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The individual films of Yasujiro Ozu, whose work stretches from the silent era to 1963, tend to open in New York at the rate of one or two per year—a mixed blessing. One Ozu film lifts the spirit for an extensive time of lingering memories, and attempting to encompass his entire canon of work would be rather like trying to digest all of William Faulkner at one sitting, sifting through a personalized spiritual landscape in which the names, characters, and locales change but little and almost imperceptibly to the uninitiated eye.

Spring (Soshun) at the New Yorker Theater unveils one more testament from a cherished body of film. Dating from 1956, it serenely contemplates the plight of a middle-class working man as he settles into the army of white-shirted accountants and white-bloused secretaries who make up the anonymous mass of salaried help in metropolitan Tokyo.

Early Spring focuses on Ryo Ikebe in a role that is both archetypal—as a married, commuting wage earner—and but one part of the spectrum of his close-knit group of nine friends, each of whom has made a separate peace with his job and each of whom returns to his own family adjustments at home. Ikebe, as the protagonist, has the personal magnetism as well as the inner calm of a young, unpolished Spencer Tracy. (American film-making in the fifties would never have cast his type of potential matinee idol in a calm, naturalistic role. An excitable Ernest Borgnine was closer to the American standard in the 1955 *Marty*, and that rare kind of middle-class realism was touted immodestly at the time as a daring, offbeat experiment. For Ozu, the same world in low-key, glowing terms and without big set pieces of vesuvian

emotions was the Japanese director's accustomed field of drama, as perceived with familiarity and with a full view of a flowing life-style.)

Early Spring seems paced with the director's own life pulse. The cutting is totally unobtrusive: the gaze uncluttered by lens refractions, the camera shots delicately held until the naturalistic poet has made his impression. It is the deceptive simplicity of the artist, working within the most primitive articulation, to make his human drama that much more accessible to the widest possible audience, of which he is the primary spectator. In *Autumn Afternoon*, Ozu's final film and his last before this to be released in New York, the editing could be felt like precise, cutting whiplashes in a contracting expression. *Early Spring* is one of Ozu's longest, most expansive works, encompassing a larger milieu and interweaving many side characters into the fabric of the hero's life.

Early Spring has a tight thematic core in centering on the vague unrest of a salaried worker at a time of family crisis in a childless marriage and at a critical time of a job transfer; but it is also broad enough to enfold a time, a society, and a way of life. The hero's bleak expectations drag him down to his most bitter hour; but the optimistic

credo of the film buoys him along until in a climactic moment with the graying Ozu figurehead, Chishu Ryu, the husband-worker acknowledges that a life can be regenerated and that any time is "the springtime of life."