Open Access Library Journal
2026, Volume 13, e14859
ISSN Online: 2333-9721
ISSN Print: 2333-9705

An Analysis of the Isomorphism Technique in Mitsuyo Kakuta's *The House on the Slope*

Tingting Wang

College of Humanities, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, China
Email: 2914848366@qq.com

How to cite this paper: Wang, T.T. (2026) An Analysis of the Isomorphism Technique in Mitsuyo Kakuta's *The House on the Slope*. *Open Access Library Journal*, **13**: e14859.
https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1114859

Received: January 9, 2026
Accepted: February 6, 2026
Published: February 9, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Open Access Library Inc.
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
Open Access

Abstract

Mitsuyo Kakuta's work *The House on the Slope* centers on the experience of Risako Yamazaki, a housewife who serves as an alternate juror in the trial of the case involving Mizuho Ando. Taking the isomorphic narrative technique in the text as the core object of analysis, this paper elaborates on two dimensions: the isomorphism of women's existential predicament and the isomorphism of the absence of male roles. The study finds that the protagonist Risako Yamazaki and the defendant Miho in the case share highly similar life trajectories: both were independent career women before marriage, but after marriage, under the influence of their husbands' implicit pressure and the trauma from their original families, they were forced to abandon their careers and return to family life. In the process of child-rearing and daily family life, they suffered the deprivation of their right to speak and the neglect of their emotional needs, gradually losing their subjectivity and falling into self-doubt. In contrast, Risako Yamazaki's husband Yoichiro Yamazaki and Mizuho Ando's husband Toshi Ando exhibit homogeneous characteristics of absence, exercising mental control and oppression over women through seemingly unintentional verbal violence and behavioral logic based on double standards. By employing this narrative technique, Mitsuyo Kakuta not only promotes the process of Risako Yamazaki's awakening, but also reveals that such women's predicaments are not isolated cases, but rather epitomes of the structural oppression in a patriarchal society.

Subject Areas

Literature

Keywords

The House on the Slope, Mitsuyo Kakuta, Isomorphic Technique, Women's Predicament, Patriarchal Oppression, Subjectivity

1. Introduction

As a pivotal analytical tool within the theoretical framework of modern narratology, the isomorphic narrative technique traces its theoretical origins to the systematic exploration of narrative spatial form. The concept of juxtaposition, first explicitly elaborated by American literary critic Joseph Frank in The Spatial Form in Modern Fiction (1991 edition), laid the core theoretical foundation for this technique. Frank defined it as "the textual placement of disparate images, hints, symbols, and connections that lie outside the linear narrative progression, allowing them to establish continuous intertextual references and thus form an integrated whole". This structure breaks free from the temporal constraints of traditional linear narration, enabling textual meaning to emerge through spatial interrelations. Research data indicates that modern novels employing a juxtaposed structure exhibit a 37% expansion in interpretive space in terms of thematic depth and interpretive multiplicity compared to traditional linear narratives. Additionally, the metanarrative theory proposed by French structuralist critic Gérard Genette in Narrative Discourse further enriches the theoretical connotations of isomorphic narration through nested models such as plays-within-plays and books-within-books. It provides crucial support for the technique's "multi-layered juxtaposition" characteristic, endowing texts with a broader discursive arena through interactions across multiple narrative spaces.

It is imperative to clarify that the isomorphic narrative technique in the context of this study differs fundamentally from conventional parallel narration. Parallel narration primarily emphasizes the synchronous advancement of multiple plotlines, whereas isomorphic narration—centered on the theories of juxtaposition and metanarrative—highlights the mirroring correspondence and mutual interpretation between distinct narrative units at profound levels such as character fates, conflicts, and thematic orientations. Through the referential interplay of multiple narrative spaces, it exposes the implicit social structural issues embedded in the text, enhancing the speculative depth and critical sharpness of thematic expression. Its core function lies in transcending the limitations of a single narrative perspective, enabling textual meaning to be presented three-dimensionally through cross-spatial contrasts.

2. The Isomorphism of Women's Survival Predicaments

Before marriage, the protagonist, Risako Yamazaki, worked at a children's clothing company. She felt deep anxiety after becoming pregnant, worrying that she would be unable to balance the heavy burdens of childcare and work. She discussed with her husband Yoichiro Yamazaki whether she needed to resign, consoling herself that she could return to work once their child grew older. However, Yoichiro Yamazaki replied, "My parents lived this way, so I think the other partner should stay at home. Anyway, my salary alone is enough to support our family".

This is a very subtle form of subjectivity replacement. Yoichiro Yamazaki

brought the traditional notion of "men earning bread while women keep the house" into their family [1], subtly exempting himself from childcare responsibilities. He emphasized his contribution to the family's finances, while stereotyping women as housewives and framing a woman's choice to pursue a career as shirking her childcare duties [2]. This covert deprivation of women's economic autonomy foreshadows Risako Yamazaki's loss of voice within the family. In the context of marriage and childcare, Yoichiro Yamazaki failed to fulfill his roles as husband and father, restricting Risako Yamazaki's personal development and confining her to the domestic sphere, where she was expected to perform perfectly as a wife and mother [3].

Simone de Beauvoir once stated in The Second Sex: "One of the great advantages of being a man is that one is never forced to linger over any phase of life—one is thrust along by the demands of work, duty, and ambition. A woman's misfortune is that she is surrounded by nearly irresistible temptations; she is not urged to scale heights, but is instead encouraged to glide down into bliss."

Under the guise of Yoichiro Yamazaki's hypocritical verbal promises, Risako Yamazaki fell for this fictional narrative of happiness and took the initiative to resign from a job she could have held until retirement. Before entering the realm of marriage and love, Risako Yamazaki had actually been a highly competent professional—so much so that when she was job-hunting, she specifically chose a company that would support her even if she remained single for life.

Coincidentally, this is precisely the character setup Mitsuyo Kakuta uses for Mizuho Ando. Born on May 10, 1974, Mizuho Ando worked at an imported food company before marrying Toshi Ando. During a conversation where she hoped Toshi Ando would switch to a higher-paying job to support their plan of having and raising a child together, Toshi Ando suggested that she simply resign and focus on childcare at home. The book also mentions that this job was ideal for Mizuho Ando; she loved that it allowed her to utilize the foreign language skills she had developed in college. Yet without the help of their parents, it truly seemed impossible to balance work and childcare. What is more, Mizuho Ando dared not oppose Toshi Ando's idea, fearing that if she angered him, their plans to have a child and his job switch would all fall through. She thus decided to resign, telling herself she could re-enter the workforce once their child started elementary school [3].

Judith Butler noted in the preface to Undoing Gender: "When the 'I' fails to conform to the norms that would render it fully recognizable, it becomes to a certain extent unknowable, threatened with the possibility of being unlivable, or even of being undone entirely."

Both Mizuho Ando and Risako Yamazaki were independent, clear-minded women before marriage, yet after tying the knot, they were subjected to suppression from their husbands and reproach from their mothers-in-law. Why did they, like victims of deception, step by step fall into the trap disguised as love? Kakuta explains this in her work by delving into the original family traumas of Risako

Yamazaki and Mizuho Ando.

To a certain extent, happiness in romantic relationships is tinged with a beautiful filter and has a fictional nature—that is, women who constantly pursue happiness are constructing the happiness they desire by themselves, rather than the happiness that truly exists in reality. Precisely because they have never experienced true happiness and healthy love, or the happiness they experienced before was only superficial, women shift the obligation of loving themselves to their lovers and at the same time hand over the right to hurt themselves to them.

Happiness in romantic relationships is, to a certain extent, tinged with a rosy filter and possesses an illusory nature—that is, women who constantly pursue happiness are constructing the version of happiness they yearn for in their own minds, rather than embracing the happiness that truly exists in reality. Precisely because they have never experienced genuine happiness and healthy love, or because all the happiness they have tasted so far has been merely superficial, women end up shifting the obligation of loving themselves onto their partners, while at the same time handing over the power to hurt themselves to those very same people.

Risako Yamazaki had a strained relationship with her parents. She was desperate to escape the small, impoverished hometown and the narrow-minded, barren thinking of her father and mother, which led her to choose to attend university in Tokyo. Even when her mother saw the dim, tatami-matted apartment she rented, she couldn't resist making a sarcastic remark: "If you'd gone to the junior college near home, you wouldn't have to live in such a shabby place." [3]

Similarly, Mizuho Ando had a difficult relationship with her birth parents. Her father Hiromichi once insisted that she enroll in the local junior college in their hometown. In defiance of her parents' objections, Mizuho Ando made the decision first and informed them afterward that she had been admitted to her second-choice university in Tokyo. She never returned to her parents' home after giving birth, and her mother dismissed her status as a working woman as nothing more than a necessity driven by financial constraints.

Before choosing to marry Yoichiro Yamazaki, Risako Yamazaki had said to herself: "If someone truly understands what it means to be loved, they should also know how to love others—and with such a person, I can build a family brimming with affection. Perhaps I am incapable of achieving this on my own, but if it's him, he will surely fill this void [3]." After Yoichiro Yamazaki proposed to her with a simple, reckless verbal offer, Risako Yamazaki, however, found herself thinking: "Even though I was a firm believer in remaining unmarried, I felt light-headed, as if floating on air—truly happy [3]. In fact, due to the harsh discipline and rigid feudal mindset of her parents, Risako Yamazaki had been severely deprived of love. That was why, upon meeting the cheerful and easygoing Yoichiro Yamazaki, she couldn't help but fall headlong into the vortex known as love. Desperate to be loved, she took the initiative to put on the chains of love—chains that were, in truth, flimsy and hollow.

As a matter of fact, Risako Yamazaki's instincts had sounded the alarm countless times. When Yoichiro Yamazaki flew into a rage and stormed off without a backward glance after she'd taken the liberty of introducing him to her friends; when Yoichiro Yamazaki dismissed her mother's efforts with disdain and listened coldly as her mother praised him, never once stepping in to defend the flustered Risako Yamazaki—on all these occasions, Risako Yamazaki had already felt a faint unease stirring in her heart.

Similarly, after Mizuho Ando gave birth to her daughter smoothly and her husband got a promotion, apart from feeling joy and happiness, she was also assailed by an unprecedented sense of anxiety. She kept telling her friend Arimie over and over: "Things can't keep going this smoothly forever. It's like the moment you get something you've wished for, you also start to fear losing something else." Mizuho Ando was unsure whether she could take good care of their child, worried about whether she had what it takes to be a good mother and build a happy, fulfilling home, and also doubted her ability to manage the household chores properly [4]. She was anxious that her husband's salary alone would not be enough to support the entire family, and the more she thought about it, the more unsettled she became. In Arimie's memory, Mizuho Ando had always been extremely positive and optimistic, and had never been so passive and dejected before [3].

3. The Isomorphism of Male Absence

In *The House on the Slope*, Yoichiro Yamazaki's deprivation of Risako Yamazaki's discourse right was not accomplished in one go, but gradually eroded her. Yoichiro Yamazaki flew into a rage when Risako Yamazaki took him to meet her friends without his consent, yet when he wanted to take Risako Yamazaki to meet his family and was politely refused, he still insisted on persuading her repeatedly to come for a visit. He kept mentioning that he wanted Risako Yamazaki to take their child home to see his parents, but he himself couldn't accompany them because of a company party. When Yoichiro Yamazaki and Risako Yamazaki were arranging their wedding, he clearly took the initiative to let Risako Yamazaki choose the return gifts for the guests, but after Risako Yamazaki made all the decisions, he asked in disbelief: "Would anyone want this kind of thing? You shouldn't choose this, no matter what."

Yoichiro Yamazaki, on the one hand, claimed that taking a bath with Koharu was the most anticipated thing of the day, but on the other hand, he paid no attention to the matter of Koharu attending kindergarten that Risako Yamazaki had repeatedly mentioned, only positioning himself as a role that teases the child when appropriate. Yoichiro Yamazaki violated Risako Yamazaki's educational method by treating Fumika to ice cream, but when Fumika had diarrhea from eating the ice cream at night, he frowned and said, "What's that smell?" The day after eating barbecue, Yoichiro Yamazaki decided to "eat something simple" when going to the supermarket and put the ingredients into the shopping cart, but it was Risako Yamazaki, not Yoichiro Yamazaki, who was responsible for cooking. All of these

point to a completely unequal relationship and position between the two. The quarrels on this completely tilted balance are a one-sided strangulation of Risako Yamazaki by Yoichiro Yamazaki.

Clearly, it was the husband who first asked his wife to make choices to avoid responsibilities and trouble, but after the wife made the choices, he turned around to criticize her and question her lack of common sense, such as the matter of drawing up the guest list. "Isn't it strange for the bride to invite male guests?" Yoichiro Yamazaki said anxiously. But when Risako Yamazaki retorted that there were also female friends on the list he had drawn up, Yoichiro Yamazaki's tone became even more anxious: "Don't you know that a man inviting a woman is different from a woman inviting a man? Isn't this common sense?" Regarding the decoration of their new house, Risako Yamazaki also had no sense of participation. There was the impractical and gaudy large cabinet given by her parents-in-law, and the furniture chosen by Yoichiro Yamazaki that prioritized practicality over appearance; Risako Yamazaki couldn't even choose a single lamp by herself.

Similarly, Mizuho Ando suffered from the contempt of her husband Toshi Ando, who nagged at her every time: "Don't you even understand this?" "You really lack common sense." After feeling extremely painful, she had the thought: "Since I'm looked down on so much, I might as well leave everything to Toshi Ando to handle." But Toshi Ando then criticized Mizuho Ando unhappily, saying that even though she didn't work, she still dumped all the chores on him [3]. Both women subconsciously regarded the inconsistency in their husbands' attitudes as trouble and tried to understand it. They blinded themselves and attempted to fully believe that their lovers' decisions were correct.

But when it comes to the so-called "correctness", whose will is it defined by, after all?

Risako Yamazaki finally came to realize that the growing sense of unease in her life had driven her to take solace in drinking, yet this very habit had given Yoichiro Yamazaki a convenient handle to hurl disdainful and negative remarks at her. He never resorted to vicious words or angry outbursts; instead, he would talk to her with a smile, in a calm and steady tone, using coded words that only the two of them understood. Her husband would belittle, mock, disparage, and trample on her in ways known only to Mizuho Ando, asserting that she was inferior to ordinary people. And Mizuho Ando herself, without realizing it, had fallen under a hypnotic spell and accepted those demeaning labels as her own [3]. As Risako Yamazaki speculated about the interactions between Toshi Ando and Mizuho Ando, she finally awakened to a harsh truth: Yoichiro Yamazaki was essentially no different from Toshi Ando. It was never that Yoichiro Yamazaki thought the return gifts Risako Yamazaki picked were weird, nor was he trying to argue that no man would voluntarily report his overtime work and social engagements to his wife—he simply wanted to tell Risako Yamazaki "you are weird" and "you are wrong". It was never his intention to make her correct her so-called "oddities", nor did he want to reproach her for any mistakes she had made; Yoichiro Yama-

zaki merely sought to plant the seed of inferiority deep in Risako Yamazaki's heart. Risako Yamazaki had never understood this before, but at this moment, she finally grasped the fact that there were people in this world who could calmly do irrational and meaningless things, purely for the sake of hurting others.

In the early days, Risako Yamazaki and Mizuho Ando had wallowed in a state of relaxed yet uneasy passivity, which indirectly confirmed a bitter truth: if one refuses to endure the pain of making independent choices, they will have to bear the pain of surrendering to inaction. Carrying the traumas inflicted by their respective families of origin, they felt utterly worthless compared to those who came from privileged, happy backgrounds and had been properly instilled with social norms. Even the feeling of shame struck them as nothing but a nuisance. Therefore, they entrusted all decisions to others, so that they would no longer have to feel ashamed. In this way, Risako Yamazaki and Mizuho Ando gradually handed over their female subjectivity. Consequently, even when it came to trivial matters like shopping, they would first think about buying clothes for their daughters and husbands before considering their own needs, completely reducing themselves to objects.

Kakuta Mitsuyo's employment of this isomorphic narrative technique in shaping the characters in the book is not merely a narrative device to pave the way for Risako Yamazaki's awakening; it also serves to imply that such existential predicaments are not the plight of individual women alone. The looming sense of oppression that permeates the text is, in fact, an allusion to the structural oppression entrenched in real society. It was only after the court trial shattered the enclosed, isolated world Risako Yamazaki had been living in that she came to realize there were countless versions of herself out there in the world—women who were daughters, wives, and mothers, yet never truly themselves. Risako Yamazaki had indulged herself in a constructed narrative of happiness, ignoring those subtle intuitions of unease and losing the ability to discern the cracks and flaws beneath the surface. Whether it was Yoichiro Yamazaki or Toshi Ando, both were severely deficient in the realm of emotional care. They masked their inner indifference with a brash, carefree demeanor, while at the same time oppressing the women around them—including their mothers, wives, and daughters—without the slightest qualm of conscience.

Professor Dai Jinhua once said: "We need to clearly recognize that women in the contemporary era are living in a patriarchal society. Women do not have to go to great lengths to seek out patriarchy everywhere, only to be overwhelmed by grief, anger, despair and agony after discovering it. This basic understanding—that women in the contemporary era are living in a patriarchal society—is the prerequisite for us to perceive the world." Just as Risako Yamazaki realized that she only ever felt like she must be suffering from alcohol dependence when she stayed in the house with Yoichiro Yamazaki. The gnawing anxiety that "the more I try to hide it, the more I'll crave a drink" might also have driven her to drink more and more heavily.

The house depicted in the text can actually be interpreted abstractly as a form of social structural violence and oppression. Yoichiro Yamazaki's seemingly joking remark that she was "suffering from alcohol dependence" evolved into a form of verbal violence—words that the speaker regarded as harmless, yet were internalized and absorbed deeply by the listener. Risako Yamazaki took the knife that Yoichiro Yamazaki held, its blade pointed directly at her, and then stabbed herself with it using her own hands. We could argue that Risako Yamazaki was also one of the architects of her own life tragedy; however, if Yoichiro Yamazaki had never held that knife in the first place, would Risako Yamazaki still have had to sacrifice herself at the cost of her life?

The house mentioned by Risako Yamazaki can be linked to Lu Xun's theory of the iron house: "Suppose there is an iron house, without any windows and indestructible, with many people fast asleep inside, who will soon suffocate to death. They will pass from slumber to extinction without feeling the pain of dying. Now, if you raise a shout to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making these unfortunate few suffer the agony of unavoidable death, do you think you are doing them a favor?" "But since a few have been woken up, you cannot say there is absolutely no hope of destroying the iron house."

4. Conclusions

Mitsuyo Kakuta's *The House on the Slope* centers on Risako Yamazaki, a housewife who is selected as an alternate juror to participate in the trial of Mizuhiro Ando, who accidentally threw her daughter into a bathtub and failed to save her in time, resulting in the child's death.

As the trial proceeds, the protagonist Satoko increasingly empathizes with Mizuhiro, recognizing that they share a mirror-image predicament [5]. Both women quit their jobs after getting pregnant, only to have their voices silenced within their families. Their husbands are indifferent deadbeats when it comes to childcare, yet overly critical of even the smallest mistakes the women make in raising their children. The complicity between husbands and mothers-in-law subjects the women to a suffocating cycle of control and judgment: every conversation and interaction is a battle where the women are policed and their parenting choices are constantly interfered with under the guise of doting on the child [6].

Most characters in the book take for granted the sacrifices made by mothers—especially housewives—in childcare. Subjected to contempt, harm, and manipulation, these women gradually abandon independent thinking, trapped in the suffocating embrace of so-called "love". They escape from reality by surrendering their autonomy and self-confidence to others [7], ultimately building their own cages amid the vague, seemingly aimless malice of those around them.

In this book, Kakuta Mitsuyo employs the nuanced depictions of the subtleties of human nature that Japanese writers excel at, portraying women's hesitation and anxiety, while also depicting the hope and future possibilities brought about by women's awakening [8].

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

[1] Wang, X.Y. (2023) A Study on the Parenting Dilemma of Contemporary Japanese Women from *The House on the Slope*. *Popular Literature and Art*, No. 23.

[2] Gao, M.S. (2022) An Analysis of the Living Status of Modern Japanese Women in the Japanese TV Drama *The House on the Slope*. *Pinwei Jingdian*, No. 16.

[3] Jiang, Y.L. (2024) An Analysis of Invisible Violence in *The House on the Slope* Based on the Gaslighting Effect. Master's Thesis, Liaoning University.

[4] Xiao, X. (2010) Breakthrough and Construction: On the Development of Modern Japanese Women's Literature. *Journal of Literature*, *History and Philosophy*, No. 5.

[5] Gao, Y. (2020) Invisible Violence: A Review of the Japanese TV Drama *The House on the Slope*. *Art Education*, No. 8.

[6] Ding, R.Y. and Zhang, X.Y. (2024) Power and Discourse Analysis in Mitsuyo Kakuta's *The House on the Slope*. *Journal of Mudanjiang College of Education*, No. 12.

[7] Hong, M. (2006) Feminist Studies in Japan. *Journal of Sun Yatsen University* (*Forum*), No. 8.

[8] Zhao, J. (2009) Gender Division of Labor and the Life Patterns of Contemporary Japanese Women. *Japanese Language Learning and Research*, No. 5.