistance is "a reaction to power" (Lilja & Vinthagen,

2014, p. 107); someone subject to power will try to break away from the bound of power relation. Resistances can be “possible, necessary, improbable ..., spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent ..., quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial” (Foucault as cited in Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014, p. 107). In this study, the power relations are about how women are oppressed (being the subjects of power), and when they resist (trying to retrieve their subjectivities), women’s empowerment happens.

The results of this study can be summarized by the story’s conflict of how the protagonist, Oshin, as the subject of power strives for her own subjectivity:

**Table 1. Power Relations and Power Resistance in *Oshin* (2013)**

	Power Relations	Power Resistance
father-daughter	Oshin is asked to leave for work.	Oshin refuses her father’s orders.
supervisor-subordinate	Oshin is accused of stealing money.	Oshin flees from her employer’s house.
employer-employee	Oshin is accused of stealing a book.	Oshin proves her good intention to read the book, not stealing it.

Table 1 shows that Oshin is the subject of sovereign power; her inferior positions – as a daughter, a subordinate, an employee – compel her to do as told. However, Oshin does not allow herself to become the subject of power incessantly; she never hesitates to confront the domination. Oshin’s efforts to achieve her subjectivity – the will to work, the truth that she is not a thief, and the ability to read – eventually lead her to women’s empowerment.

**Table 2. Women’s Empowerment in *Oshin* (2013)**

	Women’s Empowerment
Initial Stage – sisterhood	Oshin realizes she needs to take part in earning money because she does not want her mother to sacrifice her pregnancy.
Process Stage – endurance	Oshin discovers her being a maid does not mean guarantee her mother’s well-being; her mother still needs to work for the family’s welfare.
Closure Stage – interdependency	Oshin acknowledges females’ important role in a family, they need to work both inside and outside the house.

Table 2 shows that women’s empowerment in *Oshin* (2013) is closely related to economic problems; even as a little girl, Oshin is responsible for helping the family survive from starvation. Within the difficult situation, Oshin comes to an understanding that is female’s destiny to work for the family. This realization is built upon seeing her mother’s prolonged work. Furthermore, the realization highlights that Oshin is aware of her roles as a kid and daughter who will keep up with her mother’s current challenges. The two tables above illustrate how Oshin tackles her obstacles as a girl who struggles for her family’s survival concurrently with her empowerment process.

## Discussion

*Oshin* the movie (2013) presents the protagonist with the same name. Oshin, a seven-year-old daughter, is asked by her father to be a maid in the city. She reluctantly leaves her family after witnessing her mother abort the pregnancy by soaking in the cold river. Due to her family’s poverty, Oshin has to follow her older sisters’ path, earning for the family. Conversely, the movie portrays how Oshin’s mother must be separated from her kids to survive. The discussion below covers three events of power relations between father-daughter, supervisor-subordinate, and employer-employee that lead to women’s empowerment in terms of resistance as the reaction to each. This power relations issue is closely related to the story’s setting, the beginning of the Meiji era, in which Japanese society was divided into two categories: the poor who lived in rural areas and the wealthy in the cities (Priventa, Handayani, & Riani, 2023). Because of her family’s poverty, Oshin cannot pursue her education, as what Meiji policy was. Instead, she is ordered by her father to contribute to the family’s income, by working in the city. Upon this ruling, Oshin’s mother cannot let her stay. This decision is based on the social stratification in Japanese society at that time: male – in this case, Oshin’s father – as the head of the household can dictate things (Priventa, Handayani, & Riani, 2023), while female – in this case, Oshin’s mother – must comply with his decision (Valentya, 2015).

### ***Power Relations and Power Resistance in Oshin (2013)***

The type of power represented in *Oshin* (2013) is sovereign power; as the subject of power, Oshin's destiny as a maid is ruled by her father, supervisor, and employee. Moreover, Oshin's mother is a subject of her husband.

#### ***Power Relations between Oshin and Her Fathers***

Oshin, as a daughter, is the subject of power; her father gets to decide what she has to do, and she must comply to prove her filial duty.



**Figure 1. Oshin is asked to leave for work**

*Note.* Oshin's father gives an ultimatum that Oshin needs to work for the family to survive. From *Oshin* [00:02:59], by Shin Togashi (director), 2013.

The scene (Figure 1) shows Oshin and her family having dinner with a little bonfire as the minimum light source. They live in a hut which implies they are poor. It is winter, and they barely have something to eat. The darkness (Figure 1) implies not only the setting of nighttime but also the difficulty of their life without a good meal. Her father's statement, "Oshin, I've decided to send you out to work too. You'll be a live-in servant for a lumber trader. They do big business so they're rich. You'll be well fed" (Togashi, 2013, 00:02:51-00:03:15), raises the conflict from her cheerful mood about her day to her sudden fear of separation from her family. Oshin pleads with her father to let her stay, "No, I don't want to go. ... I'm not going! I'm starting school in April" (Togashi, 2013, 00:03:18-00:03:32). Here, Oshin objects to her father's decision by stating her will. However, her father firmly says, "Oshin, we don't have rice to feed you. Your sisters went to work without a word. You should too!" (Togashi, 2013, 00:03:51-00:04:01). Her father's statement suggests that he is superior to Oshin. The scene (Figure 1) uses over-the-shoulder-shot portraying Oshin's father to the camera to show his power as the decision maker and Oshin, the daughter, cannot disobey. When she objects for the second time, "No, I'm going nowhere! I want to be with Mama and you." (Togashi, 2013, 00:04:03-00:04:07), Oshin ends up being hit. This physical abuse is a punishment for her disobedience; it proves Oshin's father's power, implying that as a daughter, Oshin can only prove her filial duty by becoming a maid, earning for the family. Oshin's direct refusal of her father's order is her resistance to her father's power.

Due to the family's poverty, Oshin's mother feels guilty about being pregnant. She tries to abort the baby by soaking herself in the cold river. Seeing this, Oshin changes her mind and leaves as a maid willingly, "Mama, I'm going to work. ... I've decided! All that matters is that you're alive, Mama. Don't do that again, Mama" (Togashi, 2013, 00:07:44-00:08:07). Here, Oshin realizes that her being a maid is the only way to save her mother and her future baby sibling.



**Figure 2. Oshin says goodbye to her mother**

*Note.* Oshin's mother prepares her to leave. From *Oshin* [00:12:40], by Shin Togashi (director), 2013.

The scene shows Oshin's mother giving her a pocket charm as a token of love upon Oshin's departure (Figure 2). The camera uses a medium shot portraying the mother kneeling before her daughter; Oshin's standing position makes her taller than her mother, suggesting that she is no longer the subject of power but has the power to save her family from hunger. Her mother's statement, "You'll have to take care of yourself from now on. No one can help you. You're on your own. But, if it's too tough to bear, come home. Mama will always be here for you." (Togashi, 2013, 00:12:40-00:13:05), implies that Oshin's decision to work has made her responsible for her well-being; the mother's kneeling position then expresses her powerless position both to take care of her daughter and herself. In this case, Oshin's mother is also the subject of power; she must accept her husband's decision and thus be parted with her daughter, Oshin.

As Foucault (1982) explains, power only exists in relations; it is a strategy to gain something. It can be concluded that Oshin's leaving to work is how her father exercises power over her. Oshin, then, is the subject of domination; making Oshin work as a maid is a strategy to survive as she is paid up front with a sack of rice. Oshin's body must be given up for the family's wellness. Here, as a subject of power, she tries to resist the domination. Though denied by her father, her objection is inevitable as Foucault formulates that there will be power resistance when power is exercised (1982).

### *Power Relations between Oshin and Her Supervisor*

Oshin, as a maid, is a subject of power; she must do the house chores according to her supervisor's instructions. Tsune, her supervisor, accuses her of stealing money. The prejudice that Oshin is a thief happens because of her position, as a new maid, as a child, and because she comes from a low-income family.



**Figure 3. Oshin is accused of stealing money**

*Note.* Oshin is being stripped despite her telling the truth that she did not steal the money. From *Oshin* [00:28:08], by Shin Togashi (director), 2013.

The scene (Figure 3) uses full shots to portray the status of the characters: Oshin-the maid, Tsune-the supervisor, and the employer. All of them are standing, but their heights are different: Oshin is the shortest because she is the youngest; this represents her status as the lowest among the three. Tsune is higher than Oshin because she is older; this represents her status which is also higher as she is Oshin's supervisor. The employer is the tallest of all because she is standing on higher ground, representing her highest status. The light source is from the room's far end, creating a somber room that implies a tense atmosphere. Tsune accuses Oshin, "You thief! I know you stole 50 cents from my purse. What do you want 50 sen for?" (Togashi, 2013, 00:26:40-00:26:47) which immediately denies by Oshin, "I didn't steal!" (Togashi, 2013, 00:27:04). Blinded by Oshin's poverty, Tsune is compelled to find the money on Oshin's clothes, "Take off your kimono, Oshin. ... If she is innocent, she'd do it." (Togashi, 2013, 00:27:05-00:27:19). As she is stripped, Tsune finds a 50-cent coin in Oshin's pocket charm that she assumes is hers. "No one would send a 7-year-old off to work if they had this much money!" (Togashi, 2013, 00:28:20-00:28:26) proves her prejudice towards Oshin. She must be right because she has a better life than Oshin.

Being accused, Oshin performs resistance; she refuses to be called a thief and tries to defend her money, "Granny gave it to me when I left home. ... I'm not lying! ... That's mine! Give it back!" (Togashi, 2013, 00:28:08-00:28:32). However, because of her class, her age, and her status, no one believes her. The employer takes Tsune's side, "Oshin, I thought you were good. I didn't know you

were so wicked!” (Togashi, 2013, 00:28:42-00:28:52). The employer, who has the highest status, is the decision maker. In this case, she believes that Oshin has taken the money.



**Figure 4. Oshin flees from her employer's house**

*Note.* Oshin is alone in the forest pine. From *Oshin* [00:30:33], by Shin Togashi (director), 2013

Rather than staying in a place with people who do not trust her, Oshin chooses to leave. This scene (Figure 4) uses a low angle to present how small and powerless Oshin is in the middle of the forest pine. As she runs from an injustice employer, Oshin's safety is still threatened by the cold of the forest and the weather's uncertainty. Oshin's running away is a form of resistance; she chooses to take control of her life rather than being accused of stealing.

This event shows that the subject of power, although being subjugated, still has her subjectivity (Foucault, 1982). Here, Tsune actively exercises her power over Oshin by giving her orders and accusing her of stealing money, which might as well be a strategy to maintain her position as her employer's right hand. However, Oshin does not let her subjectivity, being an honest maid, be swept away from the prejudice. She instantly denies the accusation and leaves the premises to preserve her dignity.

#### *Power Relations between Oshin and Her Employer*

Oshin as a maid is the subject of power; her well-being in the house depends on her employer's decision. When she works at another house, her status as a maid still causes her to be assumed as a thief.

Son: What do you expect of a peasant? She craves what she doesn't have. Mother, we can't have a thief in the house.

...

Kuni: Oshin, you stole Kayo's book. But you took it without asking. Answer me!

Kayo: You took it!

Kuni: Be quiet.

Oshin: It's my fault! I didn't set out to take it. I just wanted to read it.

Kuni: But you can't read, can you?

(Togashi, 2013, 01:10:57-01:12:14)

The conversation shows that Kayo's father belittles Oshin; he assumes that stealing is her character. Moreover, because of her social class, her employer assumes she is illiterate.



**Figure 5. Oshin is accused of stealing a book**

*Note.* Oshin is apologizing for taking Kayo's book without permission. From *Oshin* [01:11:34], by Shin Togashi (director), 2013.

The scene (Figure 5) uses a full, over-the-shoulder shot to show the stratification between Oshin and Kayo's family. Here, the full shot presents the characters' actions; Kayo and her family sit down while Oshin kneels before them. The angle over the shoulder depicts how Oshin is the center of attention; her future depends on her explanation. This angle also implies how Kayo's grandmother is the family ruler, as Oshin is presented kneeling right in front of her. There is lighter background on Oshin's back as opposed to the somber room as a premonition that Oshin will be able to maintain her position.

Although she is found guilty of taking the book without permission, she proves her good intention of just wanting to read it, not take it.



**Figure 6. Oshin proves her ability to read**

*Note.* Oshin surprises the family with her fluency in reading the book. From *Oshin* [01:12:50], by Shin Togashi (director), 2013.

Being accused of stealing Kayo's book, Oshin does not hesitate to prove her good intention. This scene (Figure 6) uses a medium close-up focus on Oshin's reading the book. She reads aloud, "As the dusk tide rolls in a plover squawks/ Though I'm not a plover/ I'd flap the wings of my heart and fly/ To a place that's cold and miserable/ A young heart is like a straight arrow/ I weep for there's no consolation" (Togashi, 2013, 01:12:48-01:13:09), proving her large mastering vocabularies. This resistance action makes the employer understand her intention, "You're telling us the truth. ... If you can read that well, you'd want to pick up a book and read a little. Oshin, people view servants with prejudice. You'd better be more careful. ... Kayo, lend her a book" (Togashi, 2013, 01:13:11-01:13:36). Here, by pleading her case that she was not stealing the book (resisting the accusation as a thief), Oshin is let to stay as the maid.

Power resistance occurs when the subject acknowledges the power domination and then tries to take over the control (Foucault, 1982). From the story's event, Oshin realizes her mistake, yet she does not let the prejudice, her being a thief and illiterate, stick. She takes control of the situation by apologizing and proving her worth; she even gets Kayo's grandmother to side with her.

### ***Women's Empowerment in Oshin***

This part explores what women need to do in order to change their own personal and family circumstances, and provides an in-depth analysis of collective efforts they strive to be economically empowered – be empowered women. By all accounts, there is dichotomy of marginalization of women on grounds of their social class in the society. More specifically, women of lower social class experience greater marginalization and discrimination within their family and society – as experienced by Oshin and her mother.

Oshin's mother has no power over her reproductive rights as well as other rights. As a wife, she is obedient to her husband. Interestingly, despite Oshin's father's disconsolate decision to send her off to work, Oshin's mother "armed" Oshin with her best kimono and lucky charm. Moreover, this explication of the momentum of empowerment highlights that both Oshin and her mother are being empowered when they are together at the moment. In other words, they are empowering one another. To put it into perspective, they have experienced the beginning, middle, and end of the process of staging power resistance. The process aligns with Oshin's mother's primary goal which is to make Oshin empowered – initially through the economy. Regarding the cinematography elements, lightning plays a crucial role to enhance images and the women's empowerment issue in this study. In this film, lightning – which is closely related to the seasons (winter and spring) as the setting of time – contributes to enhancing images and issues, creating depth, and supporting the story's mood and atmosphere.



Consequently, it creates depth and supports the staging mood and atmosphere, particularly on the women characters.

*Oshin and Her Mother's Empowerment: Initial Stage*

The series of empowerment processes that Oshin and her mother went through occur throughout the two seasons – Oshin being sent to work (during winter) hinged on her finally being able to pursue her job and accept her circumstances (during spring).



**Figure 7. Oshin refuses her father's orders**

*Note.* Oshin's father is mad upon hearing her refusal to leave for work. As he tries to hit Oshin, her mother leans forward to shield her. From *Oshin* [00:04:16], by Shin Togashi (director), 2013.

The first encounter of how Oshin and her mother become each other's back is depicted in the scene presented above. Initially defying her father's commands to go to work, Oshin insists on staying at home to be with her family (Figure 7). Only Oshin refuses her father's orders; her older siblings must also work for the family but obey to do so. Her father is enraged by Oshin's complaint and rejection. Oshin is depicted to have a position—to work or not—despite the fact that she essentially has no say in the matter. Oshin's mother is powerless to overturn her husband's choice. The father is furious that Oshin does not accept his commands which resulting her being punished. However, Oshin's mother hurriedly embraces Oshin to shield her from her father's hits. The mother does not have the power in making the decision but made herself as a shield to protect Oshin while crying out, "Don't dear! Please, don't!" (00:04:11-00:04:16). Oshin's family is gathered and dining together when this occurrence happens. In order to enhance the atmosphere that is not as prominently accentuated by Oshin and her mother's power over the situation, this scene is presented in extremely low lighting – powerless Oshin and her mother are in the dark (Figure 7).

Even though Oshin's mother is powerless to stop her husband from deciding not to send Oshin to work, she ensures that if Oshin cannot manage to work, she can come home and her mother will always be there waiting for her (Figure 8), "Mama will always be here for you" (Togashi, 2013, 00:13:02). This utterance accentuates her attempt to give Oshin confidence and autonomy to live independently of her family yet can count on her mother at all times.



**Figure 8. Oshin is equipped with lucky charm**

*Note.* Oshin's mother expresses her guilt of the pressure that Oshin must earn money for the family to survive. From *Oshin* [00:13:02], by Shin Togashi (director), 2013.

This scene (Figure 8) is spotlighted by the lights in the room behind it, providing sufficient lighting to display Oshin's mother's face and hand gestures of strength for Oshin while also expressing regret at having to let go of her to work. Oshin's mother positions Oshin higher and more powerful than

herself when she kneels and looks at the daughter. In this scene, her mother's words and demeanor apparently give Oshin the confidence to be prepared for work. Oshin, however, shows her mother a sign of acceptance in return for the support, counsel, and faith that bestowed upon her. This mother and daughter's occurrence demonstrates not just their struggles for the family but also their resilience and power to support one another, a bond of mutual support.

#### *Oshin and Her Mother's Empowerment: Process Stage*

To learn more about Oshin's whereabouts and well-being, Oshin's mother travels to the city. She feels compelled to do this as a mother even if she works as a geisha.



**Figure 9.** *Oshin meets her mother*

*Note.* Oshin's mother reassures Oshin that she maintains their family's honor no matter what job she takes. From *Oshin* [01:28:08], by Shin Togashi (director), 2013.

Her mother's instinct needs to make sure that Oshin is in good shape and condition (Figure 9). After knowing that Oshin befriended Kanya's daughter, she takes pride and is grateful for that. Her conduct validates that she is there to make sure that Oshin is safe and fine – her way of being empowered and empowering Oshin as well. “I just wanted to see where you worked. “They must be taking care of you. I have nothing to worry about. I work at an inn at Silver Mine hot springs. A guest brought us to town for fun. I'll go home in the spring once the snow melts. No matter how tough it gets. I wouldn't bring shame to you and your dad” (Togashi, 2013, 01:27:27-01:28:42). In Oshin's relationship with her mother, this event underlines two key points. Her mother needs to make sure she is safe first and therefore wishes Oshin well, exactly like she did before Oshin departed. Second, her mother somehow conveys the hardships she faces in order to support the family, particularly in order to meet Oshin. Most importantly, the event indicates that even in the face of challenges at work, they continue to support and care for one another, to build on their mutual strength to get through the ordeal. For the mother and particularly for Oshin, this event establishes a solid foundation for the process of empowerment. This occurrence (Figure 9) also takes place under the low light, resulting in a deeper, more intimate, and bleak ambiance in their challenges as women.

#### *Oshin and Her Mother's Empowerment: Closure Stage*

Oshin has successfully internalized Mino's mother's words on her mother — she did it all for her family. Even though it's her employee's words, she saw the embodiment through her mother as she idolized and wanted to be just like her mother – an empowered woman. “That's the thing about women. None of us work for our own benefit. They work for their parents, husbands and children. They can't think of themselves” (Togashi, 2013, 01:30:56-01:31:13). These lines emphasize the significance of strong women to the welfare of the family. The quotes from Oshin's employee effectively shape her fundamental understanding of the existence and essence of being a woman. As soon as Oshin finds an echo of her employee's remarks, she approaches her mother and utters, “You're always working. You never stop.” Her mother responds, “That what mothers do” (Togashi, 2013, 01:42:59-01:43:09). Oshin's perspective on women and their values in the family and in society is reinforced by her mother's point of view and as a living example. Subsequently, her mother appraises her hard work and sacrifice for the family. “You've been working so hard for our family” (Togashi, 2013, 01:43:43). Oshin eagerly responds, “It's not hard at all. I can take care of it, even if I'm on my own” (Togashi, 2013, 01:43:53-01:44:02). This scene is crucial to the closure stage of Oshin and her mother's process toward women's empowerment. As Oshin feels consent to labor, she is becoming more powerful.

Reflecting on the initial momentum of Oshin and her mother's empowerment – when her mother effectively protected her from her father's physical abuse, the following illustration perfectly depicts their connection as empowered mother and daughter. This final scene (Figure 10) is particularly noteworthy since it takes place while they are returning home in the springtime when there is a strong backlight of sunshine which renders Oshin and her mother feel motivated and hopeful.



**Figure 10. Oshin and her mother hug each other**

*Note.* Oshin realizes that females have an important role in caring for the family; working at home or elsewhere is necessary. From *Oshin* [01:44:20], by Shin Togashi (director), 2013.

Women's empowerment has been associated with economic independence. Women's empowerment is mainly related to the individual's economic power. Being empowered results in women's lives in a wider context in which gender power relations function (Batliwala & Pittman, 2010). Hence, the notion of women's empowerment – in which the individual's economic power and their contribution to their family's economic development – can be a path to more individual empowerment. The experiences of Oshin and her mother can spark the staging power and therefore the empowerment process. As the mother becomes more powerful and empowered, so does Oshin, and vice versa.

## CONCLUSION

Power relations occur when someone wants to control or order someone else's actions. In *Oshin* the movie (2013), Oshin's fate as a daughter from a low-income family has made her the subject of power: her father, supervisor, and employer. Her resistance in the forms of verbal and physical is done to take control of her life; both as a daughter and a maid, she becomes an independent female who works willingly and refuses to be prejudiced as a thief. This study delineates a staging power for women's economic empowerment, focusing on the issues' natural causes and ongoing conflicts. It examines the situation of women and their contribution to their family's economic development. Hence, this study outlines the inseparability of economic independence and women's empowerment. The value of the economy only becomes apparent when it is gained. This experiential aspect is embodied through women's experiences – Oshin and her mother. Oshin's economic power and her contribution to their family's economic development are the manifestation of empowerment per se. *Oshin* the movie (2013) is still widely addressed because it is perceived as an illustration of a literary work that successfully portrays the problem of women's empowerment in the context of the Meiji era. Oshin can be seen as a symbol of women's empowerment because she effectively depicts several power staging procedures. In other words, the character, the narrative, and the illustration synergize to convey the particular feminist issue in Japanese society. Thus, women's empowerment is a topic that is pertinent to the historical context as well as to the modern world. *Oshin* the movie (2013), tries to capture this phenomenon through the experiences of Oshin and her mother. Contextualized in Japanese society, the salient thematic aspect of this movie resonates with the condition of women who struggle to foster their freedom through economic independence. Through the depiction of Oshin and her mother, financial independence can be rendered as a site of struggle for women's empowerment. At times, it is on the blurred lines whether their financial independence is merely for women's empowerment or/concurrently for sustaining the patriarchy. Hence, it is crucial to scrutinize the inseparability of women's financial independence and their submission to the husband/father – as the authority beholder. It is an exciting inquiry when the extent to which women's empowerment performs in societal practices is questioned. In light of the research findings, a deeper understanding of its significance for some circles of people in society could shed light on the position of women's empowerment in the family–patriarchal culture.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was supported in part by the Universitas Pamulang. We gratefully acknowledge the copyediting performed by all reviewers involved.

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