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## YASUJIRO OZU by CHISHU RYU

*Yasujiro Ozu died in December, 1963, aged 60. We are grateful to Mr. Chishu Ryu, leading actor in almost all his films since the war, for sending us these reminiscences.*

**A**S I ENTERED THE FILM WORLD in 1925 and Mr. Ozu became a director in 1927, I was given chances to appear in almost all his films, except *Bijin Aishu* (*The Beauty's Sorrow*, 1931), a silent film, and *Shukujo wa Nanio Wasuretaka* (*What Did the Lady Forget?*, 1937), a talkie. For the first few years I was given only bit parts, and it was in 1930 with the film *Rakudai wa Shitakeredo* (*I Flunked, But . . .*) that I played rather an important part for the first time. After that, I was lucky enough to have important parts in five of his pre-war films; and in his other films he never failed to give me the chance to appear in a few shots as a bit-player. After the war, as you

know, I was cast as leading man in almost all his films.

As to Mr. Ozu's way of direction, he had made up the complete picture in his head before he went on the set, so that all we actors had to do was to follow his directions, from the way we lifted and dropped our arms to the way we blinked our eyes. That is, we hadn't to worry about our acting at all. In a sense, we felt quite at home when we were playing in his pictures. Even if I did not know what I was doing and how those shots would be connected in the end, when I looked at the first screening I was often surprised to find my performance far better than I had expected. He paid this minute attention not only to the actors' performances but also to stage settings and properties, and sometimes even painted appropriate pictures on the sliding doors used for the set. Therefore, what was called Mr. Ozu's production was, I think, the film produced by himself.

Kenji Mizoguchi's way was quite the opposite of Mr. Ozu's. He just gave hints to the actors, who had to make every effort to obtain the best effect, whereas Mr. Ozu worked over his ideas in advance from the beginning to the end and fixed each actor into each shot.

Mr. Ozu was very strict and seemed not to be satisfied unless he worked up to the finish. Although I used to be a poor actor and was often quite at a loss as to how to play my part, he gave me hearty encouragement so long as I could exactly follow his directions. Since my clumsiness was well known throughout the studio, when my turn came on the set all the staff used to switch off the lights and go out. Mr. Ozu and I were left alone on the set, and he would let me rehearse tirelessly, giving me every sort of advice until at last I could somewhat manage to do as I was expected to. Even then the final shots were not always successful. Naturally I was disappointed and afraid that he would never use me again, but, to my surprise, he picked me out in his next picture. I can't thank him too much for this consideration for someone whom, I believe, no other director would have chosen to use because of his clumsiness.

In *Daigaku Yoitoko* (*College is a Nice Place*, 1936), I played a college boy; and in the next picture, *Hitori Musuko* (*The Only Son*), Mr. Ozu asked me to play an old man. Although I did my best in making up for this part, every device turned out to be a failure. Mr. Ozu happened to be on the set. He called me in, and with a few touches from my make-up things succeeded in a moment in producing a wonderful figure of an old man. I must confess that I felt then as if I were only the paints or some other materials with which Mr. Ozu painted pictures.

Although we were much of the same age, when we were travelling together or drinking *sake* (of which he was very fond) after the completion of a picture, he seemed to be my real father. Mr. Ozu looked happiest when he was engaged in writing a scenario with Mr. Kogo Noda, at the latter's cottage on the tableland of Nagano Prefecture. By the time he finished writing a script, after about four months' effort, he had already made up every image in every shot, so that he never changed the scenario after we went on the set. The words were so polished up that he would not allow us even a single mistake.

He told me that he was happiest when a scenario was completed. He also told me in jest that he had often been disappointed to find those images broken as he cast the parts and went on the set. He was always ready to go location-hunting and walked the narrow lanes and back streets all day long in search of the places which would best fit his images. He was such a good walker and had such enthusiasm that the cameramen, who accompanied him, used to be tired out first.

And once a film was completed, even if the actors' performances were poor, Mr. Ozu never complained of it. Even when we were sure that he must have had complaints in his mind, he took all the responsibilities on himself and never spoke of them to others. This, alone, gives one some idea of his character.

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Cal State, Irvine