

## Document Citation

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**1952**

## **MOTHER**

(OKASAN), 1952, 97 min., b/w.

**Production:** Shintoho Company

**Screenplay:** Yoko Mizuki, loosely based on the winning essay in a national elementary school children's competition

**Cinematography:** Hiroshi Suzuki

**Art Direction:** Masatoshi Kato

**Music:** Ichiro Saito

**Cast:** Kinuyo Tanaka, Masao Mishima, Kyoko Kagawa, Akihiko Katayama, Keiko Enonami; Eiji Okada, Daisuke Kato, Chieko Nakakita, Takashi Ito, Eiko Miyoshi, Koreyoshi Nakamura, Fumiko Honma, Sadako Sawamura et al.

The Fukuhara family lost their laundry business to fire during the War, but now they have succeeded in raising enough money to reopen it. The father, Ryosuke



*Mother*

(Mishima), has been working as a security guard at a factory; his wife, Masako (Tanaka), has been selling sweets at a roadside stand; and daughter Toshiko (Kagawa) has been selling candy. A pall is cast on their efforts, however, by the death of the oldest son, Susumu (Katayama), who runs away from his convalescent hospital to see his mother. Uncle Kimura (Kato), repatriated from a Siberian P.O.W. camp, comes to help with the business. Things get off to a good start, and Toshiko's friendship with the nearby baker's son (Okada) becomes more serious. But then her father dies, and the family must struggle to survive with Kimura's help. The neighborhood begins to gossip about the mother's relationship with Kimura, so eventually he leaves to start his own shop. Second daughter Hisako (Enonami) is given up for adoption, and cousin Tetsuo, who has been living with the Fukuharas and learning to be a hairdresser, goes back to his mother. Toshiko and Masako are left to run the laundry alone, and Toshiko wonders if her mother is happy.

Until the current retrospective, this was Naruse's best-known film in Europe, where it was released shortly after it was made. Although the story elements are the stuff of a standard "mother piece" tear-jerker, Naruse and his adept scenarist Mizuki have fashioned them into something that is much more mood and slice-of-life, lacking a climax and a definitive ending like all Naruse's best work. The reason for the selection of *Mother* to be sent abroad undoubtedly has to do with its atmosphere of postwar lower-middle class urban life. Indeed Naruse had accepted the project because "this is the type of world I understand best",

and it seems a happy coincidence that the Europeans, particularly the French, led by Georges Sadoul, were avidly searching for a neo-realist label to put on Japanese films. *Mother*, with its street life and economic hardships, buoyed by the persistent cheerfulness of the child's point of view—the story is told by Toshiko—seems to fill the bill of resembling Italian postwar films about contemporary life. — Audie Bock