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Ugetsu monogatari (Ugetsu), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1953

Joyû Sumako no koi (The love of Sumako the actress), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1947

Gion no shimai (Sisters of the Gion), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1936

Yoru no onnatachi (Women of the night), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1948

Waga koi wa moenu (My love has been burning), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1949

Oyû-sama (Miss Oyu), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1951

Gion bayashi (A geisha), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1953

Chikamatsu monogatari (A story from chikamatsu), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1955

Yôkihi (Princess Yang Kwei-Fei), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1955

Josei no shôri (The victory of women), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1946

Akasen chitai (Street of shame), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1956



Center for Japanese Studies

Press Release

The University of Michigan
108 Lane Hall
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
Telephone (313) 764-6307

Contact: Joanne Heald

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Subject: THE COMPLETE MIZOGUCHI: A Retrospective of the Films of
Kenji Mizoguchi

NINETEEN MASTERPIECES OF THE JAPANESE CINEMA OPEN IN ANN ARBOR IN SEPTEMBER

The Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Michigan is pleased to announce a major retrospective of the eclectic films of Kenji Mizoguchi (1898-1956), one of the great pioneering directors of the Japanese cinema and the man Kurosawa called "Japanese film's truest creator."

Beginning on September 8 and continuing each Friday night all fall, nineteen Mizoguchi masterpieces will be shown at 7:00 p.m., admission free, in the Lorch Hall Auditorium on the central campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The festival will feature Mizoguchi's most popular movies, including "Ugetsu" and "The Life of Oharu," as well as lesser known works that are now seldom seen. Six of the films are Ann Arbor premieres, four of which have only been shown once before in the United States: "Miss Oyu," "The Victory of Women," "The Love of Sumako the Actress," and "The Water Magician." This is a unique opportunity to see all the existing films of Mizoguchi available with English subtitles, and to see why he is one of the most admired directors in the history of film.

Three-time winner at the Venice Film Festival (in 1952, '53, and '54), Mizoguchi became an idol of the French New Wave. Jean-Luc Godard, for example, revered Mizoguchi for the visual elegance of his style, the painterly and musical instincts evident in his direction, and the metaphysics that underlie many of his stories. Among Mizoguchi's followers outside Japan, his films are considered as supreme artistic expressions and as symbols of purity and personal lyricism that are more authentically Japanese than the Western-influenced films of Kurosawa.

Before he became a director, Mizoguchi was a painter, and, in fact, all his films reflect a painter's understanding of composition and the atmospheric qualities of light. But where paintings remain static, Mizoguchi's films flow from his use of slow, delicate camera movements. The visual element in Mizoguchi's films achieves an overwhelming effect of beauty and timelessness. Fluid camera work, superb long-shot photography, and intricate use of sound and framing provide a veneer of aestheticism to Mizoguchi's absolute fidelity to realism, an insistence on the unquestionable authenticity of what appears before the camera and a deep respect for the unity of time and space as they are in real life. A stickler for realism, Mizoguchi admonished one of his screenwriters, "You must put the odor of the human body into every image."

Mizoguchi achieved his realism through a wide variety of techniques, most notably the use of actual museum pieces as props, the painter's horror of symmetry in the *mise-en-scène*, and a preference for the "one-scene, one-shot" approach--long takes often lasting for an entire scene. By employing long takes Mizoguchi was able to present reality without seeming to tamper with it. He is a director who lets his actors propel the action through

the sheer intensity of their performances, so that reality is allowed to reveal itself naturally, even ambiguously.

The reality that Mizoguchi depicted in the bulk of his eighty-some films concerns the lives of the merchant class and especially the women of that class. While Kurosawa celebrated the age of the samurai and Ozu portrayed the tensions in modern family life, Mizoguchi exposed the repressive conventions that women must contend with in traditional Japanese society. In one beautifully realized film after another, he explored the sacrifice--voluntary or involuntary--of a woman for a man's success, or for the sake of the family. Yet Mizoguchi's mature films are not melodramas. His finely drawn portraits of Japanese women have many dimensions to them, and reveal the inherent contradictions of real people. A perfectionist in every aspect of his craft, Mizoguchi worked closely with his screenwriters to create characters and situations that avoid the banal, the sentimental, or overt editorial comment on the action. Mizoguchi attempted to shun the role of moralist or social activist and to remain a dedicated, artful observer. "I must portray life as it is lived by people," he said. "That is all."

In the process of realizing this goal, Mizoguchi became Japan's most eccentric, enigmatic director. An intensely passionate man, he aspired to a cinema of dispassionate detachment, not always succeeding in achieving it. He insisted on meticulous preparation in preproduction, only to improvise once he arrived on the set. He is known as a worshipper of women, but the attitude he reveals toward his heroines is an ambivalent mixture of admiration, pity, and bile. Steeped in the traditional arts of his culture and a traditionalist to the core, Mizoguchi excelled at both period pieces and riveting contemporary dramas. No sooner would he

successfully conform to the expectations of a given genre than he would veer off in a new direction, seeking fresh ways to realize a highly personal artistic vision.

Mizoguchi brought a "diabolical" drive and determination to every project, intimidating all who worked with him. "I submitted to him like a reptile," said Yoshikata Yoda, his longtime screenwriter, who was often made to revise a screenplay a dozen times, consuming up to two thousand sheets of paper for a single film. On location, Mizoguchi would think nothing of ordering a row of telephone poles chopped down if it improved the composition of a shot. (When the police arrived, the assistant director was the one taken into custody.) He once insisted that his actors rehearse a scene seven hundred times, but he demanded no less of himself. In mid-career he took to using a portable urinal on the set rather than interrupt his intense powers of concentration.

The result of Mizoguchi's fanatical devotion is a body of films so aesthetically pleasing that they seem to shimmer on the screen, at the same time that they are among the most powerful and profound dramatic works in world cinema.

For more information on "The Complete Mizoguchi" film festival, please call the Center for Japanese Studies, (313) 764-6307.

Please Note: In connection with this retrospective, the Center is also sponsoring "Mizoguchi's Vision of Women," a talk by Keiko McDonald, leading authority on the films of Kenji Mizoguchi. Thursday October 12, 12:00 noon, in the Lane Hall Commons Room.



THE COMPLETE MIZOGUCHI

Nineteen Major Films by Kenji Mizoguchi
Friday Evenings, Lorch Hall Auditorium

September 8	7:00 pm	The Water Magician (1933)
September 15	7:00 pm	Osaka Elegy (1936)
	8:15 pm	Sisters of the Gion (1936)
September 22	7:00 pm	The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum (1939)
September 29	7:00 pm	The Loyal Forty-Seven Ronin (1941-42)
October 6	7:00 pm	The Victory of Women (1946)
	8:30 pm	Utamaro and His Five Women (1946)
October 13	7:00 pm	The Love of Sumako the Actress (1947)
	8:45 pm	Women of the Night (1948)
October 20	7:00 pm	My Love Has Been Burning (1949)
	8:45 pm	Miss Oyu (1951)
October 27	7:00 pm	The Life of Oharu (1952)
November 3	7:00 pm	Ugetsu (1953)
	8:45 pm	A Geisha (1953)
November 10	7:00 pm	Sansho the Bailiff (1954)
November 17	7:00 pm	The Crucified Lovers (1954)
December 1	7:00 pm	The Princess Yang Kwei-Fei (1955)
	8:40 pm	New Tales of the Taira Clan (1955)
December 8	7:00 pm	Street of Shame (1956)

Sponsored by the Center for Japanese Studies
The University of Michigan

FREE ADMISSION



The Complete Mizoguchi Friday Evenings Lorch Hall Auditorium

THE WATER MAGICIAN (Taki no Shiraito, 1933) 9/8

Based on a novel by Kyoka Izumi, the story of a young carnival performer who struggles to put the man she loves through law school. When she resists the advances of a lecherous moneylender, accidentally killing him, the judge assigned to the case turns out to be none other than her own lover, recently graduated and appointed to the bench. Though closer to melodrama than most of his later films, this is one of Mizoguchi's finest early works, beautifully photographed and critically acclaimed. Mizoguchi took a then unheard-of forty days to film the picture, and the results of his labor stunned the public. From this time on, Mizoguchi was considered a genius. Very seldom shown. Ann Arbor premiere. Silent with English intertitles. (97 min.)

OSAKA ELEGY (Naniwa Ereji, 1936) 9/15

Mizoguchi's first film about modern women, and the first of many collaborations with his favorite screenwriter, Yoshikata Yoda. To keep her brother in college and her father from jail, a young woman becomes an industrialist's mistress and then a common prostitute. Unsympathetic to her sacrifice, the man she loves betrays her and the family she saves disowns her. Yoda and Mizoguchi worked closely to capture the Osaka dialect and the rhythms of a coarse, vibrant, mercenary city, which they depicted with affectionate irreverence. Named one of the best ten Japanese movies of 1936, this film marked the beginning of Mizoguchi's realism. Japanese with subtitles. (71 min.)

SISTERS OF THE GION (Gion no Shimai, 1936) 9/15

A taut, realistic look at the glamorous world of the geisha. Beneath the glitter of the demimonde, two sisters--one old-fashioned and yielding to men, the other "modern" and manipulative--both discover the underside of life in the Gion pleasure district of Kyoto. Mizoguchi himself dates the style he became famous for as beginning with this picture. Only after 1936, he said, "was I finally able to show life as I see it." Ranked first on Kinema Junpo's Best Ten List for 1936. "The best prewar Japanese film, considered by many to be Mizoguchi's masterpiece"--Georges Sadoul. In 35 mm. Japanese with subtitles. (66 min.)

THE STORY OF THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUM (Zangiku Monogatari, 1939) 9/22

A spoiled young actor from an important Kabuki clan defies his parents to marry the family maid and live in poverty as he struggles to master his craft. With this film Mizoguchi felt he came into his own. He had freer rein than ever before, and the result is a highly successful evocation of the theatrical milieu in Japan at the turn of the century. "Powerful insight into the ruthless snobbery of the Kabuki world"--Audie Bock. Japanese with subtitles. (115 min.)

THE LOYAL FORTY-SEVEN RONIN (Genroku Chushingura, 1941-42) 9/29

An epic of intrigue, adventure, and suspense based on a true story of feudal loyalty. In 1703 a group of forty-seven disbanded samurai became overnight folk heroes when they avenged their leader by assassinating the man whose arrogant behavior was responsible for his death. This riveting tale of honor and revenge is one of the most celebrated stories in Japanese culture, still today a perennial favorite on the Kabuki stage. Mizoguchi's two-part extravaganza was made when the outbreak of the Pacific War led the authorities to demand that filmmakers help glorify the traditional samurai values of loyalty and self-sacrifice. He could hardly have chosen a more appropriate subject, or one with more mystique, than the legendary case of righteous patriots whose selfless vendetta led to their own ritual suicide. Yet he pulled it off without including a single violent image in the entire film--a feat that must have given Mizoguchi the last laugh on the military authorities. Japanese with subtitles. (222 min.)

THE VICTORY OF WOMEN (Josei no Shori, 1946) 10/6

Mizoguchi's outspoken celebration of women's rights, though not his most successful pursuit of the subject. In his first film after the war (now seldom seen), Mizoguchi attempted to assimilate U.S. Occupation ideas regarding the equality of women. The result depicts a new breed of professional women lawyers and a controversial case of infanticide caused by the poverty and degradation that followed in the wake of Japan's defeat. Ann Arbor premiere. Japanese with subtitles. (84 min.)

UTAMARO AND HIS FIVE WOMEN (Utamaro o Meguru Gonin no Onna, 1946) 10/6

One of Mizoguchi's most famous movies. Based on the life of the late eighteenth-century woodblock artist Utamaro Kitagawa, this film chronicles the story of men and women trying to achieve personal freedom in the restrictive society of feudal Japan. The printmaker Utamaro, known particularly for his portraits of beautiful women of the redlight district, defies conventional artistic principles and lives among the poor, whose raw passions inspire the full flowering of

his talents. Mizoguchi had to petition the Occupation authorities in order to make this period drama. With it, he emerged from his wartime slump, recreating the vibrant world of eighteenth-century urban Japan, complete with its teahouses, criminals, and courtesans. Japanese with subtitles. (95 min.)

THE LOVE OF SUMAKO THE ACTRESS (Joyu Sumako no Koi, 1947)

10/13

Cast in the same mold as "The Victory of Women" and "Utamaro and His Five Women," Mizoguchi's film asserts the need for human emancipation. A progressive stage director discovers the perfect actress to introduce Ibsen's play "A Doll House" to Japan in the Meiji period (1868-1912). The characters are inspired by a real-life actress and director who pioneered a new dramatic movement that brought Western-style realism to the Japanese stage. In Mizoguchi's film they must choose between conformity and liberation. Like Nora in "A Doll's House," the heroine leaves her husband, in this case to find fulfillment on the stage and freedom in love with her director. In the title role, Kinuyo Tanaka received the 1947 Mainichi Film Concours award for best actress. Ann Arbor premiere. Japanese with subtitles. (96 min.)

WOMEN OF THE NIGHT (Yoru no Onnatachi, 1948)

10/13

A breakthrough film for Mizoguchi. Returning to the theme of women's struggles to survive intolerable conditions, Mizoguchi demonstrates more assurance than in some of his earlier postwar films. After the war two sisters turn to prostitution as a means of survival. They attempt to live normal lives and to raise children, but the constant presence of pimps, police, and venereal disease creates an oppressive environment with no escape. Mizoguchi's stark realism examines the degenerate aspects of eroticism and exposes prostitution as the epitome of all the social and economic evils plaguing postwar Japan. After it was released, Mizoguchi was the film's harshest critic. He considered its impassioned attitude the result, in his own words, "of the overpowering sense of resentment I'd accumulated during the long years of wartime suppression. You could call it 'Mizoguchi's postwar style,' or the misplaced bravura of an old man." Ranked third on Kinema Junpo's Best Ten List for 1948. Ann Arbor premiere. Japanese with subtitles. (75 min.)

MY LOVE HAS BEEN BURNING (Waga Koi wa Moenu, 1949)

10/20

Inspired by the life of the feminist Eiko Kageyama. In the 1880s, a time of political ferment in Japan, a young woman runs away from home to work with the fledgling Liberal Party in its efforts to create a constitution. But she is soon disillusioned. Even the men in the democratic movement are hypocritical in their treatment of women, and the promise of equal rights, independence, and true

liberalism evaporates. In his strongest feminist work, Mizoguchi is bluntly explicit. He depicts the social and psychological predicament of women in traditional Japan without ever suggesting that there are comfortable solutions. But, like "Women of the Night," Mizoguchi ended up dissatisfied with this film. Again, he felt his passion had run away with him, and he branded the final result "barbarous." Ann Arbor premiere. Japanese with subtitles. (84 min.)

MISS OYU, (Oyu-sama, 1951)

10/20

Rarely shown, this film is based on the novella Ashikari by Jun'ichiro Tanizaki, a writer Mizoguchi held in awe. Through the exquisite set designs of Hiroshi Mizutani and the evocative camera work of Kazuo Miyagawa (whose spectacular collaboration with Mizoguchi began with this film), "Miss Oyu" presents a history of unhappy love. The hero is a Mizoguchi prototype--the unassertive, vacillating male--who falls in love with a beautiful woman descended from the old aristocracy. Because she is a widow with a son, and therefore still tied to her husband's family, the lovers cannot marry, and their affair, overwhelmed by scandal, is doomed to failure. This story of an unconventional love triangle challenged sexual and moral taboos. And it marked Mizoguchi's return to period dramas set in the Meiji era (1868-1912). The studio had warned him that such films were stale and out of fashion, but, undeterred, Mizoguchi set out to revivify the form. With his obsessive attention to detail, he succeeded admirably. Ann Arbor premiere. In 35mm. Japanese with subtitles. (96 min.)

THE LIFE OF OHARU (Saikaku Ichidai Onna, 1952)

10/27

A film that Mizoguchi had wanted to make for many years, and the one that secured his international reputation. Though a box office dud in Japan, Mizoguchi's adaptation of the seventeenth-century classic Koshoku Ichidai Onna by Saikaku Ihara won him the Best Director Award at the 1952 Venice Film Festival, which he shared with John Ford. Akira Kurosawa considers this Mizoguchi's best film, and claims to have been deeply influenced by it. Among other things, the satisfaction derived from this project saved Mizoguchi's rocky collaboration with his favorite screenwriter, which a thoroughly exasperated Yoda had been on the verge of disbanding. Told in flashbacks with superb photography, the film chronicles the life of an amorous woman who sinks from courtly aristocrat to courtesan to streetwalker. Unlike Saikaku's original, however, where the heroine is undone by her own unbridled enthusiasm for sex, Mizoguchi's heroine is ruined by harsh feudal values and forces beyond her control. The making of this film was fraught with upsets--budget overruns, constant rewriting and improvisation on the set, and the resignation of at least one assistant director--but Mizoguchi's demonic perfectionism paid off in the creation of one of the finest films of the Japanese cinema. Jean-Luc Godard boasts of having seen it more than ten times, and the Japanese film director Masahiro Shinoda calls this portrait of

Oharu "the ultimate fruition of Mizoguchi's realism . . . a film that conveys as much of the tragedy of the human condition as any movie ever made." Japanese with subtitles. (133 min.)

UGETSU (Ugetsu Monogatari, 1953)

11/3

"Mizoguchi at his richest and best"--Keiko McDonald. In his most famous film, Mizoguchi again turned to literature for his inspiration--two short stories from an eighteenth-century collection of gothic fiction, Ugetsu Monogatari by Akinari Ueda, and Guy de Maupassant's short story "Décoré." The result is Mizoguchi's supreme masterpiece, a film that hovers between the natural world of peasants in a time of civil war and the supernatural world of ghosts and apparitions. Set against a sinister nocturnal atmosphere, "Ugetsu," or "Moonlight and Rain," tells the eerie story of a sixteenth-century potter bewitched by a beautiful ghost. It also addresses one of Mizoguchi's favorite themes: the injustice suffered by the masses as they struggle to survive the forces of oppression unleashed by those in power. Mizoguchi told his cameraman Miyagawa that he wanted the film to unroll seamlessly, "like a scroll painting, whose hazy landscapes one can almost touch before they disappear as the tale rolls on." Critics agree that he achieved all that and more. At the Venice Film Festival, Mizoguchi locked himself in his hotel room and prayed before a portrait of Nichiren, the Buddhist saint, until "Ugetsu" defeated William Wyler's "Roman Holiday" for the Silver Lion. It won many other accolades. In 35 mm. Japanese with subtitles. (96 min.)

A GEISHA (Gion Bayashi, 1953)

11/3

A remake of Mizoguchi's 1936 film "Sisters of the Gion," but set in postwar Japan. A young woman becomes an apprentice geisha only to watch her tutor compromise herself for the sake of survival. The theme of the sacrifice that women make in a male-oriented, money-dominated society is a familiar one for Mizoguchi, but the execution here is more relaxed. The emotional intensity and stylistic rigor of Mizoguchi's earlier films set in the demimonde have mellowed into a cinema of manners--the customs of the geisha and her patrons in the traditional pleasure quarters are portrayed with a soft, sure touch and a spirit of acceptance. Japanese with subtitles. (87 min.)

SANSHO THE BAILIFF (Sansho Dayu, 1954)

11/10

An aristocratic family in eleventh-century Japan is brought to ruin when the patriarch is exiled for supporting human rights. The mother is kidnapped and forced into prostitution and the two children are turned over to the slave camp of the notorious Sansho. Remembering their father's maxim that "a man without pity is no longer human" sustains the children until they can defy their captor. One

commits suicide and the other flees, to be reunited with his aging mother. Like "Ugetsu," the film examines the individual's coming to terms with an oppressive feudal structure. And once again Mizoguchi manages to balance emotionally taut scenes of human suffering against a lyrical, evocative atmosphere. Based on the well-known short story by Ogai Mori. Japanese with subtitles. (125 min.)

THE CRUCIFIED LOVERS (Chikamatsu Monogatari, 1954)

11/17

"A great masterpiece that could only have been made by Mizoguchi. He was peerless at portraying the merchant class"--Akira Kurosawa. Mizoguchi's adaptation of the eighteenth-century puppet play Daikyoji Mukashibanashi by Monzaemon Chikamatsu. Like "Utamaro and His Five Women," a celebration of tragic love. A woman of the merchant class is falsely accused of committing adultery with one of the clerks in her husband's almanac shop. Fleeing to escape certain death--the shogun's punishment for adultery--the two become actual lovers. Though his portrayal of the lovers' dilemma is thoroughly modern, Mizoguchi employs many elements of traditional Japanese drama--Noh music, sound effects borrowed from Kabuki, and the chanting of the puppet theatre--to depict two people caught in a constricted world where the only choice is between love and submission to social obligation. One of the best examples of Mizoguchi's famous "one scene, one shot" approach to directing and of the fluid camera work Kazuo Miyagawa. Among Japanese critics, this is the most loved of all Mizoguchi's films. "A marvel of narrative concentration"--Keiko McDonald. Japanese with subtitles. (90 min.)

THE PRINCESS YANG KWEI-FEI (Yokihi, 1955)

12/1

Failing health and the distractions of world fame brought a slight falling off to Mizoguchi's final films. His first color movie took him to unfamiliar ground: China in the eighth century and Hollywood of the mid-fifties. In hopes of fending off television's rising popularity, Mizoguchi lobbied the Japanese film industry to go technicolor and widescreen. He traveled to Hollywood to learn about the new processes and returned to Japan to introduce the state-of-the-art technologies into his next movie. Inspired by a famous lyric poem by Po Chu-i, "The Princess Yang Kwei-Fei" tells the melodramatic story of a kitchen maid who becomes the emperor's concubine and ultimately brings his downfall. Shot on location in Hong Kong, the production was plagued with problems from the start. Actresses came and went; four different writers worked on the script. Nonetheless, there are many traces of Mizoguchi's genius, and the opening sequence, with its free-flowing lateral pan, is considered a prime example of the master's unique cinematic style. Japanese with subtitles. (91 min.)

NEW TALES OF THE TAIRA CLAN (Shin Heike Monogatari, 1955)

12/1

Another period film, also in color. If he was out of his element, Mizoguchi still managed to produce a spectacular film, one which The Village Voice called "a symphonic drama." Based on the medieval Japanese epic Heike Monogatari, which chronicles the rise and fall of a great samurai house, Mizoguchi's film captures Japan's transition from aristocratic to military rule with colorful pageantry. One of the interesting things about this film is Mizoguchi's decision to put psychological issues before the sociopolitical, and to focus on the young hero's spiritual growth as a charismatic political leader. Critics have praised the polished performance of Raizo Ichikawa in the lead role and the rhythmic balance of Mizoguchi's direction. Japanese with subtitles. (90 min.)

STREET OF SHAME (Akasen Chitai, 1956)

12/8

Mizoguchi's last completed film, shot as he battled leukemia. Shorn of his trademark lyricism, "Street of Shame" casts a cold eye on the case histories of five prostitutes. From the opening shots, the old licensed pleasure quarter of the Yoshiwara seems out of place in the rapidly changing modern world. Its days of elegance are long past, and the current denizens of the redlight district are vulgar and distant relations of the courtesans who once populated the quarter. But the hardships of these women are treated with sensitivity, and the film succeeds as a powerful expression of the ways that human relations are at once desperate and fleeting. Mizoguchi's final work is credited with having had an extraordinary national impact. The public outrage fanned by the film is thought to have been an important factor in Japan's decision to outlaw prostitution in 1957, the year after "Street of Shame" was released. Japanese with subtitles. (85 min.)