

## Document Citation

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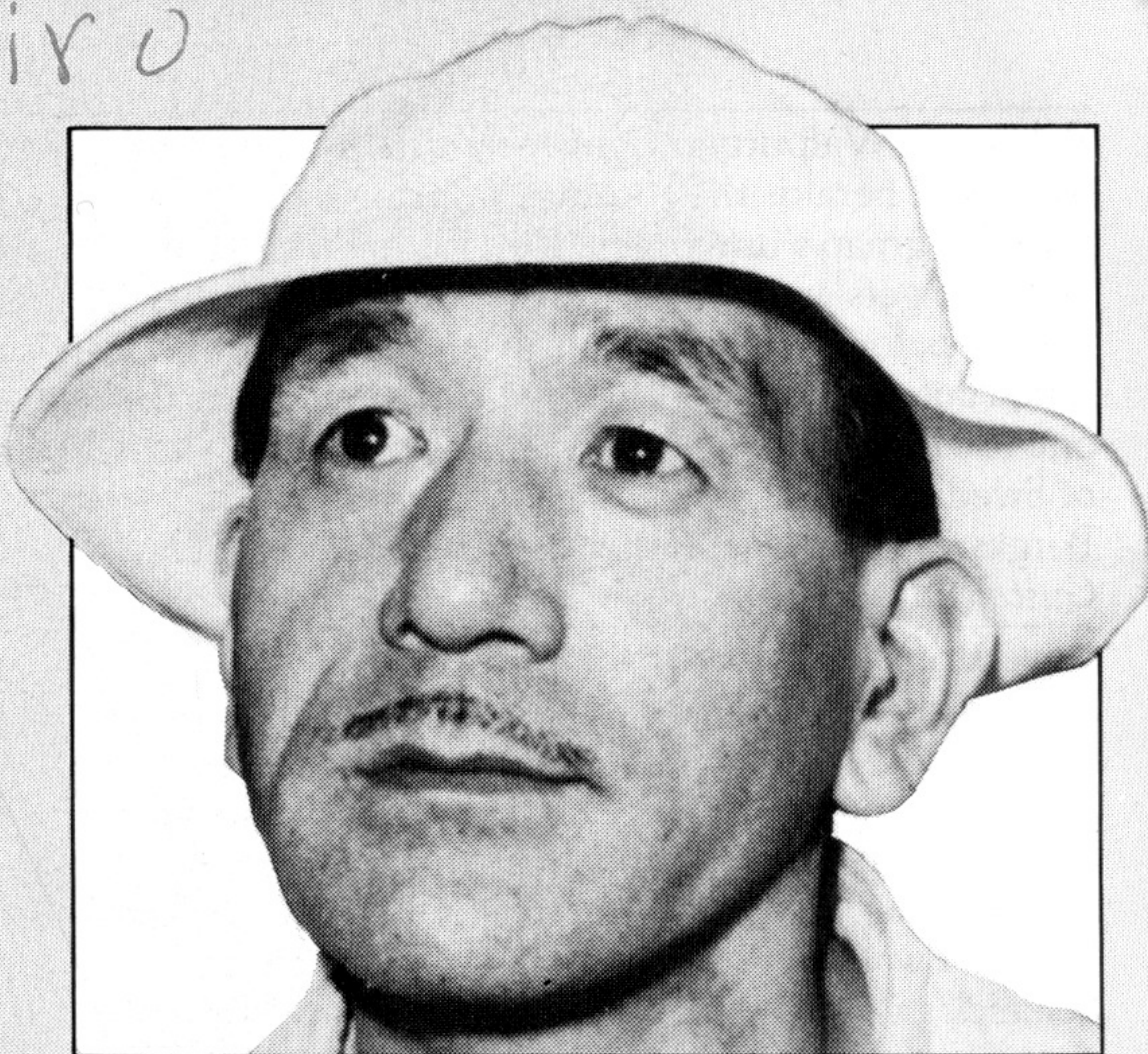


Throughout his career, Yasujiro Ozu worked steadily in the mainstream film industry. He often compared himself to the tofu salesman, offering nourishing but supremely ordinary wares. Yet Ozu can also be seen as one of the most daring film-makers in the world, enriching the genre he worked within and developing a unique cinematic style.

This season's films display Ozu's strengths in the 'home drama'. Under the leadership of Shochiku producer Shiro Kido, this serio-comic genre was cultivated by many of Ozu's contemporaries, but none surpassed him in portraying the joys and trials of ordinary life – keeping a job, marrying, raising children, struggling on after a parent's death. Alongside these perpetually significant concerns, the genre enabled Ozu to introduce topical concerns, such as Depression unemployment in the films of the 1930s or the changes in the Japan of the post-war era. Ozu paid his tribute on his deathbed when he remarked to Kido: 'After all, Mr President, the home drama.'

At the same time, Ozu developed one of the most distinctive visual styles in the cinema. His low camera, trained on his actors, apparently casual props, breathtaking landscapes or even empty rooms, embodies a technique at once ascetic in its simplicity and virtuosic in its range of evocative variations. His compositions, a gallery of superb pictorial designs, seem at once spontaneous and supremely controlled. Minute changes of focus, props and figure position are invested with rich visual and narrative nuances. In the colour films, a fleck of bright colour (often red) will migrate among the shots, returning as an abstract motif in scene after scene. Transitions that sidle us gradually into scenes not only lend atmosphere but create a rhythmic play of expectation and fulfilment that exists alongside the drama.

Ozu's achievement has seldom been paralleled in the history of film-making: working in a popular, mass-production cinema, he created powerfully emotional works in a highly personal style. This season invites viewers to share his poignant and comic vision of 20th-century Japan.—David Bordwell.



# OZU

## REVISITED

Mon 9 May 8.30

Following the screening of *I Was Born, but . . .* there will be a discussion between David Bordwell and John Gillett, who organised the NFT Ozu seasons in 1976. Tickets £2.00, standby £1.80. David Bordwell's book *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* is published this month by the British Film Institute.





In the Depression, a rebellious office worker is fired and forced into menial labour. The film treats some of Ozu's perennial themes: family duty, nostalgia for the carefree days of youth, vagaries in the master/pupil relationship, the parallels between adults and children. Yet comedy is never far off: the scene in the clerks' WC is a corrosive commentary on the petty jealousies of office life. *Japan 1931. With Tokihiko Okada, Tatsuo Saito.*

**Tue 3 May**  
9.00

### Tokyo Chorus

(Tokyo no gassho)



'Another early Ozu comedy, this time centring on the bemused reactions of two young brothers to their parents' foibles and apparent hypocrisies. Full of neatly worked-out gags, Ozu's direction of the children is quite masterly and he makes some splendidly wry comments on middle-class family life. Whichever way you look at it, it remains a supremely funny film, sunnily shot on locations which include Ozu's favourite highways and byways' (John Gillett). *Japan 1932. With Chishu Ryu, Hideo Sugawara.*

**Fri 6 May**  
6.30

### I Was Born, but . . .

(Umarete wa mita keredo . . .)



A widower fruitlessly woos a homeless girl while neglecting his son. Ozu delineates the son's shifting reactions to his father's fecklessness; he uses slight gestures to suggest character development; he economically evokes a steamy Tokyo summer. From its playful beginning, in which a purse and a flea cause havoc in a variety hall, to its lyrical epilogue, this is one of the director's most masterful and beguiling films. *Japan 1933. With Takeshi Sakamoto, Tokkan Kozo.*

**Thu 5 May**  
6.15

### Passing Fancy

(Dekigokoro)



An upper-class family adjusts to the death of their father. The film subtly turns the parent/child theme to the ends of a home-front message: when the nation is at war, the young may be the best guardians of tradition. One of Ozu's biggest commercial successes, it prefigures the study of extended-family relations in his post-war works. *Japan 1941. With Shin Saburi, Mieko Takamine.*

**Sat 28 May**  
4.00

### Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family

(Toda-ke no kyodai)



An echo of Ozu's 1930s home dramas and a muted specimen of the 'Occupation film', *Tenement Gentleman* offers Ozu's characteristic mixture of poignancy, vulgar humour and everyday realism. In this story of a homeless boy and the childless woman who reluctantly takes him in, Choko Iida again plays the mother-figure, supported by a troupe of *shitamachi* types. *Japan 1948. With Choko Iida, Mitsuko Yoshikawa, Chishu Ryu.*

**Mon 9 May**  
6.30

### Record of a Tenement Gentleman

(Nagaya shinshi-roku)







**Sun 15 May**  
6.30

### Late Spring

(Banshun)

A father wishes his daughter to marry; she would prefer to stay with him. To such simple story material Ozu was to return often. At first glance, the father seems identified with 'purely Japanese' tradition – Noh drama, Buddhist and Shinto imagery. Yet in this film made under the American Occupation, Ozu also evokes a liberalism that refuses to let a woman sacrifice her life to patriarchal authority. A great and moving masterpiece. *Japan 1949. With Setsuko Hara, Chishu Ryu.*



**Wed 18 May**  
6.15

### Early Summer

(Bakushu)

A family is disrupted by a daughter's impetuous, mysterious decision to marry. Using no fewer than 19 significant characters (plus an unseen suitor), *Early Summer* steadily surveys a spectrum of life: childish rebellion, youthful impulsiveness, middle-aged anxiety and the resignation of old-age. Ozu's style is utterly assured, including stunning urban landscapes and a crane shot that evokes nothing less than the inexorable turning of the earth. *Japan 1951. With Setsuko Hara, Chishu Ryu.*

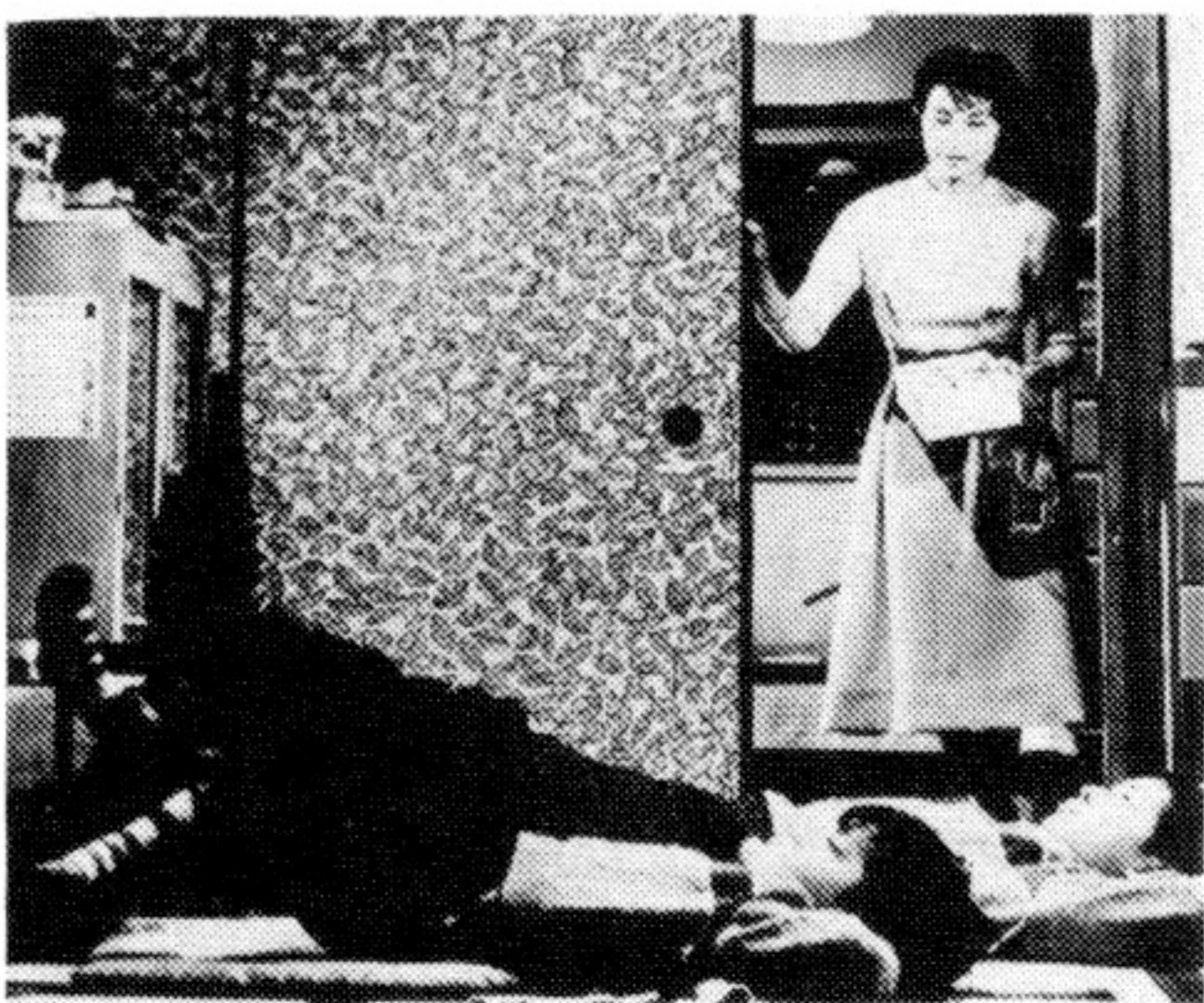


**Tue 24 May**  
6.15

### Tokyo Story

(Tokyo monogatari)

Another extended-family tale, Ozu's most renowned film traces the declining relations between generations. Elderly parents visit Tokyo. Their children indulge in deceptions and evasions. Only the daughter-in-law, tensely keeping vigil over the memory of her missing husband, shows the old couple a spontaneous kindness. The relaxed pace gathers majestic force at one of Ozu's most powerfully poignant conclusions. *Japan 1953. With Chishu Ryu, Chieko Higashiyama, Setsuko Hara.*

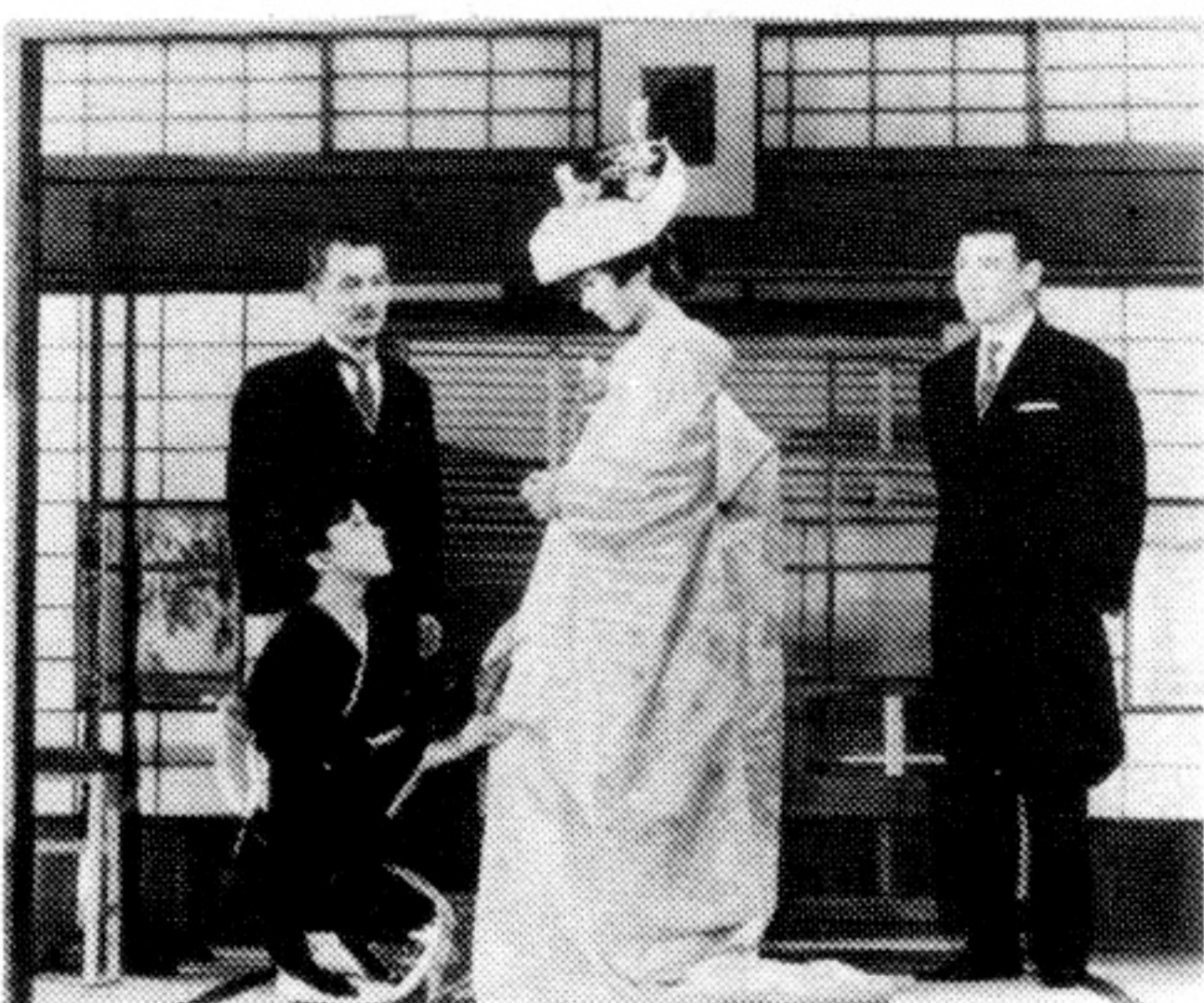


**Mon 30 May**  
4.15

### Good Morning!

(Ohayo)

Even amid the sombre last films, Ozu could turn out a hilarious, Tati-like essay on the absurdities of everyday life. He tosses together gags about gossip, envious neighbours, the non-communicative functions of language, the television craze and flatulence. Despite its casual air, this is one of Ozu's most stylistically rigorous films; in filming the neighbourhood setting in rich, gaudy colour, he plays a suite of nuanced variations on urban landscapes. *Japan 1959. With Chishu Ryu, Yoshiko Kuga.*



**Sun 29 May**  
4.15

### An Autumn Afternoon

(Samma no aji)

Ozu's last film is utterly characteristic: the sorrow of old-age, the craze for commodities, the enigmatic daughter who is to be married off. Yet Hirayama, the drunken father, is somewhat self-pitying as he sinks into nostalgia; Michiko, the no-nonsense daughter, may see more clearly where their lives will lead. Ozu's bold use of colour gives every scene a distinctive flourish. *Japan 1962. With Chishu Ryu, Shima Iwashita.*