

Document Citation

Title	Mizoguchi the master
Author(s)	Akira Kurosawa James Dudley Andrew Peter Grilli
Source	<i>Japan Film Center</i>
Date	1981 May 01
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	13
Subjects	Mizoguchi, Kenji (1898-1956), Tokyo, Japan
Film Subjects	Meito Bijomaru (The famous sword Bijomaru), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1945 Saikaku ichidai onna (The life of Oharu), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1952 Utamaro o meguru gonin no onna (Utamaro and his five women), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1946 Zangiku monogatari (The story of the last chrysanthemums), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1939 Maria no oyuki (Oyuki the madonna), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1935 Genroku chushingura (The loyal forty-seven ronin of the genroku era), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1942 Taki no Shiraito (The water magician), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1933

Naniwa erejî (Osaka elegy), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1936
Sanshō dayū (Sansho the bailiff), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1954
Shin Heike monogatari (The Taira Clan saga), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1955
Ugetsu monogatari (Ugetsu), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1953
Miyamoto Musashi (Musashi Miyamoto), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1944
Furusato no uta (The song of home), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1925
Joyū Sumako no koi (The love of Sumako the actress), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1947
Gion no shimai (Sisters of the Gion), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1936
Musashino fujin (Lady Musashino), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1951
Yoru no onnatachi (Women of the night), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1948
Waga koi wa moenu (My love has been burning), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1949
Oyū-sama (Miss Oyu), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1951
Yuki fujin ezu (A picture of Madame Yuki), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1950
Gion bayashi (A geisha), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1953
Chikamatsu monogatari (A story from chikamatsu), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1955
Orizuru Osen (The downfall of Osen), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1935
Gubijinsō (Poppy), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1935
Tokyo koshin-kyoku (Tokyo march), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1929
Aru eiga-kantoku no shogai (Kenji Mizoguchi: the life of a film director), Shindo, Kaneto, 1974
Fujiwara Yoshie no Furusato (Home town), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1930
Uwasa no onna (A woman of rumor), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1954
Yōkihi (Princess Yang Kwei-Fei), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1955
Josei no shōri (The victory of women), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1946
Akasen chitai (Street of shame), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1956



The Japan Film Center
presents

MIZOGUCHI

The Master

A Series of Films by Kenji Mizoguchi May 1 - June 28



The Japan Film Center

in Association with the Museum of Modern Art
and the Japan Film Library Council, presents

MIZOGUCHI: The Master

A Series of Thirty-one Films

by Kenji Mizoguchi

May 1 - June 28, 1981

Fri	May 1	7:30	Ugetsu (Ugetsu monogatari), 1953, 96 min.
Sat	May 2	2:00	Sansho the Bailiff (Sansho dayu), 1954, 125 min.
Sun	May 3	2:00	A Geisha (Gion bayashi), 1953, 87 min.
Fri	May 8	7:30	Street of Shame (Akasen chitai), 1956, 85 min.
Sat	May 9	2:00	New Tales of the Taira Clan (Shin Heike monogatari), 1955, 108 min.
Sun	May 10	2:00	Crucified Lovers (Chikamatsu monogatari), 1954, 102 min.
Wed	May 13	7:30	Kenji Mizoguchi: The Life of a Film Director (Aru eiga kantoku no shogai) directed by Kaneto Shindo, 1975, 132 min.
Fri	May 15	7:30	Song of Home (Furusato no uta), 1925, 45 min., <i>silent, no subtitles</i> Poppy (Gubijinso), 1935, 72 min.
Sun	May 17	2:00	Tokyo March (Tokyo koshinkyoku), 1929, 20 min., (fragment), <i>no subtitles</i> Hometown (Furusato), 1930, 107 min.; (partial sound), <i>no subtitles</i>
Wed	May 20	7:30	The Downfall of Osen (Orizuru Osen), 1935, 78 min. Women of the Night (Yoru no onna-tachi), 1948, 73 min.
Fri	May 22	7:30	Taki No Shiraito: The Water Magician , 1933, 110 min., <i>silent</i> Musashi Miyamoto (Miyamoto Musashi), 1944, 53 min.
Sun	May 24	2:00	Oyuki the Madonna (Maria no Oyuki), 1935, 78 min., <i>no subtitles</i> Poppy (repeat screening), 72 min.
Wed	May 27	7:30	Osaka Elegy (Naniwa ereji/Naniwa hika), 1936, 71 min. Sisters of Gion (Gion no shimai), 1936, 69 min.

Information & Schedule

Admission: Japan Society members, \$2.50
Nonmembers, \$3.50

Tickets are sold on a first-come-first-served basis, beginning at 5:30 on Wednesdays and Fridays and 1:00 on Saturdays and Sundays

No mail or telephone reservations. No refunds or exchanges,

Program subject to change without advance notice.

Films are shown in Japanese with English subtitles, except where otherwise noted

For information, 832-1155.

All Wednesday and Friday screenings begin at 7:30 pm.

Saturday and Sunday matinees begin at 2:00 pm.

This film series is made possible in part by the generous assistance of Japan Air Lines.

Fri	May 29	7:30	The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums (Zangiku monogatari), 1939, 142 min.
Sun	May 31	2:00	The Loyal Forty-Seven Ronin, Part I (Genroku Chushingura), 1941, 111 min. The Loyal Forty-Seven Ronin, Part II , 1942, 108 min.
Wed	June 3	7:30	Musashi Miyamoto (repeat screening), 53 min. The Famous Sword (Meito Bijomaru), 1945, 66 min.
Fri	June 5	7:30	Victory of Women (Josei no shori), 1946, 80 min.
Sun	June 7	2:00	Utamaro and His Five Women (Utamaro o meguru gonin no onna), 1946, 93 min.
Wed	June 10	7:30	The Love of Sumako the Actress (Joyu Sumako no koi), 1947, 93 min.
Fri	June 12	7:30	My Love Has Been Burning (Waga koi wa moenu), 1949, 84 min.
Sun	June 14	2:00	Portrait of Madame Yuki (Yuki fujin ezu), 1950, 86 min.
Wed	June 17		No program
Fri	June 19	7:30	Miss Oyu (Oyu-sama), 1951, 90 min.
Sun	June 21	2:00	The Life of Oharu (Saikaku Ichidai onna), 1952, 137 min.
Wed	June 24	7:30	The Lady of Musashino (Musashino fujin), 1951, 87 min.
Fri	June 26	7:30	A Woman of Rumor (Uwasa no onna), 1954, 83 min.
Sun	June 28	2:00	Princess Yang Kwei Fei (Yokihi), 1955, 85 min. Kenji Mizoguchi: The Life of a Film Director (repeat), 132 min.

FOREWORD

"... it is not likely that anyone in the West will be able to think of the Japanese film and not also think of Mizoguchi."

—DONALD RICHIE & JOSEPH ANDERSON:
The Japanese Film: Art and Industry

In the quarter-century since Kenji Mizoguchi's death in 1956, his reputation as one of the master directors of world cinema has continued to grow. Few critics today would neglect to include at least one of his films on their short lists of "best films of all time," and audiences the world over return again and again to his films, discovering something new in them with each re-viewing. Mizoguchi's name is invariably one of the first mentioned by film scholars debating the role of director as *auteur*, and for many more casual viewers the Japanese cinema is defined largely by their experience of his films.

And yet, Mizoguchi's exalted international reputation rests on a relatively small number of works. Of the eighty-five films he made during his thirty-three years as a director (1923-56), a mere dozen are available outside Japan and no more than half of those are seen with any real frequency. *The Life of Oharu* (1952), *Ugetsu* (1953), and *Sansho the Bailiff* (1954)—the brilliant masterpieces that brought international acclaim to Mizoguchi by winning top awards at the Venice Film Festival in three consecutive years—continue to fascinate, and repeated viewings do not diminish one's admiration for their extraordinary artistry. But long overdue is the opportunity to look back at the precursors to these mature works, to examine the foundations on which their mastery was based, and to trace the development of one of the supreme artists of world cinema.

It is thus with a sense of special privilege that the Japan Film Center presents the present retrospective series of Kenji Mizoguchi's films. Of the eighty-five listed in Mizoguchi's filmography barely more than thirty have survived the ravages of time, war, and the neglect of an industry that too generously invests its resources in its present and future without a care for its past. All but one of Mizoguchi's extant films are included in this series—an assemblage that provides an extraordinary overview both of the work of a single filmmaker and of the Japanese film industry in its most creative decades.

Mizoguchi's life closely parallels the development of cinema in Japan: born in 1898, only a year or two after the introduction of the first Kinetoscope and Vitascope films into Japan, Mizoguchi entered the film industry in the early 1920s, just as films were breaking away from the conventions of Japanese traditional theater to establish themselves as an independent art form. The earliest film in the present series is *Song of Home*, a 1925 silent film but in no sense a "first film" since, incredibly, Mizoguchi had already managed to produce twenty-five others in the two years since becoming a full-fledged director. The last film in the series, the 1956 *Street of Shame*, was made at the height of what has been called "the Golden Age of Japanese Cinema" and reveals Mizoguchi struggling as vigorously as ever with one of his favorite themes—the victimization of women by harsh social pressures—and as creatively as ever with the art of filmmaking.

The series' thirty-odd films that fall between 1925 and 1956 do not project a uniform pattern or a consistently rising line of development. Mizoguchi was a restless genius, driving himself like a Picasso or a Beethoven to innovate and extend his art, never repeating earlier achievements, always setting new challenges for him-

self. Many of his films are masterpieces, many are flawed and less than fully satisfying. But in all of them is evident a seriousness of purpose and a fierce determination to capture through the special reality of film the inner vision of a master.

There is a certain consistency in Mizoguchi's themes and in aspects of his style, however, and it is only in a retrospective such as this that we can fully appreciate the achievements of his lifelong commitment to film. In both contemporary dramas and period sagas, Mizoguchi's compassionate humanism hovers like a protective angel over the victims of society, particularly women, as he investigates with remarkable delicacy the nuances of human relationships. And in each film, regardless of whether it is a medieval ghost story, an adaptation from Maupassant or Eugene O'Neill, or a domestic tragedy unfolding in the back streets of modern Osaka, the viewer is enveloped in an atmosphere perfectly attuned to the subject at hand. Transcending mere accuracy in selecting and decorating his settings, Mizoguchi seems almost to control the textures and vapors and aromas that draw the viewer totally into the worlds he created on film.

The preparation of this tribute to Kenji Mizoguchi required the devoted efforts of many individuals scattered over several continents. The most profound thanks are due Mme. Kashiko Kawakita and Mr. Akira Shimizu and their colleagues at the Japan Film Library Council in Tokyo, first for assembling all available Mizoguchi films for a special program at the 1980 Venice Biennale and then for sending the series on to New York. The Japan Foundation supported the making of new prints where possible, and the Film Center at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo generously lent the only surviving prints of Mizoguchi's early films, *Song of Home* (1925) and *Hometown* (1930); special thanks are due to Mr. Kenji Adachi, Director of the Museum, and to its film curator Mr. Sadamu Maruo, who personally carried these valuable prints from Tokyo. Mr. Shuichi Matsuda of the Matsuda Eigasha made available the surviving fragments of *Tokyo March* (1929). Mr. Donald Richie has been, as always, an invaluable source of information and guidance. Ms. Hiroko Go-vaers in Paris assisted in sending Mizoguchi prints from Europe and arranged for the loan of *Oyuki and Madonna* from the National Film Theatre in London. For prints of the films that are available in the United States, we are indebted to New Yorker Films, Films Incorporated, New Line Films, and Entertainment Marketing Corporation. Mr. Kiichi Ito and Mr. Tadao Fujimatsu of Japan Air Lines were instrumental in arranging shipment of films from Japan. Mary Lea Bandy, Adrienne Mancina, Larry Kardish, and Steven Soba of the Museum of Modern Art have collaborated closely in planning this retrospective and in coordinating the screenings of a selection of Mizoguchi films at MOMA. Prof. Dudley Andrew of the University of Iowa contributed the excellent introductory essay in this program. David Owens, my colleague at the Japan Film Center wrote the notes for each film, and he and Teddi Oda worked tirelessly on a myriad of other details to make possible this uniquely important film series.

Peter Grilli
Director, Japan Film Center



Kenji Mizoguchi (1898-1956)

KUROSAWA ON MIZOGUCHI

"An exceptional nature, haunted by his own image. He was driven, unswerving in his search to create his ideal work."

Mizoguchi's greatness was that he would do anything to heighten the reality of every scene. He never made compromises. He never said that something or other 'would do.' Instead, he pulled—or pushed—everyone along with him until they had created the feeling which matched that of his own inner image. An ordinary director is quite incapable of this. And in this lay his true spirit as a director—for he had the temperament of a true creator. Mizoguchi pushed and bullied and was often criticized for it. But he held out, and he created masterpieces. This attitude toward creation is not at all easy, but a director like him is especially necessary in Japan, where this kind of pushing is so resisted. . . . Of all Japanese directors I have the greatest respect for him, but at the same time I can't say that everything he did was equally good. If he portrays an old merchant you get marvelously successful scenes, like those in *Crucified Lovers* (Chikamatsu monogatari), but he was no good at samurai. In *Ugetsu*, when you get to the war scenes it just isn't war. A long time ago he did *Chushingura* and he left out the last scene (the great vendetta, with much fighting and swordplay), which isn't surprising at all. Our historical worlds are actually far different. His central figures are women and the world he describes is largely that of women or merchants. That is not my world. I think I am best at delineating samurai. . . . But with the death of Mizoguchi, Japanese film lost its truest creator.

(translated by Donald Richie)



Mizoguchi on the set of *Ugetsu*, with Masayuki Mori, Machiko Kyo, and Mitsuko Mito.

MIZOGUCHI: A Brief Introduction

by Dudley Andrew

The Japanese have seldom glorified genius and more rarely advocated novelty and difference. Their relationship with Kenji Mizoguchi has perforce been stormy, for he was on the one hand, a distinctively Japanese artist (unlike Kurosawa and Oshima, for instance, who seem to court Western attitudes toward art), and on the other he was fiercely independent. Where did he come by his fanatical pursuit of artistic perfection? His family and education were unexceptional, as was his entry into the industry. He seemed destined to give long years of service to Nikkatsu films like the hundreds of other artisans in the Japanese film capitals of Tokyo and Kyoto. Yet Mizoguchi began to develop his own themes and style. Moreover, to find the means to make the films he demanded of himself, he began frequently to change companies, a truly unheard of practice in Japan. His enormous output (85 films over 34 years) and the talented artists who clustered around him made Mizoguchi an important force in the industry. He even held major appointments at various times in government and the film industry. Yet it was the West which had to crown him, for the Japanese were perplexed both by his innovations and by his conservatism. The French critics, bowled over by the few masterworks they saw at Venice in the early 1950s, adored him as an exotic (that is, non-Western) visionary. His reputation has continued to grow in recent years.

The distinctiveness of Mizoguchi lies in the peculiar balance he maintained between fidelity to Japan (to its traditions, genres, trends) and to his personal artistic voice. Participating fully in nearly every aesthetic movement which arose in Japan from 1922 to 1956 Mizoguchi, more than Ozu, Naruse, or other Japanese filmmakers, is a barometer for those years. His cinema on the surface would seem to be in dialogue with its times, as he passed easily from style to style: the *shimpa* melodrama (1922-27), the socialist tendency genre (1928-31), the Meiji-period pieces (1932-35 and again 1937-40), social realism (1935-37), the historical epics in the militarist era (1941-44), the postwar democratic exposés (1945-50), and the artistic export film (1951-56).

Yet in Japan Mizoguchi has been thought of as bizarre, quirky, and intransigent. His first international success, *The Life of Oharu*, was deemed such an untraditional and ambitious undertaking that it had to be made with almost no studio support. In short, through all his phases and periods something strongly personal persists, something so personal that it has been constantly noted in Japan and often objected to. For Mizoguchi novelty came not in veering from what was being done or had been done, but rather in deepening it, and doing so with such strength that it could be neither dismissed nor avoided. In this way we can see him as both traditional and starkly individual.

Mizoguchi may have gained his belief in the sanctity of the artistic mission from his lasting interest in Western painters and writers (he was obsessed with Matisse, Maupassant, and Dostoev-



Mizoguchi and Raizo Ichikawa, on the set of *New Tales of the Heike Clan* (1955)

Dudley Andrew is director of the film-studies program at the University of Iowa and author of numerous articles on Mizoguchi. His book *Kenji Mizoguchi: A Guide to References and Resources* (co-authored with Paul Andrew) will be published by G.K. Hall in October, 1981.



Mizoguchi and cinematographer Kazuo Miyagawa, shooting *Street of Shame*



Mizoguchi (left) while shooting *A Woman of Rumor* (1954), with actresses Kinuyo Tanaka and Yoshiko Kuga and cinematographer Kazuo Miyagawa.



Shooting the famous picnic scene from *Ugetsu* (1953), with Machiko Kyo as the ghostly Lady Wakasa and Masayuki Mori as her bewitched lover.

sky) and the cult of genius surrounding them; more likely, though, the stark beauty of certain elements in his Japanese cultural environment provided the motivation for him to devote his entire life to artistic expression in film. His close associate, Yoshikata Yoda, is not the only one to attribute Mizoguchi's zealous pursuit of some higher vision to his growing commitment, especially in his final years, to Buddhism.

Mizoguchi was fond of declaring, almost like a Zen master, that nothing truly revealing could be expected of an artist who had not practiced his trade for thirty years. He claims that his first dozen years (1923-35) were mere apprenticeship, and that only after 1950 should one look to his work with the hope of finding value. Indeed, it was only shortly before his death that he conceded that he was at last prepared to make strides in creating the art of the cinema. Such statements were spoken not from humility but from a sincere appreciation of the discipline necessary for achievement.

The work of filmmaking is predominately a work of preparation and the fables surrounding the preparation of any Mizoguchi film portray the pathology of the true artist. Most well known is his determination to achieve exact replication in the historical films. He would employ professors to verify the accuracy of his designs and props. He would send his assistants across the full archipelago that makes up Japan in search of a single object. He would assault government officials with requests to have the country's museum treasures laid open to him. His assistants even took to lying about the props they brought back, knowing that on the screen, and even on the set, no one would recognize a copy from an original piece of a certain era.

And this was only the first step in capturing the atmosphere within which his actors and his script would come alive. The scenarist Yoshikata Yoda, with whom he collaborated on more than a dozen films, has commented in several interviews on the trauma of writing for Mizoguchi. Version after rejected version would find itself back on Yoda's desk with few instructions for changes except the inevitable—and inevitably forceful—command to get to the center of the issue.

Mizoguchi seemed incapable of articulating his desires to Yoda, to his designers, and to the actors who would rehearse endlessly in frustration, never pleasing him, but never knowing precisely why. Yet with this method all who collaborated with Mizoguchi were driven beyond their experience, their training, and even their instincts to seek new resources capable of meeting his standards. More important, because Mizoguchi always presumed his own talent to be one of interpretation rather than pure creation, it was essential that the material he confronted be somewhat alien so that he could legitimately mold it with his *mise en scene*. He demanded that all who labored on his films be responsible for creating their own perfect artworks which he could then utilize in his own way.

This could be a brutalizing method, and there are few affectionate reminiscences of life on Mizoguchi's set. Yet it was not as though Mizoguchi knew all along what he wanted and refused to inform his cast and crew; rather he sensed that there was a perfect solution for every artistic situation, one that neither he nor his actors and designers yet knew, but one which, under his prodding, they would eventually find. Nor did he exempt himself from his own ferocious standards. Once he had decided to make a certain film, he tenaciously kept after it, reading stacks of books, seeing films, sketching, and in every way concentrating on the subject so that he could grasp its essence. So fanatical was his concern for concentration that he even had a urinal brought on the set so that he need not leave his fictional world even for an instant.

Mizoguchi is known to have been inseparable from his crane on the set. He went so far as to have it taken to locations where no possible use could be made of it. More than a symbol of power, the crane was for him a means of adjusting himself to the action before him. He would glide fluidly amongst his actors and across the set, trying to penetrate the atmosphere of his fiction. These crane movements were his personal gestures of authorship. They were at the same time disciplined and instinctive.

This balance between obsessive preparation and the freedom of the instant is the methodological corollary of his dual vision of the artist; distant analyst of situations, aiming at their precise formulation, the artist is also the embodiment of passionate response to what he sees. The revolutionary aspirations of the artist are thus balanced by Mizoguchi's contemplative stance in precisely the same way that they are balanced in his obsessive subject, the downtrodden woman. Mizoguchi's women are alternately rebellious, condemning the male world which subjugates them, and stoical, piously regretting the fate which mysteriously yet ineluctably dissolves all human aspirations. Alternately attracted to both poles of this opposition, Mizoguchi swayed from left to right in his political sentiments and allegiances. Doubtless he felt himself outside politics, alienated in the same way that his women are. Or rather, he seemed to use his inclination to rebel as a means to attain his vision in the same way that Oharu attained, at the end of her life, a vision which was deeper than all politics and all art.

Mizoguchi's humility before both his characters and the actresses who played them, together with the distance (at times scientific, at times contemplative) which he maintained from his tales, led him to develop a most original camera style. As early as 1935 critics were surprised at his one-scene/one-take method, a method he claimed was designed to hypnotize the spectator. At first these takes involved little camera movement, content to observe entrances, exits, and reblockings in a single long look. Under the camera's gaze actors play to one another within a tableau until a moment when their interrelations suddenly, though inevitably, burst into dramatic passion. At this point Mizoguchi cuts to the next tableau. The camera's presence is like a bellows which invisibly intensifies the dramatic heat already present in the *mise en scene*. The filmmaker here organizes the materials and their context, then stands back to record the results of his "experiment." Mizoguchi developed this technique at the moment when he was under the influence of Maupassant and of Western naturalist aesthetics.

In his postwar, "classic" phase Mizoguchi began to respond directly to the drama before him with camera movements of the most elegant sort. While his camera seldom originates its own movement, once it begins to follow the action of a character, it finds its own point of rest. Hence, the one-scene/one-shot method has evolved into a structure of two moments of quiet balance connected by a solemn movement. This is the period of Mizoguchi's dependence on his "crane," and we can read such movements as the strokes of an artist before his model. Critic Tadao Sato likens this technique to traditional Japanese aesthetics which prefer "fixations" to melodies. The poses a *kabuki* actor strikes are held through the critical moment and beyond, before he then slides gracefully in search of the next pose. By adopting this aesthetic, Mizoguchi creates one of cinema's most haunting effects. Like the heroines it photographs, his camera is captivated by a passion in refusing to avert its gaze from the drama it confronts. Although it doesn't initiate action, it responds, as do the women respond, by turning a reaction into a pose.

The sophisticated sense of observation inherent in his camera-



Mizoguchi with Kinuyo Tanaka on location for *Sansho the Bailiff* (1954)



Mizoguchi (right) preparing for filming *Miss Oyu* in 1951, with novelist Junichiro Tanizaki and stars Kinuyo Tanaka and Yuji Hori.



Shooting the opening scene of *New Tales of the Heike Clan* (1955)

Film Notes

work is made even more intricate by Mizoguchi's penchant for inscribed observers within his fictions. Anju's suicide in the quiet pool outside Sansho's compound is seen by us through her tearful friend standing helplessly by. The full pathos of Okita's determination to kill herself at the end of *Utamaro and His Five Women* is delivered only after she leaves the screen and the camera instinctively pans back to Utamaro who, handcuffed, cries out, "I want to draw, I want to draw so much." Here our passion is activated by Mizoguchi's passionate response to Utamaro who, in turn, is excitedly watching Okita live out the final passion of her life.

This dizzying structure is more than a *tour de force* of style; it authentically represents the necessary interplay between distance and identification at the heart of Mizoguchi's method and worldview. Here he brings to the cinema a crucial aspect of Japanese aesthetics, for the sympathetic observer of a scene is integral to many of their arts. Small human figures respond to landscapes in Japanese paintings of all eras. Both the *bunraku* and *kabuki* theaters include narrators who describe and respond to the action on stage. In the cinema we can point to the *benshi*, the onstage narrator of silent films, whose prominence rivalled that of the visual imagery during the first three decades of Japanese film history.

Trading on this tradition Mizoguchi permits us, even commands us, to watch both an event and its effects on a human observer. How else can we account for the thrilling finales of *Ugetsu* and *Sansho the Bailiff*, where the camera totally liberates itself from the finished tale and climbs independently and pathetically to a broader view. Together with the rising music these camera movements give us the space to respond broadly to what we have seen. In the figure of an artist's gesture these distant tales are made palpably near.



Kenji Mizoguchi (1898-1956)

"With Mizoguchi's death, Japanese film lost its truest creator."

—Akira Kurosawa

CRUCIFIED LOVERS: A STORY FROM CHIKAMATSU (Chikamatsu monogatari), Daiei (Tokyo), 1954, 102 minutes

Original play by Chikamatsu Monzaemon; **Screenplay** by Yoshikata Yoda; **Photography** by Kazuo Miyagawa; **Music** by Fumio Hayasaka.

With Kazuo Hasegawa (Mohei), Kyoko Kagawa (Osan), Yoko Minamida (Otama), Eitaro Shindo (Ishun), Sakae Ozawa (Sukeimon), Haruo Tanaka (Doki), Chieko Naniwa (Oko), Ichiro Sugai (Genbei), and Tatsuya Ichiguro, Hiroshi Mizuno.

Crucified Lovers, also known as *A Tale from Chikamatsu*, is based on a play Chikamatsu Monzaemon wrote for the 18th-century Bunraku puppet theater. Mizoguchi also incorporated a cautionary tale on the perils of passion, "The Almanac Maker's Tale," by Chikamatsu's celebrated contemporary, Ihara Saikaku, another of whose works Mizoguchi had earlier adapted for *The Life of Oharu*.

A beautiful young woman who has become the second (and therefore suspect) wife of a prosperous almanac maker is visited by her brother, a merchant in deep financial trouble. He asks for money to see him through his difficulties. The almanac maker turns him away, forcing his young bride to hide money for her beloved brother. She does so with the aid of her husband's top assistant, Mohei, who is sympathetic to her plight.

The dashing Mohei, heir apparent to the business, is being pursued by



one of the young maids employed at the shop. When this jealous young woman happens to see Mohei meeting furtively with the mistress of the house, she suspects he has betrayed her and has taken up with their employer's wife. Out of spite, she spreads a rumor that Mohei and Osan are having an affair, ruining Mohei's once promising future. Mohei and Osan flee together, determined to eventually clear their names, only to realize they really are in love. The authorities track them down and bring them back to Kyoto to be executed.

The main story of Mohei and Osan is beautifully framed by two processions. Mizoguchi seems to have been very fond of using processions as a means to move viewers into a story; parades of courtesans, actors, or in this case, criminals, appear in many of his films. The film opens with the staff of the almanac maker's shop observing two runaway lovers being carted back into town by the police, an occasion which foretells the film's conclusion in which Mohei and Osan are themselves brought in on horseback past the shop where they once lived.

THE DOWNFALL OF OSEN (Orizuru Osen), Dai-ichi Eiga, 1935, 78 min., 16 mm. sound

From an original story by Kyoka Izumi; **Screenplay** by Tatsunosuke Takashima; **Photography** by Minoru Miki.

With Isuzu Yamada (Osen), Daijiro Natsukawa (Sokichi), Genichi Fujii (Matsuda), Ichiro Yoshizawa (Uwaki), Shin Shibata (Kumazawa).



Though never before seen in this country, *The Downfall of Osen* has been described for American students of film in Noel Burch's *To the Distant Observer* as *Osen of the Paper Cranes*, the film's literally translated title.

Burch has described the film as "remarkably inventive and . . . a vivid instance of Mizoguchi's system of representation at a critical formative stage" of his career. It was, and is especially remarkable for its narrative structure. The story begins with the discovery by Sokichi Hata, a well-to-do physician, of his former mentor Osen at a railway station and proceeds to unwind in flashback as he recalls the circumstances of their relationship.

Sokichi had been a poor country boy who came to Tokyo seeking employment. He is taken in by an unscrupulous art dealer who employs Sokichi as a messenger in his illicit schemes. Sokichi protests only at the dealer's mistreatment of his maid-servant, Osen. When the art dealer

is ultimately arrested, Sokichi and Osen are free but poor. To satisfy Sokichi's ambition to become a doctor, Osen turns to prostitution to support him. She is arrested for stealing from one of her customers, but before the police carry her off she presses a folded paper crane into Sokichi's hand. Sokichi is taken in by his professor and attains his goal. Now recognizing the poor sick woman he encounters at the station, Sokichi is overcome with regret at the debt of gratitude he still owes her. But Osen is now hopelessly mad and no longer recognizes him.

As in *Taki no Shiraito* and several of his other films, Mizoguchi conveys with tremendous emotional force the debt of gratitude the male protagonist suddenly remembers he owes to a forgotten woman. The heroine has sacrificed herself to enable this man to rise from destitution to riches and respect. *The Downfall of Osen* is the most dramatic example of this persistent theme in Mizoguchi's work, one which film critic Tadao Sato attributes to the director's guilt feelings about the sacrifices his own mother and sister made for him.

The narration was recorded by the *benshi* Suisei Matsui and forms a link between Mizoguchi's silent and sound films.

THE FAMOUS SWORD (Meito Bijomaru), Shochiku-Kyoto, 1945, 66 min., 16 mm.

Screenplay by Matsutaro Kawaguchi, **Photography** by Shigeto Miki.

With Shotaro Hanayagi (Kiyone, the swordsmith), Isuzu Yamada (Sasae), Ichijiro Oya (Kozamon, her father), Eijiro Yanagi (Kiyohide) and Hiroshi Ishii (Seiji).

Mizoguchi was always susceptible to the pressures of the prevailing social climate. When films of socialist leanings, so-called "tendency films," were in vogue, he made *Metropolitan Symphony* (1929). Just a few years



later he joined several others in making a propaganda film on the Japanese take-over of Manchuria, *The Dawn of Manchukuo and Mongolia* (1932). His *Osaka Elegy* (1936) and *Sisters of Gion* (1936) were exemplary of a trend toward social realism. But as the militarists gained strength in Japan and the government censors supervised film production ever more closely, such films on contemporary social themes were discouraged. To avoid being assigned to projects he disliked, Mizoguchi turned his attention to generally acceptable subjects of traditional performing arts and historical romances like *Story of the Last Chrystanthemum* and *The Famous Sword*.

The government's chief objective in promoting this kind of film was to exalt traditional values, the virtues of Japan's military tradition, but in *The Famous Sword* Mizoguchi managed to shift attention away from the swordsmith who was the intended center of the story to the woman who loves and encourages him.

The film is set in the mid-19th century, at the end of the Tokugawa period, when loyalist factions favoring return of authority to the Imperial throne were at odds with the reigning Tokugawa shogunate. A loyalist fencing master, Onoda, is attacked by a group of masterless samurai while on his way to present a new sword to the lord of his domain. In the ensuing fight, the sword is broken. Onoda is put under house-arrest as punishment for his carelessness.

The swordsmith, Kiyone, blames himself for the incident and determines to make a new and better sword to replace the broken one. He apprentices himself to a master swordsmith in Kyoto and succeeds in producing a superior blade. He presents the blade to Onoda's daughter, Sasae, whom he loves deeply.

During his incarceration, Onoda receives assistance from one of his clansmen, Naito, who mediates on his behalf with the clan authorities. When Onoda is freed, Naito demands Sasae's hand in marriage as reward. Onoda refuses and Naito kills him. Sasae, accomplished in the art of swordsmanship, sets out with Kiyone's newly forged blade to avenge her father's murder. In the turmoil of the rebellion which has by now enveloped the nation, Sasae fights bravely for the loyalist cause. She finally encounters Naito and defeats him.

A GEISHA (Gion bayashi), Daiei (Kyoto), 1953, 87 minutes

Original story by Matsutaro Kawaguchi; **Screenplay** by Yoshikata Yoda; **Photography** by Kazuo Miyagawa; **Music** by Ichiro Saito.

With Michiyo Kogure (Miyoharu), Ayako Wakao (Eiko), Seizaburo Kawazu (Kusuda), Chieko Naniwa (Okimi), Eitaro Shindo (Sawamoto), Mikio Koshiba (Kanzaki).



As originally conceived, *A Geisha* was to have been a reworking of Mizoguchi's earlier *Sisters of Gion*, bringing the character Omocho from that film up to date. As work progressed, however, the character Miyoharu took on her own distinct personality. The similarity of themes remained.

Miyoharu is a geisha past her prime, loved by a younger man who is wasting his family's fortune on her. Eiko, the daughter of an old friend, comes to ask Miyoharu to train her in the geisha's art. Eiko shows great promise, and after a year of training Miyoharu borrows money for her debut from Okimi, mistress of one of Gion's most prominent teahouses. The money, as it turns out, has actually come from Kusuda, a wealthy businessman who hopes to be Eiko's patron. Eiko is not at all interested in him. Kusuda invites Miyoharu and Eiko to accompany him on a business trip to Tokyo with his associate Kanzaki, and while there he tries to force

himself on Eiko. Eiko bites him on the lip. The infuriated Kusuda arranges to have the two women barred from all the Kyoto teahouses. To put them back in good standing, Eiko agrees to sleep with Kanzaki, but Miyoharu intervenes and offers herself instead. Miyoharu, who has gotten used to prostituting herself, urges Eiko to protect her decency.

The grand discovery of *A Geisha* was Ayako Wakao. Wakao had made her movie debut just the previous year and veterans of Mizoguchi's crew expected her to wilt under the withering blasts of criticism the director invariably aimed at his performers. To everyone's astonishment, though others in the cast were singled out, Wakao did everything exactly to Mizoguchi's liking the first time around. Her performance is the centerpiece of the film.

HOMETOWN (Furusato), Nikkatsu, 1930, 107 min., 16mm, partial sound. No subtitles

This print, the only surviving print of the film, has been lent for the present retrospective by the Film Center of The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Original story and screenplay by Iwao Mori, Toshi Kisaragi, and Shuichi Hatamoto; **Photography** by Tatsuyuki Yokota; **Sound** recording by Hoshikatsu Urashima and Toshio Naryu; **Piano** by Constantine and Lydia Shapiro.

With Yoshie Fujiwara (Yoshio Fujimura), Shizue Natsukawa (Natsuko), Fujiko Hamaguchi (Natsue Omura) and Isamu Kosugi (Higuchi).

Like many early sound films, *Hometown* is built around a music-related theme. It is the story of Fujimura, a young vocalist struggling to make a name for himself. He is discovered



by a rich patron of musicians, Natsue Omura, a woman of ample funds and more than an artistic interest in him. She introduces him to her agent and suggests that he sing Japanese rather than Western songs. Under her tutelage his first recording "Furusato" is a smash hit, landing him a big con-

tract—by which Natsue stands to profit most.

Fujimura, intoxicated by success and the sleek Natsue, abandons his faithful girlfriend, Ayako, who worked as a hotel maid to support him when he had nothing to live on but dreams. When Fujimura is seriously injured in an automobile accident, Natsue, in turn abandons him, thinking his career is ended and he would be of no further use to her. But Fujimura is determined to save his career and with patience, hard work, and Ayako's love, he makes a dramatic comeback.

This was Mizoguchi's first sound film done in a process known as "MinaTalkie" created by Yoshizo Minakawa. It preceded Heinosuke Gosho's *The Neighbor's Wife and Mine* by a year, but did not enjoy the success of Gosho's light comedy, partly because the sound reproduction was poor and partly because of Mizoguchi's more serious subject matter.

KENJI MIZOGUCHI: THE LIFE OF A FILM DIRECTOR (Aru eiga kantoku no shogai), Kindai Eiga Kyokai, 1975, color, 132 minutes

Produced and directed by Kaneto Shindo; **Photography** by Yoshiyuki Miyake.



Known in the United States for *The Island and Onibaba*, Kaneto Shindo began his movie career in 1934 at the age of 22 when he joined the Shinko Kinema Company. He first worked with Kenji Mizoguchi in 1937 on *The Straits of Love and Hate* (Aienkyo) as an assistant art director. From then until 1951, when he began directing his own films, Shindo worked steadily for Mizoguchi in various capacities. And like many others who worked with the great director, Shindo found the experience overwhelming. He began talking with

other of Mizoguchi's former associates in early 1970s and wrote a book which then became this film. *The Life of a Film Director* was named the *Kinema Jumbo* "Best Film" for 1975.

The film consists of interviews conducted by Shindo with actors, actresses, writers, cameramen and other members of Mizoguchi's crews, intercut with still photos taken on the sets of many of the films they had a hand in making. The picture of Mizoguchi that emerges is not always flattering but certainly shows a man obsessed with the art of filmmaking.

Some of the more familiar interviewees appearing in this film include: actresses Kinuyo Tanaka, Machiko Kyo, Isuzu Yamada, Ayako Wakao, Michiyo Kogure, Kyoko Kagawa, and Nobuko Otowa (Shindo's wife); actors Ganjiro Nakamura, Eitaro Ozawa, Eitaro Shindo; and cameraman Kazuo Miyagawa.

THE LADY OF MUSASHINO (Musashino fujin), Toho, 1951, 87 min.

Screenplay by Yoshikata Yoda from a novel by Shohei Ooka; **Photography** by Masao Tamai; **Music** by Fumio Hayasaka.

With Kinuyo Tanaka (Michiko Akiyama), Masayuki Mori (Tadao Akiyama), Akihiko Katayama (Tsutomu Miyaji), Yukiko Todoroki (Tomiko Ono), So Yamamura (Eiji Ono) and Eitaro Shindo.

Shohei Ooka's original novel, from which Mizoguchi adapted *Lady of Musashino* was a best seller credited at its publication with being Japan's first European-style psychological novel. It intertwines the lives of five people in the years just after World War II. Michiko, the shy, sensitive wife of a scholar; Tadao, her husband, a man absorbed in his translations of Stendahl; Tsutomu, Michiko's cousin and a recently repatriated soldier; and Eiji Ono, another of Michiko's cousins living nearby who has made a fortune by converting a munitions plant into a soap factory; and Ono's assertive wife Tomiko.

Michiko and her husband have been entrusted with maintaining her family's estate in Musashino. Over her husband's objections, Michiko employs her rather aimless young cousin Tsutomu to take care of the estate. Michiko and Tsutomu grow chastely fond of each other, but Tsutomu is torn between his peaceful country life and the excitement of Tokyo. When Tomiko, who believes that all male-female relationships are



sexual, sees them walking together, she reports to Tadao that the two are having an affair. She then succeeds in seducing Tadao and the two run away together. Because Ono's business has begun to falter, Tomiko is ready to cast him off for a share of Tadao's property. But failing in that she abandons Tadao too. Tadao returns meekly to Michiko only to find that in grief she has poisoned herself. Her will leaves the estate to Tsutomu, who rejects his inheritance and sets off for Tokyo.

Mizoguchi had dealt frequently with the lives of people aspiring to high position, but in his interest for the poor and downtrodden he had rarely looked at the lives of the privileged class. *A Portrait of Madame Yuki* had been a very successful exception which he hoped to repeat with this picture. Its advocacy of the benefits of rural life are reminiscent of *Song of Home*, but the victory of urban Japan in the film's ending demonstrates how much both Japan and Mizoguchi's view of the nation had changed over the years.

THE LIFE OF OHARU (Saikaku ichidai onna), Koi Productions-Shin Toho, 1952, 137 minutes

Original story by Ihara Saikaku; **Screenplay** by Yoshikata Yoda; **Photography** by Yoshimi Hirano; **Music** by Ichiro Saito.

With Kinuyo Tanaka (Oharu), Toshiro Mifune (Katsunosuke), Ichiro Sugai (Shinzaemon), Hisako Yamane (Lady Matsudaira), Toshiaki Konoe (Lord Matsudaira), Tsukue Matsuura (Tomo), Sadako Sawamura (Owasa) Eitaro Shindo (Kahei), Jukichi Uno (Yakichi), Hiroshi Oizumi (Bunkichi), and Masao Shimizu, Daisuke Kato, Eijiro Yanagi, Benkei Shiganoya, Chieko Higashiyama.

Ihara Saikaku's cautionary tale *The Woman Who Loved Love* (Koshoku ichidai onna) is narrated in the first person by a withered but sassy old nun to two young men who visit her. She recounts with self-mocking irony her travails as a woman addicted to the pleasures of the flesh. She tells her story with both bitterness and a wry humor, and at the end she advises



her young visitors to be careful of their passions.

Mizoguchi's film adaptation is stately, beautiful, and evocative, with a heartrending pathos not seen in the original. Conversely, he has trimmed away nearly all of the original's ironic humor. (With one outstanding exception: When Oharu is unjustly charged with seducing her employer she takes revenge on his accusing wife by exposing with the assistance of a cooperative cat the wife's carefully guarded secret—that she is bald.)

The Life of Oharu, like *Osaka Elegy* before it, depicts how a woman can be stripped of social respectability and her own self-esteem simply by the fact of her being powerless. And like *Osaka Elegy*, but in far greater detail, it shows us ring by ring the protagonist's spiralling descent into her own personal hell.

Oharu is from a family of modest means but high standing, and she serves as lady-in-waiting to a young noblewoman. She is admired by a young man of similar standing who deceives her into thinking she has been summoned by their lord to one of his villas. Instead, she finds herself alone with her admirer, Katsunosuke, for whom she had had a chaste affection. He overpowers her and carries her inside the villa where they are met by their lord's constable, who accuses her of soliciting Katsunosuke's affections. Though Katsunosuke confesses his guilt and is executed, Oharu is found guilty of complicity and banished from the domain. From there her greedy father is bribed to offer her as a mistress to another lord whose wife is barren. Oharu bears this nobleman's child, but her function accomplished, she is turned out of the house. Her disappointed father then puts her in service to a wealthy merchant's wife, whose husband tries to seduce Oharu. Expelled from that position, she then marries a poorer merchant, and at last, seems to have found a good man to look after her. Shortly afterward, however, her husband is slain by bandits. In disillusionment, Oharu enters a nunnery, where a

merchant of vestments rapes her, resulting in her expulsion. By film's end she is reduced to begging.

The winner of a Silver Lion at the 1952 Venice Film Festival, *The Life of Oharu* is the film that brought Mizoguchi to international prominence. It was also ranked 9th in the 1952 Kinema Jumbo critics poll.

THE LOVE OF SUMAKO THE ACTRESS (Joyu Sumako no koi), Shochiku (Kyoto), 1947, 93 min. 16 mm.

Screenplay by Yoshikata Yoda from a story by Hideo Nagata; **Photography** by Shigeto Miki; **Music** by Hisato Asawa.

With Kinuyo Tanaka (Sumako), So Yamamura (Hogetsu Shimamura), Eijiro Tono (Shoyo Tsubouchi), Kikue Mori (Ichiko) and Chieko Higashiyama, Koreya Senda, Sugisaku Aoyama.

Another of Mizoguchi's film portraits taken from life, this time set during the Meiji period, around the turn of the present century. His protagonists are Sumako Matsui, Japan's first modern stage actress, and Hogetsu Shimamura, one of the founders of the Shingeki movement advocating theatrical realism. Once again, the subject was made even more attractive by its possibilities for promoting democracy, for Sumako Matsui was an unusual woman who risked everything for a career in the theater and pioneered a new place for women in an art form that previously had been altogether closed to them. *The Love of Sumako the Actress* is generally grouped with *Victory of Women* and the subsequent *My Love Has Been Burning* as Mizoguchi's "Fighting Women Trilogy," and like the others enjoyed little initial success. Japanese critics charged that Mizoguchi, in his eagerness to flaunt his new democratic ideology, failed to bring to the screen the full-blooded believable characters that had been the strength of his best films. Mizoguchi himself professed dissatisfaction with the results. American film scholar Noel Burch, however, believes that Sumako "represents a plateau of excel-



lence" from which Mizoguchi's work steadily declined.

Though *Sumako* was not a success, its subject was certainly popular. That same year, Teinosuke Kinugasa made a much more successful film about Sumako Matsui, with Isuzu Yamada in the title role, called *Actress* (Joyu) which finished high in the Kinema Jumbo annual ratings and also did well at the box office.

The story is of a young woman enamored of the theater who leaves her husband to seek a career on the stage. She apprentices herself to Hogetsu Shimamura, and together they are determined to establish a Western-style realism on the Japanese stage. While rehearsing Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, in which Sumako is to play Nora, Hogetsu and Sumako fall in love. Hogetsu leaves his wife and daughter to form a permanent partnership with his new star. But he exhausts himself trying to keep the new company together; a simple cold turns into pneumonia, and soon he is dead. Sumako continues to rehearse with such obsessive fervor that after her opening performance she kills herself.

THE LOYAL 47 RONIN, I & II (Genroku Chushingura) Part I: Koa, 1941, 111 minutes Part II: Shochiku, 1942, 108 min.

Screenplay by Kenichiro Hara and Yoshikata Yoda from Seika Mayama's play on a popular legend; **Photography** by Kohei Sugiyama; **Music** by Shiro Fukai; **Art direction** by Hiroshi Mizutani and Kaneto Shindo.

With Chojuro Kawarazaki (Kuranosuke Oishi), Yoshizaburo Arashi (Asano), Mantoyo Mimasu (Kira), Kanemon Nakamura (Sukeimon), Utaemon Ichikawa (Tsunatoyo), Isamu Kosugi (Denpachiro), and members of the Zenshinza theater troupe.



There have been many films made of the classic *Chushingura* story, each based in turn on one of the many theatrical or narrative versions of this most popular Japanese legend of feudal loyalty. The version most familiar to American audiences is Hiroshi Inagaki's 1962 color spectacular made for Toho. Mizoguchi's *Chushingura* is quite different.



The legend itself goes something like this: In 1701, Lord Asano of Ako was invited by the Tokugawa shogunate to attend a formal ceremonial occasion at Edo castle. It was customary for those so invited to take a brief series of lessons in etiquette and deportment conducted by men experienced in such matters. It was also customary for the men receiving these lessons to add a large gratuity to the fee for these lessons. Lord Asano, unfamiliar with this courtesy, failed to reimburse his instructor, Kira, sufficiently, whereupon the disgruntled Kira took every opportunity to insult the naive Asano. Asano finally lost his patience and drew his sword against Kira within the castle confines, an offense punishable by death, even though Kira was only slightly injured. Asano was ordered to disembowel himself and his estates were confiscated, his assets dissolved. The heart of the legend is the manner in which Asano's loyal retainers managed to take revenge on the man responsible for their master's death.

In this version of the tale, which is more meditative and less action-oriented than the Kabuki version that inspired Inagaki's film, the retainers are informed before they are ordered to disperse that the government in Edo and even the Emperor sympathize with their plight. They resolve to meet again to carry out their revenge.

The leader of the vendetta is Kuranosuke Oishi, Asano's chief retainer. Through an elaborate ruse he convinces Kira's watchful cohorts that no revenge will be taken. He abandons his family and dissipates himself with wine and women, or so it seems, until Kira's forces are thrown off guard. Finally, on a snowy winter day in 1703, forty-seven of Asano's retainers fulfill their vow to avenge their master's death by attacking Kira and killing him in his home.

Because their case aroused widespread sympathy, both within the government and among the general populace at the time, the forty-seven

were allowed the honorable death of *seppuku* rather than be executed for what was in fact a crime.

Shochiku had created a subsidiary company, Koa, which was responsible for special productions. Mizoguchi spent so lavishly to capture a sense of authenticity for *Chushingura* that Koa went broke. That he was allowed to spend so large a budget in the first place was due to the nature of the project: as the nation headed into war, the government would spare no expense to inspire in the populace the spirit of "the loyal 47." Part I of *Genroku Chushingura* opened in Tokyo on December 8, 1941. Shochiku picked up the tab for finishing the project once Koa had been dissolved and Part II opened in February 1942.

One has to believe that no matter what Mizoguchi's political beliefs may have been—he vacillated markedly between right and left—he must have enjoyed the joke on the government. After several years of bickering over what sort of movies he was permitted to make, he was finally able to use the government's militaristic aims to satisfy his own cinematic vision.

MISS OYU (Oyu-sama), Daiei (Kyoto), 1951, 90 minutes, 16mm.

Original story by Junichiro Tanizaki; **Screenplay** by Yoshikata Yoda; **Photography** by Kazuo Miyagawa; **Music** by Fumio Hayasaka.

With Kinuyo Tanaka (Oyu-sama), Nobuko Otowa (Oshizu), Yuji Hori (Shinnosuke), Eijiro Yanagi (Eitaro), Eitaro Shindo (Kusaemon), Kiyoko Hirai (Osumi), Reiko Kongo (Otsugi).



Following the completion of *A Picture of Madame Yuki* in 1950, Mizoguchi made *Miss Oyu* for Daiei, where he was to make most of his later films. Here he continues his exploration of the lives of women of the upper classes. His source was the story "Ashikari" by one of Japan's modern literary masters, Junichiro Tanizaki. Out for a stroll one evening, the tale's narrator beholds from a distance a private recital in a large country mansion. He discovers he is not alone,

and soon he hears from his companion an unusual tale about the occupants of the villa—a tale Mizoguchi brings to the screen.

Oyu is a beautiful and talented young woman who marries, bears a child, and is widowed before she is 21. Shinnosuke is deeply enamored of her, but propriety forbids her to remarry, and so he seeks out and marries her sister Oshizu. Oshizu knows of Shinnosuke's love for her sister and because she too is devoted to Oyu, she encourages his interest. To Shinnosuke's surprised delight, his love is not unrequited. After a brief period of happiness, their *ménage à trois* becomes the object of scandal, resulting in Oyu's expulsion from her husband's house. Shinnosuke and Oshizu move to Tokyo where they live in humble circumstances, no longer able to enjoy the refinements of their former life. Oshizu bears Shinnosuke a child, but soon dies, believing he still loves Oyu.

During a party at her home, Oyu hears a baby crying. With the baby she finds a note from Shinnosuke asking her to care for it. Shinnosuke disappears through the reeds across a nearby river.

MUSASHI MIYAMOTO (Miyamoto Musashi), Shochiku Kyoto, 1944, 53 min., 16mm.

From a story by Kan Kikuchi; **Screenplay** by Matsutaro Kawaguchi; **Photography** by Shigeto Miki; Fencing sequences supervised by Hiromasa Takano.

With Chojuro Kawarazaki (Musashi), Kanemon Nakamura (Kojiro Sasaki), Kinuyo Tanaka (Shinobu Nonomiya), Kigoro Ikushima (Genichiro Nonomiya).

By the time *The Loyal Forty-seven Ronin* (*Genroku Chushingura*) had been completed in 1942, Japan was totally immersed in war and the film industry had come under strict government control. Mizoguchi was sent to China to make a series of propaganda films on Sino-Japanese cooperation. Following that project he was put to work on Matsutaro Kawaguchi's adaptation of Kikuchi Kan's novel on the life of the legendary hero Musashi Miyamoto, whose heroic exploits as a master swordsman in the early 17th century had obvious nationalistic overtones that could be easily exploited to encourage the war effort.

The Musashi legend has been retold many times over. The best known adaptation is by Eiji Yoshikawa, whose multi-volume novel was pub-



lished in 1935. Yoshikawa's version of the legend depicted Musashi as a determined but confused young man trying to perfect his skill with a sword while not knowing just how to put his skill to use. The Yoshikawa Musashi, as it is known, has in turn been the basis for many film adaptations, among them Hiroshi Inagaki's 1955 Oscar-winning *Samurai, The Legend of Musashi*.

The Kikuchi Musashi differs markedly from its more famous counterpart in its characterizations. Kikuchi depicts Musashi as mature and clear-thinking, a man who turned his skills to sculpture when he had mastered the art of swordsmanship. The girl, Shinobu, who pursues Musashi, far from being the village naïf of Yoshikawa's version, is a skilled swordswoman determined to carry out a vendetta. This last characteristic was particularly suited to Mizoguchi's fondness for women who asserted themselves. This is the point where his own predilections may have collided with the "national policy" that inspired this adaptation: where an unfettered Mizoguchi might have made Shinobu a sympathetic protagonist, the nation at war needed a model of masculine virtue, who could withstand feminine imprecations, thus also the mature, stable Musashi of Kikuchi's version rather than the callow youth of Yoshikawa's.

MY LOVE HAS BEEN BURNING (Waga koi wa moenu), Shochiku (Kyoto), 1949, 84 minutes

Screenplay by Yoshikata Yoda and Kaneto Shindo; **Photography** by Kohei Sugiyama; **Music** by Senji Ito.

With Kinuyo Tanaka (Eiko Hirayama), Ichiro Sugai (Kentaro Omoi), Mitsuko Mito (Chiyo), Eitaro Ozawa (Ryuzo Hayase), Kuniko Miyake (Toshiko Kishida).

For this third of his so-called "Fighting Women" series, Mizoguchi returned once again to the Meiji period. He drew on the life of one of that era's first staunch feminists, Eiko Kageyama, whose autobiography

Warawa no hanshogai (My Half Life) inspired the screenplay and to which screenwriters Yoda and Shindo gave a thin fictional disguise.

Eiko grew up in Okayama Prefecture, where as a young school teacher in 1884 she first hears feminist Toshiko Kishida speak. After a row with her parents over the mistreatment of one of the family's maidservants, Eiko leaves Okayama for Tokyo to join Ryuzo Hayase, a member of the fledgling Liberal Party. Once there, she finds that Hayase has betrayed the new and not officially legal party by spying for the government.

Eiko falls in love with the party leader, Omoi, and joins him in his political crusades. During a protest against the abuse of young girls working in a mill Eiko sees a woman raped; it is her family's former servant, Chiyo. Chiyo burns down the mill and in trying to help her escape Eiko and Omoi are also arrested. Hayase visits Eiko in prison, confessing he still loves her and wants to marry her, but he insists she must become a proper obedient wife. Eiko refuses. She and Omoi are freed in the amnesty for political prisoners that is bestowed with the completion of the new Meiji Constitution in 1889. While Omoi is hailed for his struggle for political rights, no mention is made of women's rights.

Eiko marries Omoi and takes Chiyo into the household, only to discover soon afterward that her husband is having an affair with Chiyo. Eiko leaves him to return to Okayama where she hopes to start a school and to promote women's rights. As she rides toward Okayama on the train, news comes through that Omoi has won election to the Diet. Suddenly Chiyo appears—she too has left Omoi and she has come to learn with Eiko. In the film's final, touching scene, the two women sit side by side on the train and Eiko draws her shawl around Chiyo's shoulders.



NEW TALES OF THE TAIRA CLAN (Shin Heike monogatari), Daiei (Kyoto), 1955, color, 108 minutes.

Original novel by Eiji Yoshikawa; **Screenplay** by Yoshikata Yoda, Masashige Narusawa, and Hisaichi Tsuji; **Photography** by Kazuo Miyagawa; **Music** by Fumio Hayasaka.

With Raizo Ichikawa (Taira no Kiyomori), Yoshiko Kuga (Tokiko), Naritoshi Hayashi (Tokitada), Michiyo Kogure (Yasuko), Ichijiro Oya (Taira no Tadamori), Eitaro Shindo (Banboku).



This was the first of a projected series of film adaptations of Eiji Yoshikawa's immensely popular historical novel about the rise and fall of the Taira clan in the 12th century. This film was made even as the novel was still being serialized in a weekly magazine.

During a power struggle between the landed gentry and the monastic forces to which this landed class felt obliged to pay respect, a young man of the military class seizes power and changes the course of Japanese history. The brilliant general Taira no Kiyomori manipulates the complex politics of his times and rises to the pinnacle of power, from which he is eventually toppled by his exceeding vanity. Raizo Ichikawa, in his first starring role, plays the young Kiyomori.

The motif of a young man finding himself in a situation where he could exert his own individual ambitions was one particularly suited to Mizoguchi's favorite themes. He and the whole Japanese film industry were enjoying unprecedented prosperity, which afforded him the luxury of hiring as many extras as he needed, pursuing all the props he wanted without being hounded by the studio's accounting department.

But there was one thing he could not have: Cinemascope. Mizoguchi had been much impressed with the new widescreen technology he had seen in Europe and very much wanted to use it on this project. The Taira clan saga had been depicted in a famous

scroll painting, the effect of which Mizoguchi hoped to reproduce on a wide screen. It was not to be.

Two "Taira Clan" installments followed Mizoguchi's: Teinosuke Kinugasa's *Yoshinaka's Three Women* (1956) and Koji Shima's *The Dancer and the Warrior* (1956).

OSAKA ELEGY (Naniwa hika/Naniwa ereji), Dai-ichi Eiga, 1936, 71 minutes

Screenplay by Yoshikata Yoda; **Photography** by Minoru Miki; **Sound** recording by Hisashi Kase and Yasumi Mizuguchi.

With Isuzu Yamada (Ayako), Benkei Shiganoya (Asai), Yoko Umemura (Sumiko, Asai's wife), Kensaku Hara (Nishimura), Eitaro Shindo (Fujino), Chiyoko Okura (Sachiko), Shinhachiro Asaka (Hiroshi), Seiichi Takegawa (Ayako's father).

Osaka Elegy marked a departure from Mizoguchi's previous preoccupation with Meiji-period success-and-sacrifice stories, such as *Taki no Shiraito* and *The Downfall of Osen*, and a renewal of his interest in depicting the difficulties of contemporary life. It also was the first time that scenarist Yoshikata Yoda (who was to write nearly every subsequent Mizoguchi film) worked for him. Yoda recalls that he had to rewrite his screenplay more than ten times before Mizoguchi was satisfied. The Dai-ichi Eiga Company, suffering financial difficulties at the time, put stringent budgetary restrictions on Mizoguchi and allowed him only twenty days to shoot *Osaka Elegy*.

Ayako is the telephone operator at a large pharmaceuticals firm. She is working to support her indigent father and to put her brother Hiroshi through school. Though she is shocked when Asai, the company president, propositions her, she returns home to have her father berate her for not giving him enough money to pay his drinking debts. We next see her ensconced in a handsome apartment, provided by the boss, who has also paid her father's debts. That arrangement ends when the boss's wife discovers them together. Ayako longs for a respectable married life with Nishimura, a man she had nearly been engaged to, but family pressures demand that she provide more money. Prostitution is the only way she can find to earn that money, money which her brother accepts without the least gratitude. Finally, Ayako steals from one of her former employers who has paid to spend the night with her and determines to elope with Nishimura. When they are caught Nishimura too be-



trays her. Her family berates her, and she is turned out of the house once again.

Isuzu Yamada's riveting performance as Ayako is still regarded in Japan as one of the greatest screen portrayals ever. In the dramatic final scene, she stares, eyes cold and hard, directly into the camera and sneers, in response to a doctor's question if she is ill, "There's no cure for delinquency."

The bravura device of having Yamada stare directly at the camera was new and startling to 1936 audiences, but it corresponded perfectly to Mizoguchi's own declared intention at the time to "confront directly the harsh realities of life." The film opened in May 1936 to rave reviews and huge audiences.

OYUKI THE MADONNA (Maria no Oyuki), Dai-ichi Eiga, 1935, 78 min., 16mm. No English subtitles.

From an original story, "Boule de Suif," by Guy de Maupassant and adapted by Matsutaro Kawaguchi; **Screenplay** by Tatsunosuke Takashima; **Photography** by Minoru Miki; **Sound** recording by Junichi Murota; **Edited** by Tokichi Ishimoto.

With Isuzu Yamada (Oyuki), Komako Hara (Okin), Daijiro Natsukawa (Asakura), Eiji Nakano (Sadohara), Kinue Utogawa (Ochie).

As in *Taki no Shiraito* and *The Downfall of Osen* which preceded, the heroine of *Oyuki the Madonna* is a fallen woman whose heart is much purer than those of the so-called respectable citizens who look down on her.

The film is set in Kyushu in 1877 during the short-lived and unsuccessful Satsuma Rebellion in which a band of disgruntled former samurai turned against the new Meiji government.

Oyuki and Okin, two prostitutes fleeing their burning town, are scorned by the townspeople with

whom they find themselves sharing a wagon. Even so, they share what little food they have with their fellow citizens. When their wagon is stopped by government soldiers hunting a hidden rebel, the officer in charge, Asakura, orders a young girl on board to join him in his tent that night. The other townspeople, fearing their own safety, urge her to comply. But Oyuki feels sorry for the innocent young girl and offers herself instead. Later, having been driven off by the ungrateful townspeople she has aided, Oyuki makes her way back to her home town. There she discovers one night the wounded Asakura and takes him in. When she learns he had been betrayed to the Satsuma rebels, she helps him escape into the night.

Maupassant's original story, set during the Franco-Prussian War, was intended as broad criticism of the self-righteous French bourgeoisie. Mizoguchi's adaptation was centered more personally on the character of the heroine.

POPPY (Gubijinso), Dai-ichi Eiga, 1935, 72 min., 16mm

Original novel by Soseki Natsume; **Screenplay** by Haruo Takayanagi; **Photography** by Minoru Miki; **Edited** by Tsuruko Sakaneda.

With Kuniko Miyake (Fujio), Ichiro Tsukida (Ono), Daijiro Natsukawa (Munechika), Yukichi Iwata (Inoue), Chiyoko Ogura (Sayoko), Kazuyoshi Takeda (Kono).



Based on Soseki Natsume's 1908 novel of the same title, *Poppy* is an ornately complicated story of desire and ambition. Fujio is beautiful, talented, well-heeled and engaged to Munechika, a rising young diplomat. She has promised him a gold watch, a family heirloom, as an emblem of their engagement. But she falls in love with Ono, a student employed to tutor her in English, who is attracted by her beauty and wealth. Ono is himself bound by an engagement to Sayoko, the daughter of his mentor, Professor Inoue. The self-centered Fujio is ready to forsake everything for Ono, but he is pre-

vailed upon to go ahead with his marriage to Sayoko. Fujio then offers the watch to Munekichi, who, perceiving Fujio's true feelings, hurls the watch into the sea.

This melodrama was the anniversary production of Dai-ichi Eiga, a company in severe financial trouble which had not had a hit film in several years. Their choice of projects and directors did not exactly ensure success, but Mizoguchi enjoyed a lavish budget for this film that he had not been accustomed to on other pictures. And though the film's heroine has been compared to other femme fatales such as Cleopatra and Yang Kwei Fei (a later subject of Mizoguchi's) the milieu of Meiji intellectuals was not exactly Mizoguchi's own. The film flopped and Dai-ichi was soon out of business.

PORTRAIT OF MADAME YUKI

(Yuki fujin ezu), Takimura Productions-Shin Toho, 1950, 86 minutes

Script by Yoshikata Yoda and Kazuro Funabashi from a serialized novel by Seichi Funabashi; **Photography** by Joji Ohara; **Music** by Fumio Hayasaka.

With Michiyo Kogure (Yuki), Ken Uehara (Masaya Kikunaka), Eijiro Yanagi (Naoyuki), Yuriko Hamada (Ayako), So Yamamura (Tateoka), Michiko Kuga (Hamako), Haruya Kato (Sei-chan), Kumeiko Urabe (Kin).



A Picture of Madame Yuki was the first of three consecutive films Mizoguchi made about women of the privileged classes, none of which were successful either critically or financially when they were released. They may have gained a certain patina with the general acclaim accorded Mizoguchi's genius, but they remain interesting and lovely works in their own right.

Yuki is the daughter of a provincial nobleman whose stipends and estates were confiscated during the postwar occupation of Japan. Little remains of his once enormous wealth but a spacious villa at the resort of Atami, looked after by Yuki and her

entourage of servants. Yuki has made a bad marriage to the rather boorish Naoyuki. When her father dies her philandering husband, as the surviving male heir, orders her to convert their assets into cash to pay off his debts. He has squandered their fortune on a coarse cabaret singer in Kyoto. Yukiko turns to an old friend, Kikunaka, for advice. He advises her to leave her husband and establish the villa as a first-class inn. But Yukiko, though she despises her husband, finds herself hopelessly attracted to his sexual power. It is Kikunaka whom she really loves, but Kikunaka is too weak and irresolute to take any decisive action of his own. Naoyuki all the while is being manipulated by his creditors, the singer Ayako and her manager Tateoka. When Yuki discovers she is pregnant by Naoyuki, they make it seem as though Kikunaka is responsible. Yuki, distraught by all their plotting and scheming, strolls down a mist shrouded hill to Lake Ashinoko and drowns herself.

Madame Yuki is one of Mizoguchi's most elliptical films: the narrative unfolds in small bits and pieces, often as seen through Yuki's servants, Hamako and Sei-chan. The viewer's first glimpse of the sexual relationship between Naoyuki and Yuki, for example, is Hamako's horrified reaction to a bedroom in disarray, only a tiny portion of which is visible on the screen. The film is characterized by this sort of partial, indirect visibility, a quality emphasized by its many camera shots through curtains, gauze drapery, or leafy branches.

PRINCESS YANG KWEI FEI (Yokichi), Daiei (Tokyo), 1955, 85 minutes, color;

Screenplay by To Chin, Matsutaro Kawaguchi, Yoshikata Yoda, and Masashige Narusawa; **Photography** by Kohei Sugiyama; **Music** by Fumio Hayasaka.

With Machiko Kyo (Yang Kwei Fei), Masayuki Mori (Emperor Hsuan-tsung), So Yamamura (An Lu-shan), Sakae Ozawa (Yang Kuo-chung), Isao Yamagata (Yang Hsien).



This was Mizoguchi's first color film, a grand Japanese-Chinese co-production based on one of the enduring romances of Chinese history. It was not a project Mizoguchi particularly relished, but once he accepted the assignment he pursued it with his usual passion for historical accuracy, paying particular attention to a famous Chinese poem written about the legendary lovers who are the subject of the film.

The Emperor Hsuan-tsung of T'ang (r. 712-756 A.D.) falls in love with one of the maids at his palace. He marries her only to be burdened with her father and brothers, men of overweening ambition who use their ties to the throne to seize power for themselves. The Emperor's ability to rule is impaired by these family complications, but so great is his love for his Princess that he cannot forsake her. Finally, rebellion breaks out, the Emperor is exiled and the Princess, whom the rebels blame for the empire's troubles, is executed. The forlorn ruler ends his days dreaming of his beloved.

The production of *Princess Yang Kwei Fei* was prompted by the international success of several of Mizoguchi's recent historical films—*The Life of Oharu*, *Ugetsu*, and *Sansho the Bailiff*. This was also an era of burgeoning international co-productions, a phenomenon which Daiei president Masaichi Nagata wanted to exploit. Nagata sensed from the European response to earlier Mizoguchi films that the key to success was exoticism. The Shaw brothers of Hong Kong, later responsible for the emergence of Bruce Lee as an international star, provided financing for the Japanese production of a Chinese costume-drama. Nagata and the Shaws smelled box office bonanza. The picture flopped.

Why would a well-established film director of soaring international reputation take on such a project? Mizoguchi felt deeply obligated to Nagata, whose financing and support had made *Ugetsu* and *Sansho the Bailiff* possible and which in turn finally brought Mizoguchi the artistic recognition he had sought throughout his career.

SANSHO THE BAILIFF (Sansho dayu), Daiei (Kyoto), 1954, 125 minutes

Original story by Ogai Mori; **Screenplay** by Fuji Yahiyo and Yoshikata Yoda; **Photography** by Kazuo Miyagawa; **Music** by Fumio Hayasaka.



With Yoshiaki Hanayagi (Zushio), Kyoko Kagawa (Anju), Kinuyo Tanaka (Tamaki), Eitaro Shindo (Sansho Dayu), Kikue Mori (Namiji), Akitake Kono (Taro), Bontaro Miake (Kichiji), and Chieko Naniwa, Ichiro Sugai, Yoko Kosono.

The wife and children of an exiled provincial governor are captured by slave traders while trying to join him. The children are carried off to a labor camp while their mother is sent to the remote island of Sado. The camp is run by Sansho the Bailiff, a cruel tyrant who rules by terror. Gradually, the boy Zushio accommodates himself to the harsh rules of the camp, but his sister Anju continues to resist. After many years of captivity, she finally convinces Zushio to escape and drowns herself in helping him do so. Zushio makes his way back to Kyoto, where he is reinstated to his proper position and is eventually made governor of the very province where Sansho conducts his slave trade. He frees the slaves and sends Sansho into exile before resigning his post to set out in search of his mother. He finds her on Sado, now blind and crippled.

The famous last scene of the film is done with a very long crane shot that tracks along a craggy beach, leaving mother and son as two specks against the sun-washed landscape. This shot, as much as any other of the many superb compositions found in Mizoguchi's work epitomizes the director's attitude toward man's place in the world.

Though the film is set in the 11th century, its heart is firmly in the 20th. "Men are created equal," Zushio's father admonishes his son. "Remember to be sympathetic. Without mercy man is like a beast. Every man is entitled to happiness." Zushio memorizes this liturgy and remembers it later when cynicism and despair threaten to overcome him. *Sansho* gleams with Buddhist-inspired images of man's insignificance within the cosmos while also speaking out with the voice of a positive-thinking modern democrat: though one man may be powerless, he can change

things if he tries. This duality is no doubt emblematic of Mizoguchi's own two-mindedness about the way of the world.

SISTERS OF GION (Gion no shimai), Dai-ichi Eiga, 1936, 69 minutes

Screenplay by Yoshikata Yoda; **Photography** by Minoru Miki; **Sound** recording by Hisashi Kase.

With Isuzu Yamada (Omocha), Yoko Umemura (Umekichi), Benkei Shiganoya (Furusawa), Fumio Okura (Jurakudo, the antique dealer), Eitaro Shindo (Kudo, the drygoods merchant), Taizo Fukami (his clerk, Kimura).

Flushed with the tremendous success of *Osaka Elegy*, Mizoguchi plunged right into his next project, employing the same crew and cast to film the story of two second-class entertainers who scratch out a living in Kyoto's famous Gion entertainment district.

The word "geisha," burdened with exotic connotations for most Americans, is most generally taken to mean a high-class prostitute. Strictly speaking, however, geisha are highly disciplined musicians whose sexual favors are not for sale. They are, ever more rarely, retained at astronomical prices to sing and dance for private parties. But in the back alleys of Kyoto's Gion district there are numerous restaurants and "teahouses" which call in second-class entertainers, many of whom supplement their meager wages through prostitution.

Sisters of Gion is the story of two such women, Umekichi and Omocha. Conservative and old-fashioned, Umekichi has accepted her lot in life, as unfortunate as it may be. She supports Furusawa, a bankrupt merchant who takes advantage of her kindness. Omocha, the younger of



the two, is cynical and feisty. She dupes Furusawa into leaving their house in order that Umekichi can get a more prosperous patron. She uses her own feminine allure to get expensive kimono material from Kimura, a drygoods store clerk who has a crush on her. She is quick to betray him, though, when she sees she can get more out of his boss, Kudo. The enraged Kimura takes her for a ride and then dumps her from his automobile. In an ending similar to that of *Osaka Elegy*, the bandaged Omocha looks out at the camera from her hospital bed and cries, "Why do there have to be such things as geisha?"

Sisters of Gion was even more successful than *Osaka Elegy*. It won the Kinema Junpo prize as "Best Film" for 1936, the only time that any of Mizoguchi's films has won the top Japanese film award.

Osaka Elegy and *Sisters of Gion* were Mizoguchi's first successful sound films. One of the reasons he had retreated from films of contemporary social realism in the early thirties was the technical failure of *Hometown*, for which the quality of the sound recording had been a disappointment. Mizoguchi was very interested in using synchronized sound because he considered it absolutely necessary to convey a realistic atmosphere in stories of contemporary life, but he was not willing to use it until it could be reproduced better. So although some of his films between 1930 and 1936 had sound, it was often the result of adding a spoken sound track after the picture had been shot.

SONG OF HOME (Furusato no uta), Nikkatsu Kansai Education Division, 1925, 45 min., 16 mm, silent; no English titles.

This print, the only surviving print of the film, has been lent for the present retrospective by the Film Center of The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Original story by Choji Matsui; **Screenplay** by Ryunosuke Shimizu; **Photography** by Tatsuyuki Yokota.

With Shigeru Kido (Naotaro Sakuda), Mineko Tsuji (Okinu, his sister), Kentaro Kawamata (Junichi Okamoto).

Nikkatsu was commissioned to produce this film by the Ministry of Education as a means to encourage young people to stay in rural areas and increase agricultural production at a time when there was a great migration away from farms and villages to more lucrative employment in the cities. The film then became an official document of the ministry.



Mizoguchi came into the project having just recovered from wounds suffered when a disgruntled entertainer slashed him with a razor. This was a time when he had been much infatuated with the world of prostitution and had spent long hours (and no doubt a great deal of money) dallying in Kyoto's licensed quarters. His brush with death is reported to have changed his thinking about women, as is amply evident in many of his later films. In any event, *The Song of Home* was his first film after the slashing incident and its subject must have been particularly close to him.

The story is of Naotaro, a bright young man prevented by poverty from pursuing an advanced education. One of his former schoolmates, Junichi, who has gone on to school in Tokyo, returns to the village full of sophisticated airs and talk of the excitement of urban life. Junichi even forms a club to teach the other village youths the latest city trends. Naotaro, who is shown to be a young man of strong moral fiber, protests that his friend's activities divert attention from the important work of the village. When Naotaro is offered a scholarship for the education he had once wanted he turns it down to remain with his family and to work for the village. Even the urbane Junichi is impressed.

Song of Home is the earliest of Mizoguchi's works to survive and the print shown is the only one of its kind.

THE STORY OF THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUMS (Zan-giku monogatari), Shochiku (Kyoto), 1939, 142 minutes

Original story by Shofu Muramatsu, adapted by Matsutaro Kawaguchi; **Screenplay** by Yoshikata Yoda; **Photography** by Shigetomi Miki and Yozo Fuji; **Music** by Shiro Fukai.

With Shotaro Hanayagi (Kikunosuke), Kakuko Mori (Otoku), Gonjuro Kawarazaki (Kikugoro), Kokichi Takada (Fukusuke), Yoko Umemura (Sato), Benkei Shiganoya (Genshun Amma), Yoshiaki Hanayagi (Tamijiro).

During the late 1930s the pressure of finding contemporary subjects acceptable to the increasingly watchful military government drove Mizoguchi back once again to the Meiji period. *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* is the first and only surviving film of a trilogy he made about Meiji-period theater.

Kikunosuke, the spoiled young scion of a prominent 19th-century family of Kabuki actors, is expelled from the family for his cavalier attitude and unprofessional behavior. Otoku, a maid in the household who has been the only one honest enough to tell him his acting is bad, urges him not to abandon his art but to perfect it. Under her constant and loving attention he begins to take his work seriously. While enduring the many hardships of travelling with an itinerant troupe of players, Kikunosuke learns the discipline of his craft. Finally, he is accepted back into his family and is paraded through Osaka to the acclaim of admiring fans. Otoku, in the meantime, has sacrificed even her health for his career. As Kikunosuke makes his triumphant entry into Osaka, she lies dying, her sacrifice unappreciated by any but Kikunosuke himself.

The film's final scene is majestic and moving. Before joining the procession of actors, Kikunosuke has gone to see Otoku, who urges him to get on with it. The procession is by boat through the canals of Osaka to the accompaniment of clamorous festival music. Amid all the gaiety, Kikunosuke struggles to hide his sadness.

The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums finished second in the *Kinema Junpo* critics' poll for 1939, just behind Tomu Uchida's document of farm life, *Earth*.



STREET OF SHAME (Akasen chitai), Daiei (Kyoto), 1956, 85 minutes

Screenplay by Masashige Narusawa; **Photography** by Kazuo Miyagawa; **Music** by Toshiro Mayuzumi.

With Machiko Kyo (Mickey), Ayako Wakao (Yasumi), Michiyo Kogure (Hanae), Aiko Mimasu (Yumeko), Hiroko Machida (Yorie), Yasuko Kawakami (Shizuko), Eitaro Shindo (Kurazo Taya), Sadako Sawamura (Tatsuko), Kumeko Urabe (Otane).



Mizoguchi's last complete film. Set in a brothel called "Dreamland" in the Yoshiwara licensed quarter of Tokyo at the time when a ban on legal prostitution was being debated in the Japanese Diet. The girls who work at "Dreamland" are prostitutes for a variety of reasons: one sees it as the fastest way to accumulate the capital she needs to open her own shop; another has no other way of supporting her sick husband and their small child; yet another dreams of marriage only to discover that life as a whore may be better than being enslaved to a husband. The film offers sensitive portraits of women whose profession is on the threshold of legal extinction. We hear periodic broadcasts throughout the film of the Diet's debate on the subject.

Similar in subject to the 1948 *Women of the Night*, *Street of Shame* is unlike most Mizoguchi's films in that it is composed of a series of vignettes,

character studies loosely connected by place. Machiko Kyo as the rebellious Mickey, daughter of a well-to-do family, and Ayako Wakao as the avaricious Yasumi dominate the film, but Sadako Sawamura in the supporting role of Dreamland's mistress was singled out by the Japanese critics.

Mizoguchi's attitude toward society underwent dramatic shifts. Here he seems more bitter and cynical about the "way of the world" than in any film since *Osaka Elegy*. Even the Kinuyo Tanaka character in *Women of the Night* seemed to exhibit some hope, but here the good and likable victims of prostitution are all ground down and only the hard-bitten cynics survive.

TAKI NO SHIRAITO (The Water Magician), Irie Productions, 1933, 16 mm. silent, 110 min.

Original story by Kyoka Izumi; **Screenplay** by Yasunaga Higashiboji, Shinji Masuda and Kennosuke Tateoka; **Photography** Shigeru Miki.

With Takako Irie (Takiko Shiraito), Tokihiko Okada (Kinya Murakoshi), Suzuko Taki (Nadeshiko), Ichiro Sugai (Iwabuchi), Koji Murata (Nankin), Bontaro Miake (Shinzo), and Kumiko Urabe (Ogin).



Taki no Shiraito is the stage-name for the star performer in a provincial Meiji-period carnival troupe. Her popularity at magic tricks with water has earned her top billing, a fat salary, and the envy of other actors in the troupe. One summer while performing in Kanazawa, Shiraito meets and falls in love with a young cart-driver, Kinya. He is from a good family fallen on hard times and is biding his time until he can earn enough to go to Tokyo to study law. Shiraito decides to put him through school, asking only his love in return.

For two years she sends him tuition money, while also befriending some of the less fortunate performers

in the troupe. As the carnival falls into debt the knife thrower extorts money from her and the carnival owner, Iwabuchi, demands sexual favors in exchange for her wages. Shiraito kills him accidentally as they struggle. She escapes to Tokyo and goes to Kinya's home, but does not have the heart to face him. She is soon arrested and taken back to Kanazawa to face trial. To her amazement, the prosecutor is Kinya. She confesses her crime and then kills herself after admonishing Kinya to uphold his duty to the law. Kinya too then kills himself, by the bridge where he first met Shiraito.

Takako Irie was one of Japan's top actresses in 1933. Like many other star performers of the time, she created her own production company to make the films she starred in. Her brother, writer and director Yasunaga Higashiboji, was coauthor of the screenplay. Irie and Mizoguchi, who had worked together on several previous pictures, feuded throughout the production and she never appeared in another of his films.

Donald Richie wrote the subtitles for the present print, which like the others that survive is not quite complete. Although the narrative continuity is occasionally broken by missing fragments, the power and authority of Mizoguchi's original conception are apparent in this composite print.

TOKYO MARCH (Tokyo koshinkyoku), Nikkatsu Uzumasa, 1929, 20 minutes, 16 mm, silent, no English titles.

Original story by Kan Kikuchi; **Written** by Chieo Kimura; **Photography** by Tatsuyuki Yokota.

With Shizue Natsukawa (Orie), Takako Irie (Sayuriko), Isamu Kosugi (Yukichi Sakuma), Koji Shima (Yoshiki Fujimoto), Eiji Takagi (Fujimoto, the father).

This twenty-minute fragment is all that survives of a film that was originally about 80 minutes (ten reels) long. This print is shown courtesy of the Matsuda Eigasha.

Orie is a geisha pursued by two wealthy young suitors, Yukichi Sakuma and Yoshiki, long-time friends and co-workers. She plays them both along until they quarrel violently—and then chooses Yoshiki. But unbeknownst to any of them, Orie is the illegitimate daughter of Yoshiki's father. The elder Fujimoto, a man of great wealth, has long made a hobby



of disporting himself with geisha and during an evening of dalliance with the attractive Orie—some time before his son has become interested in her—he had discovered that she is the daughter of the mistress he forsook years before, forsook because she was pregnant. He must now face his son with the embarrassing fact that he and Orie cannot marry because they are brother and sister.

Through all this, Fujimoto's legitimate daughter, has been jealously pursuing the love-lorn Yukichi.

There are, apparently, no surviving materials to tell us how all these matters are resolved in the end.

UGETSU (Ugetsu monogatari), Daiei (Kyoto), 1953, 96 minutes

Original stories by Ueda Akinari; **Screenplay** by Matsutaro Kawaguchi and Yoshikata Yoda; **Photography** by Kazuo Miyagawa; **Music** by Fumio Hayasaka.

With Machiko Kyo (Lady Wakasa), Masayuki Mori (Genjuro), Kinuyo Tanaka (Miyagi), Sakae Ozawa (Tobei), Mitsuko Mito (Ohama).

A complex and beautifully wrought fable of the dangers of vanity and ambition set during the civil wars of the 16th century. A village potter and his neighbor go off to Kyoto to peddle their wares and are enchanted by the ease with which they can prosper. When rampaging armies loot their village, the potter is more concerned with protecting his profits than his own family. The potter is bewitched by a beautiful ghost-woman, and only his harrowing escape from her clutches brings him to his senses. He rushes home to discover that his family has perished. The potter's neighbor, who is smitten with the lure of military glory and who succeeds through fraud in attaining military rank, is brought down to earth when he discovers his wife has become a prostitute.

In addition to the stories of 18th-century writer Ueda Akinari, Mizoguchi was inspired by a 1921 film adaptation of one of those stories, *Jasei no in* (The Lewdness of the Viper) directed by Thomas Kurihara with a script by the renowned nov-



elist Junichiro Tanizaki. Mizoguchi as a novice filmmaker, had admired the Kurihara/Tanizaki film and the impression stayed with him. It is also said that he was inspired by Guy de Maupassant's story *The Medal*. Another influence was surely Mizoguchi's interest in Buddhism during the last years of his life: the Buddhist concept of the mutability of human desire is in strong evidence here.

Certainly one of the most famous and best loved of all Japanese films, *Ugetsu* is a perfect depiction of the fabulous. Among the many awards it has received are the Silver Lion and the Italian Film Critics' Prize at the 1953 Venice Film Festival.

UTAMARO AND HIS FIVE WOMEN (Utamaro o meguru gonin no onna), Shochiku (Kyoto), 1946, 93 minutes

Original story by Kanji Kunieda; **Screenplay** by Yoshikata Yoda; **Photography** by Shigeto Miki; **Music** by Hisato Osawa and Tamezo Mochizuki.

With Minosuke Bando (Utamaro), Kinuyo Tanaka (Okita), Kotaro Bando (Seinosuke), Hiroko Kawasaki (Oran), Toshiko Iizuka (Takasode), Kyoko Kusajima (Oman), Eiko Ohara (Yukie), Shotaro Nakamura (Shozaburo), Kinnosuke Takamatsu, Minpei Tomimoto, Masao Hori, and Mitsuaki Minami.

Kenji Mizoguchi was not one to make his art overtly autobiographical, though it is possible to see elements in his films that he may have drawn from his own life. Yet in making this film about the renowned 18th-century woodblock print artist Utamaro, he may have found the perfect allegorical subject for his own experience in cinema. Utamaro, like Mizoguchi himself, was the creator of a popular art form not always appreciated in his own time as art, yet he was profoundly convinced that his work was of no less quality than that of conventionally acknowledged artists. Both men were obsessed with women as subjects for their art. Finally, both were hampered throughout their ca-

reers by restrictions imposed from outside on their creative impulses.

Throughout the war years Mizoguchi and other Japanese filmmakers had had to endure increasingly harsh governmental restrictions on their work. Expecting a more liberal atmosphere after the war, they were at first surprised to find the American Occupation authorities similarly cautious about what sort of film they would permit as acceptable for the promotion of Japan's newly instituted democracy. All films dealing with Japan's feudal past were suspect. *Utamaro* was in fact the first period film to be approved by the postwar authorities, no doubt because its theme is about freedom and equality. At the end of the film, Utamaro, who has been under arrest for fifty days, looks forward to celebrating the end of his sentence not with a party, but by drawing. "I want to draw; I want to draw so much," he shouts out; through these words echo Mizoguchi's own feelings about the renewed possibilities for his cinematic art.



The film depicts Utamaro as a real man of the people. Early on he wins over a haughty painter of the most prominent academic school by defeating his challenge in a drawing contest. From then on the two become cohorts. Throughout, Utamaro acts as a confidant and benevolent protector to the many women who model for him. And though he must frequently patch up their romances with invariably fickle men, his interest in them remains purely artistic. When Utamaro is arrested by the Tokugawa authorities for outraging a local magistrate, his many friends gather round to keep him cheerful during the fifty days he is forbidden to draw. Then his favorite model, madly in love with a man who repeatedly jilts her, slays her lover and goes off to kill herself. Finally, his sentence over, Utamaro once again takes up his brush. The film ends with an outpouring of his drawings of women.

Although *Utamaro*, in its narrative line, seems more conventionally

straightforward than most of Mizoguchi's films, it is particularly remarkable for its individual compositions, many of which are stunningly erotic.

VICTORY OF WOMEN (Josei no shori), Shochiku (Ofuna), 1946, 80 min.

Screenplay by Kogo Noda and Kaneto Shindo; **Photography** by Toshio Ubukata; **Music** by Kyoka Asai.

With Kinuyo Tanaka (Hiroko Hosokawa), Michiko Kuwano (Michiko), Toyoko Takahashi (their mother), Eiko Uchimura (Yukiko), Mitsuko Miura (Tomo Asakura), Shin Tokudaiji (Keita Yamaoka), Yoshihira Matsumoto (Prosecutor Kono).

Just one year after making *The Famous Sword*, Mizoguchi found himself in a radically different political climate. The war had ended and his former militarist overseers had been replaced by the censors of the American Occupation government. Suspicious of films that might rekindle enthusiasm for feudal or militarist values, they encouraged themes that would illustrate democracy in action. Women were to be given special prominence in the building of a newly democratic Japan. Mizoguchi, who in many of his pre-war films had been obsessed with the theme of women victimized by society, embraced the new directives wholeheartedly. *Sisters of Gion* and *Osaka Elegy*, made a decade earlier, had been powerful pleas for women's rights, and his first post-war film simply reaffirmed his earlier position.

Victory of Women, from an original script by Kogo Noda (Yasujiro Ozu's longtime scenarist) and the young Kaneto Shindo, is the story of a determined young lawyer Hiroko Hosokawa. She is engaged to Keita Yamaoka, a strident critic of the military government, who is released from prison to a hospital for treatment of a serious illness. Hiroko's engagement to Keita had been vehemently opposed by her sister, Michiko, whose husband Kono was a government prosecutor responsible for jailing Yamaoka and numerous other wartime dissidents.

Hiroko takes on the defense of a former schoolmate, Tomo, who has killed her own child. Tomo had been living in destitution in the aftermath of the war and when her husband died the distraught Tomo had suffocated the baby rather than see it suffer. Hiroko's opponent in court is none other than her brother-in-law



Kono, who argues against any leniency for Tomo. During a recess, Hiroko learns that Yamaoka has died. The film ends before a verdict is returned.

The drama on screen in *Victory of Women* was matched by the off-screen illness and death, shortly after shooting had been completed, of actress Michiko Kuwano.

WOMEN OF THE NIGHT (Yoru no onnatachi), Shochiku (Kyoto), 1948, 73 minutes

Original story by Eijiro Hisaita; **Screenplay** by Yoshikata Yoda; **Photography** by Kohei Sugiyama; **Music** by Hisato Osawa.

With Kinuyo Tanaka (Fusako Owada), Sanae Takasugi (Natsuko), Mitsuo Nagata (Kuriyama), Tomie Tsunoda (Kumiko).

In the desperate days just after World War II, when everything but pluck was in short supply, a young Osaka woman, Fusako, is forced to pawn her belongings to feed her sick child. The child dies and Fusako learns her missing husband also is dead; she is now completely on her own. Fusako and her younger sister, Natsuko, quarrel over the affections of Kuriyama, a prosperous black-marketeer, whom Fusako had seen as her ticket to a more comfortable life. When Natsuko wins the man, Fusako is recruited reluctantly into a band of prostitutes; she sees no other way to survive. Later, both sisters are rounded up in a police raid. Natsuko learns that not only is she pregnant by Kuriyama but she also has contracted venereal disease. Fusako looks after Natsuko and helps with the delivery of her child, which is still-born. Now thoroughly enraged by the injustice of her plight, Fusako begins to speak out against the evils

of prostitution. The other women in her gang turn on her, but Fusako is rescued by another group of women impressed with her courage.

Not only food, but film stock was in very short supply. Mizoguchi had been working within government regulations on its use since 1943. Much of what was available was also of poor quality, which makes this film appear to be much older than it is.

Dissatisfied with his recent films, Mizoguchi felt that this one would pull him from his slump. He especially liked Hisaita's novel and the opportunity it provided him for portraying strong women resisting harsh social pressures. He went to Osaka for location shooting and his enthusiasm for the project produced results that pleased even himself. He also ended up with a box-office hit.



A WOMAN OF RUMOR (Uwasa no onna), Daiei (Kyoto), 1954, 83 minutes

Screenplay by Yoshikata Yoda and Masashige Narusawa; **Photography** by Kazuo Miyagawa; **Music** by Toshiro Mayuzumi; **Noh sequences** by Kyuemon Katayama. **Kyogen sequences** by Chuzaburo Shigeyama and Sengoro Shigeyama.

With Kinuyo Tanaka (Hatsuko), Tomoe-mon Otani (Kenzo), Yoshiko Kuga (Yukiko), Eitaro Shindo (Yasushi), and Bon-taro Miake, Chieko Naniwa, and Haruo Tanaka.

Mizoguchi in his later years seemed to follow a period piece with a contemporary drama and, unfortunately, a masterpiece with a flop. *A Woman of Rumor*, coming just after *Sansho the Bailiff* in 1954, fell into both of the latter categories.

Flushed with the success of *Sansho the Bailiff*, which was awarded the



Silver Lion at the 1954 Venice Film Festival, Mizoguchi decided to return to one of his favorite haunts, the world of Kyoto's "women of the night." Since he had previously explored the well-known Gion district, this time he went to Shimabara, another of the city's red-light districts.

A Woman of Rumor involves Hatsuko, the proprietor of a prosperous brothel, the Izutsuya, who has sent her daughter Yukiko off to get a proper education in Tokyo. Yukiko attempts suicide when a love affair fails—fails because of her mother's occupation. Hatsuko takes Yukiko back to Shimabara where the girl meets Kenzo Matoba, a young doctor with whom Hatsuko is having an affair. Yukiko at first dislikes Kenzo and disapproves of his interest in her mother, but gradually she takes a liking to him and they begin an affair of their own, arousing Hatsuko's jealousy. Soon Yukiko discerns that Kenzo's interest in her is nothing more than a cold, calculating means of manipulating her mother. With a new respect for the suffering her mother has endured, Yukiko assumes responsibility for running the Izutsuya.

Beginning with the now lost *Woman of Osaka* in 1940, Kinuyo Tanaka appeared in 15 of Mizoguchi's 23 subsequent films, most frequently in the leading role. Tanaka herself was "a woman of rumor": she and Mizoguchi reportedly had been carrying on an affair for most of the years they worked together. Tanaka responded coyly to hints about their liaison, thereby inflating the rumors and irritating Mizoguchi. This film marked her last appearance in his films, indicative of her fall from his favor.

Notes by David Owens
Designed by Dana Levy

14P
#33992



Japan Society
333 EAST 47TH STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017