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Author(s)	Judy Bloch
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Friday January 22 '82

In Wheeler Auditorium

7:30

Admission \$4.00

From the PFA Collection of Japanese Films--

A Samurai Series: The Films of Tatsuo Osone

"The PFA has about 200 samurai (the Japanese call them *jidaigeki*, 'period dramas') films in its Japanese collection. All were made in the 1950s and 60s, decades which, in retrospect, were the dying days of the glorious 50-year period of such films. Kurosawa's *Kagemusha* was their swan song.

"The parallels between the American Western and the samurai film are numerous. Both were distinct and popular genres from the beginning of the cinema in both countries. Both created and perpetuated iconographies and myths of the cowboy and the samurai that endure today. Both faded in the mid-Fifties, and both found new life for a time in television.

"About 30 directors specialized in period films, none of whom, except Hiroshi Inagaki (who directed the 1964 *Chushingura*), is known in the West. There were five enormously popular samurai stars, all of the magnitude of John Wayne and Gary Cooper, and whose careers began in the 1920s and lasted for three to five decades (four are still intermittently active).

"Over the next six months, the PFA will show the films of one of these directors, Tatsuo Osone (pronounced Ohsonay). The series will start with his two-part version of *Chushingura* and will continue with 10 films set in various periods of Japanese history - the civil war period of the late sixteenth century; the period of corrupt government in the late eighteenth century; another period of corruption in the first half of the nineteenth century; and the period of civil wars leading to the 1868 Meiji Restoration and modern Japan.

Tatsuo Osone (1904-1963)

"One of the most prolific and professional of samurai film directors, Osone entered film production in 1925. He was an assistant director for nearly a decade under such famed masters of the period film as Daisuke Ito and Teinosuke Kinugasa. Osone made the first of his 93 films in 1935. (The PFA has 24 of his films.)

Osone was a dependable director for whom the Shochiku Studios (for whom he worked all his life) had high regard. They entrusted him with four versions of *Chushingura*, which was always the most prestigious production of the year. Lavish budgets enabled him to engage a high-powered cast and staff and to build elaborate sets. Like Ozu, Mizoguchi, and Kurosawa, Osone had his own stable of staff and actors whom he used in all of his films. With one exception, all of his films were set in pre-modern Japan and were based, for the most part, on popular works. His one modern film *Kedamono no yado* (Lodging of Beasts, 1951) had a screenplay by Akira Kurosawa, and dealt with the yakuza code and the human ties that get in the way of

that code. Throughout his long career, Osone never pretended that he was anything but a skilled craftsman. Few of his films got on the various ten-best lists, but every one of his films was entertaining and - more important to the studio - a box office success." --Frank T. Motofuji

Chushingura

"Every version of this Japanese epic has the set pieces: the humiliation of the young and inexperienced Asano, a provincial feudal lord, by the touchy Kira, the protocol officer to the shogun; Asano's burst of fury against his tormentor; Asano's suicide; the confiscation of his lands and castle, and his vassals' opposing views of whether to make a last-ditch stand against the authorities or to bow peacefully to the demands; the decision to disperse; Oishi, the clan elder's painstaking plans for the vendetta, including his prolonged dissipation in the pleasure quarters as a ruse; and the final destruction of Kira.

"In Osone's two-part version (Part 1: 'Cherry Blossoms'; Part 2: 'Snow') there is a detailed exposition of the causes leading to Asano's explosion in the shogun's castle, and the character of the loathesome Kira, who abuses his office, is given a great deal of prominence. In most versions of the *Chushingura*, from the eighteenth-century puppet play onward, there is a character who is prevented from joining his co-conspirators in the vendetta because of his involvement with a woman. In this film, this character is the young Koheita, who has vowed to look after his fiancée even though her father is a turncoat.

"In Osone's version the camerawork is fluid, the cuts rapid, and there are numerous close-ups. There is none of the longueurs that characterize Mizoguchi's *Genroku Chushingura*. The art direction is superb. The Edo palace of the shogun looks as immense as the exact replica built by Mizoguchi for his version. The film is in black and white. Now that the Inagaki color and scope version, the one most movie-goers are familiar with, is nearly 20 years old and the tints have faded, this Osone version may be the only one left worth looking at.

"The ending is one of the most unforgettable in Japanese cinema: the 47 men, having carried out their revenge, come to their lord's grave to report their successful mission. Oishi commands each man to call out his name. As they do so, the camera slowly pulls back through a snowy forest in an extraordinarily long reverse tracking shot until the men are tiny figures in the distance - figures receding in space and time into history and legend." --Frank T. Motofuji

• Directed by Tatsuo Osone. Produced by Ryuzo Otani and Kiyoshi Takamura. Written by Genzo Murakami, Yoshikata Yoda, and Tatsuo Osone. Photographed by Hideo Ishimoto. Art Direction by Jun'ichi Osumi. Musical Score by Seiichi Suzuki. With Koshiro Matsumoto, Kokichi Takada, Yumeji Tsukioka, Teiji Takahashi, Isuzu Yamada, Koji Tsuruta, Yoko Katsuragi, Osamu Takizawa. (1954, 160 mins, 35mm, English titles, Print from the PFA Collection)