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Keisuke Kinoshita

Kinoshita started out as one of the most frantically experimental of filmmakers and ended up working for NHK turning out TV dramas (soaps) of the most abysmal - so I hear - slushiness. What's known as O-namida chodai (tear jerker) stuff. But before he got to that sad and sorry state, he found about thirty years in which to turn out some great films. And - let's not pull our punches - some bloody lousy ones.

Hana saku minato - The Blossoming Port

Army & shy; Rikugun - a great film that rides primarily on the strength of its extraordinary ending - it's a fair bit to ask to expect anyone to go through the whole film understanding little of what's going on just to see that last 10 minutes or so, (as I had to do, coz I can't get these films with subtitles here in Japan), but if you do, you will, I hope, see that it was worth it. Kinoshita really pulled the wool over the censor's eyes about this one shot, but then he wasn't allowed to make another film till the war ended.

The film is a saga of three generations of a family that has always been upstanding and what-have-you. (Partly for this stiff backboned philosophy, the film has been called fascist in principle by some dull-witted commentators, but the criticism has hardly stood the test of time - the film seems anti-war to me, to say the least). Anyway, the film focuses mostly on the father, the ubiquitous Ryu Chishu, and his business, which, because of his moral rectitude and unwillingness to cheat anyone under any circumstances, is not very successful. But then it ends with the son going off to war after being called up. The last sequence is where the mother sees her son off. It's an amazing bit of film, about 10 minutes long or so, in which she at first refuses to see him off because she thinks she'll cry, but then decides to pursue him down to the port - she follows the crowds, singing and playing for these supposed young heroes, and finally catches a glimpse of her son, and waves to him and cries. She is eventually overpowered by the huge crowd and gets left behind. The camera focuses in on her face, praying and weeping for the son who, by the expression on his mother's face, might as well be dead already.

The authorities didn't approve any more of Kinoshita's ideas and he almost gave up directing. When Japan lost, Kinoshita found himself more in tune with the psychology and sensibility of a nation starting to question its own values and beliefs - and rejecting quite a lot of them.

His next film was "Morning for the Osone Family," in which he pushes the ideas behind "Army" a lot further - family values over military ones, the love of the mother for her children - a dominant theme in much of his work - and the difficulties of sticking together as a family in a society that puts other values first.

A mother with three sons and one daughter turns to her army-man brother and his horrible cow of a wife to help her bring up her children. One of her sons, an outspoken liberal, is jailed for his beliefs, and her two other sons go off to war and die - as the war comes to a close, the woman realises that her brother is a stupid idiot who has cost her two of her own children just because of his own pathetically thoughtless nationalism. She kicks him and his wife out of her house at the end and welcomes home her eldest son who has been released. A tacky last shot shows the mother with her two kids and daughter's fiance welcoming the dawn, a

new era for the family.

An interesting film with a few good characters - the mother and the uncle particularly - and a good script. Not one of Kinoshita's best, but worth a watch to get a feel for the kind of films that were produced in the immediate post-war period.

One odd thing is the name of the film - Audie Bock says the film is called, in Japanese, "Osone-ke no Asa," and the final Chinese character that appears on the cover of the video and in the opening of the film is usually read as "asa," meaning "morning". But, just to confound students of Japanese, the lettering by the side of the character reads "ashita," meaning "tomorrow" or "the next day." So maybe the title should be "A New Day for the Osone Family," or something like that. Big fat hairy difference, you say. Fair enough.

Nihon no higeiki - A Japanese Tragedy

Nijushi no hitomi - Twenty-four eyes

Nogiku gotoki kimi to nariki - You Were Like a Wild Chrysanthemum

Yuyake gumo - Clouds at Twilight