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There Was a Father (*Chichi Aiki*). Shochiku/Ofuna. Written by Tadao Ikeda, Takao Yanai, and Ozu. Photographed by Yushun Atsuta. With Chishu Ryu, Shuji Sano, Mitsuko Mito, Takeshi Sakamoto, Shin Saburi, Haruhiko Tsuda, Shinichi Himori, et al. 94 min. Released April 1, 1942. Script and duplicate negative in existence;

There Was a Father. 1942.
Haruhiko Tsuda and Chishu Ryu



BIOGRAPHICAL FILMOGRAPHY



prints at Shochiku, the Tokyo Film Center, the Anthology Archives, New York, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Cinémathèque Française. A schoolteacher is very close to his young son. When the boy grows up he is drafted, but the father has the pleasure of seeing him married to the daughter of his best friend. After the father dies, the son returns to carry on the family name.

*Haruhiko Tsuda, Ozu, and Chishu Ryu on location for **There Was a Father***



*Ozu filming
There Was a Father*

Ozu had written the first draft of this script before he went to China. (In the same year, 1937, he also wrote the story for *Unending Advance* [*Kagirinaki Zenshin*] for Tomu Uchida, who later filmed it.) After he returned to Japan he rewrote it: "I wrote and rewrote it over and over again, and it could still be improved."⁵² One is at a loss to imagine how. This is one of Ozu's most perfect films. There is a naturalness and a consequent feeling of inevitability that is rare in cinema. At the same time there is, with no warping of character or situation, the unfolding of a pattern—the links between the generations—which is seen every day by every one of us, but which has almost never been so perfectly shown. Critics have called the performance of Chishu Ryu in this film one of the best in the history of Japanese cinema, and they are right. *There Was a Father* won the *Kinema Junpo* Second Prize, made money at the box office, and has become one of the country's most esteemed classics.

It is easy now to forget that this picture and the one before it were made during the Pacific War, yet Ozu must have had difficulties making them. The industry was all but openly government-controlled,

and “national policy subjects” were insisted upon. Both these films were nominally about such subjects, i.e., the war, soldiers, home morale, etc., but Ozu made no compromise with his own kind of reality. Refusing to sacrifice his characters to the needs of plot, he was even more adamant about exploiting them for propaganda purposes. The subject was on the approved list, but the treatment was so human that the official attitude was inherently criticized.

Ozu stood up for the work of other directors as well. Akira Kurosawa in particular remembers him during the wrangle over *Sanshiro Sugata*. Kurosawa's film was shown to a military board (as were all films), which then criticized it, saying this would have to be cut, that would have to go, etc. One officer even asked (a question incomprehensible to us today) if the young Kurosawa was not interested in aiding and abetting the enemy. To this Ozu replied that either the film was a good one or it was not, that he thought it good, and that they ought to pass it and get on with their work.⁵³ This kind of remark was enough to send a man to prison in 1943, yet Ozu always escaped. Masahiro Shinoda, later one of Ozu's assistant directors and now a well-known director himself, explains, in recalling this incident and wondering how Ozu got away with it, “he always made such funny jokes, always got everyone in such a good mood, and was so expert in saying a serious thing in a light way, that nothing ever happened to him.”⁵⁴

Nonetheless even an Ozu could not entirely escape the *Zeitgeist*. An article in the New Year's edition of a film magazine finds him listing various plans for future films, all having to do with war. The list includes a proposed continuation of *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family*, laid in both Japan and China; a film commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the South Manchurian Railroad, seen through the eyes of a successful employee of that company who had labored on its behalf for three decades; something called *One Plane Has Not Yet Returned* (*Imada Kikan Sezaruru Mono Ikki*), and a “revenge period film” (*adauchi-mono*) about the two Soga Brothers and the love between them.⁵⁵ How seriously Ozu considered such projects is not known, but he had begun work on one wartime project, the script for *Far Motherland* (*Harukanari Fubo no Kuni*). It was based on material in the “War Diaries,” and was never finished because the government did not like what it had seen of it (no heroics, no high-flown language, no sacrifice for the fatherland, etc.). Its qualities are best expressed in an alternative title given it by one of Ozu's friends: *Kihachi Goes to War*. In any event, it no longer exists.⁵⁶

B I O G R A P H I C A L F I L M O G R A P H Y

Another reason for canceling the project was that Ozu was once more called up by the military. Though he had already served his time in the Imperial Army, the government decided that directors should join the troops to make propaganda films. Originally it was planned that Ozu make a film in Burma, but by 1943 the Japanese were faring so poorly there that he was sent to Singapore instead. Though several films were discussed, none were ever made, though one apparently was begun. It was about the Indian independence movement, which for its own reasons Japan was encouraging. When Singapore returned to British rule, Ozu busied himself burning negatives and prints. Having done his best to make no films at all, he did not want to be judged a war criminal by the Allied Tribunal. Before that time, however, Ozu was casually sabotaging various suggestions for good "national policy" films, and looking at the American films that the Japanese in Singapore had confiscated. Later he said he saw over one hundred.

The director Kimisaburo Yoshimura, in Singapore at the time, remembers Ozu looking at John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Stagecoach*, *How Green Was My Valley*, and *Tobacco Road*; King Vidor's *Northwest Passage*; Hitchcock's *Rebecca*; Wyler's *The Westerner* and *The Little Foxes*; *Fantasia*, and *Gone With the Wind*. The film that impressed Ozu most was Welles's *Citizen Kane*. "If you give Chaplin 62 points, this film gets about 85."⁵⁷ He looked at it again and again. It was apparently the technique of the film that most interested him, and according to Yoshimura he kept shaking his head in wonder over this effect or that.⁵⁸ Thereafter, whenever asked his favorite foreign film, he always said *Citizen Kane*, though it is impossible to imagine a picture more antithetical to his own.

His other favorites, some of which predated his Singapore days, were almost equally surprising. The influence of Vidor and Lubitsch is visible, and his liking for Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* is reasonable. But he also said that if he had not seen Ince's *Civilization*, he would never have become a director, and that "if there hadn't been a director called Rex Ingram, I would not now be a director myself." He liked John Ford, admired his spontaneity. "When you get to *Roman Holiday*," he later said, "that man Wyler just isn't spontaneous."⁵⁹ One may only wonder at Ozu, the epitome of a doctrinaire nose-in-the-script director, deploring Wyler's alleged lack of spontaneity. One can also question Ozu's further assertion that all this film-viewing changed his style.

Several people have noted, usually with regret, a supposed major difference between Ozu's prewar and postwar films. It has been sug-

gested, as we have seen, that the change derived from his abandoning the proletariat and embracing the bourgeoisie; but we have also seen that this is nonsense. It has been suggested, further, by Ozu himself and others, that repeated doses of Welles and Hitchcock somehow strengthened or diluted the director's style; yet no one has been able to find a trace of any such change. Finally, it has been suggested that Ozu was "brainwashed" by the American way after the war.⁶⁰ This is a more serious charge because there are many examples of directors changing styles in midstream to accommodate the ideals of the new conquerors.

In fact, no such thing happened in the case of Ozu. When his first postwar film appeared (another *kihachi-mono*, the last one), everyone was surprised, bewildered, reassured, or disappointed to discover that Ozu had not changed at all. The director himself was rather hard on the directors who were changing their themes and consequently their way of making films to fit the newly imported *demokratiku* ideas.⁶¹ The changes in Ozu's films, all of them minor, are accounted for by the fact that although he made few pictures during the war years, as a man and artist he kept evolving. We lack the evidence for minor changes and hence wrongly deduce a major one. The natural growth of the Ozu style is apparent when one considers the director's work as a whole. So far as influences on his style went, the foreign films had no more impact than his army experience, the war itself, and the war's democratic aftermath.

In 1945, however, Ozu's military experiences were not yet over. Though no war criminal, he was a POW, and was sent to a British camp near Singapore for half a year. During this time, besides doing the dishes and cleaning the toilet, Ozu reportedly became interested in poetry. When not working, he and his fellow prisoners sat around composing elaborate *renga* (chain verses). Ozu had always written poetry—an unexceptional pursuit in prewar Japan—but he apparently became more actively interested in it in the prison camp.

Then, in February, 1946, Ozu returned to a new Japan. A large part of Tokyo had been destroyed and part of its population killed. Fukugawa, where he had spent his earliest years, had been almost completely destroyed. Ozu set to work amid the ruins.

The Record of a Tenement Gentleman (*Nagaya Shinshi Roku*). Shochiku/Ofuna. Script by Ozu and Tadao Ikeda. Photographed by Yuharu Atsuta. With Chishu Ryu, Choko Iida, Takeshi Sakamoto, Reikichi Kawamura, Tomihiro Aoki, Eitaro Ozawa, Mitsuko Yoshikawa, et al. 72 min. Released May 20, 1947. Original negative and script in existence: prints at Shochiku and the Tokyo Film Center. A