

Document Citation

Title	The end of summer
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Source	<i>Japan Society</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Kohayagawa-ke no aki (The end of summer), Ozu, Yasujiro, 1961

THE END OF SUMMER (Kohakawa-ke no aki), a.k.a., Early Autumn, 1961, color, 103 minutes

Screenplay: Kogo Noda and Yasujiro Ozu. Photography: Asakazu Nakai. Art Direction: Tomoo Shimogawara. Music: Toshiro Mayuzumi.

Cast: Ganjiro Nakamura (Manbei Kohayakawa), Setsuko Hara (Akiko), Yoko Tsukasa (Noriko), Michiko Aratama (Fumiko), Keiju Kobayashi (Hisao), Masahiko Shimazu (Masao), Hisaya Morishige (Eiichiro Isobe), Chieko Naniwa (Tsune Sasaki), Reiko Dan (Yuriko Sasaki), Haruko Sugimura (Shige Kato), Daisuke Kato (Kitagawa), Kakyu Sazan (the chief clerk), and Chishu Ryu, Yuko Mochizuki, Yu Fujiki, et al.

Old Manbei is the head of a well-established sake brewing family in Fushimi, outside Kyoto, which has hit hard times as large brewers have bought up and shoved out small ones. Manbei is as well an inveterate philanderer who has recently re-acquainted himself with one of his former mistresses, by whom he has a flouncy gum-chewing daughter. It is clear to Manbei's family that he will do in their already precarious livelihood with his frequent gambling excursions to the bicycle track with his mistress, Tsune.

Other problems face the family as well: widowed daughter-in-law Akiko must decide on a proposal for a second marriage; younger daughter Noriko is also being matched; elder daughter Fumiko and her husband Hisao must make a crucial decision about a merger offer from a larger concern. Despite their displeasure with the old man's behavior, when he has a heart attack his kin realize they are not prepared to conduct their lives without his guidance.

Ganjiro Nakamura gives a sterling performance in this most richly complex of Ozu's many films. Despite some wonderfully comic antics (Manbei playing hide-and-seek with his grandson) there is a bleak foreboding quality to the drama: it faces the prospect of dying head on. "It is perhaps Ozu's only picture in which there is no spiritual survivor. One of Ozu's most beautiful films, it is one of his most disturbing."

(Donald Richie)