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The Japanese Film: Art and Industry by Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie, 1959. Charles E. Tuttle Company.

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The Japan Society

presents . . .

An Ozu Retrospective

of ten films
on each Friday evening
at 7:30 p.m.
from October 6 through December 15, 1972
(with the exception of November 24)

Oct. 6 I Was Born, But . . . (Umarete wa Mita Keredo), 1932, silent, b/w, 89 min. Shochiku/New Yorker Films

13 Late Spring (Banshun), 1949, b/w, 120 min., Shochiku/New Yorker Films (shown last season)

20 Early Summer (Bakushu), 1951, b/w, 126 min. Shochiku Films

27 The Flavor of Green Tea over Rice (Ochazuke no Aji), 1952, b/w, 115 min. Shochiku/NewYorker Films

Nov. 3 Tokyo Story (Tokyo Monogatari), 1953, b/w, 135 min. Shochiku/New Yorker Films (shown last season)

10 Early Spring (Soshun), 1956, b/w, 149 min. Shochiku/New Yorker Films

17 Tokyo Twilight (Tokyo Boshoku), 1957, b/w, 129 min. Shochiku Films

Dec. 1 Equinox Flower (Higanbana), 1958, color, 118 min. Shochiku/New Yorker Films

8 Late Autumn (Akibiyori), 1960, color, 131 min. Shochiku/New Yorker Films

15 An Autumn Afternoon (Samma no Aji), 1962, color, 112 min. Shochiku/New Yorker Films

Reservations not accepted. Admittance on first-come-first-served basis.

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Yasujiro OZU (1903-1963) is the director the Japanese themselves call most Japanese, and yet, though one of Japan's most honored and beloved, his films are relatively little known to the rest of the world. A reason for this is found in the films themselves: they are always about the Japanese family; are about the two generations, older and younger; they faithfully recreate Japanese life and the tempo of the traditional way. His pictures show the actual rather than the purposely exotic, the subtle rather than the obvious, the profound rather than the superficial. One brings oneself to an Ozu film and one returns richly rewarded. In this way, though it would seem paradoxical since his pictures concern themselves with traditional Japan, their extreme restraint—in both form and content, method and meaning—brings them very close to what the West at present considers avant-garde.

For Ozu, the script is the most important part of the film—he insists upon having a perfect script before he begins shooting. This is one of the reasons that he makes only one film a year, and sometimes less. Working with Kogo Noda, a collaboration which has extended over the years, he slowly adds page after page. "For me there is only one way—write and correct, write and correct. Only in this way do you make progress."

At the same time, while writing the script, Ozu casts his film. "It is impossible to write a script unless one knows who is going to act in it, just as a painter cannot paint if he does not know the color of his paints. Name stars have never been of special interest to me. What is important is the character of the actor . . . what he is as a human being." The part of the daughter in *Late Autumn* was written with Yoko Tsukasa in mind. The mother was written for Setsuko Hara, who had played the original daughter-role in *Early Summer*. It is a rare Ozu film that does not include a part for Chishu Ryu, the fine character actor whose work has become practically synonymous with the world of Ozu.

The finished script, like the finished film, has no plot and no story. It is formal, indeed very formal, but "pictures with obvious plots bore me. Naturally, a film must have some kind of structure or else it is not a film, but I feel that a picture is no good if it has too much drama." The "plots" of most Ozu films may be told in a line or two: *Early Summer* is about a girl who finally gets married and leaves her father; in *Late Autumn*, her mother; *Early Spring* is about an office worker and his wife parting and coming back together; the sad and necessary differences between generations are the theme of *Tokyo Story*. But how little the story has to do with the picture, how this simplification damages these rich, varied, profoundly compassionate films. The reason is that with little or no interest in action or story, Ozu concerns himself entirely with character development, a leisurely disclosure of character, the like of which is rare in the films of any director.

All of this is presented over a period of time and, since there is no action to sustain the time values, Japanese critics are always pointing out that this seemingly slow pace would prevent a foreign audience's appreciating the picture. Actually, these films are not slow. They create their own time and clock-time ceases to exist; the audience is drawn into Ozu's world, into a realm of purely psychological time. What would at first appear a world of stillness, of total inaction, is revealed as mere appearance. Beneath this lies the potential violence found in the Japanese family system, and also the quiet heroism of the Japanese faced with his own family. It is this action potential which gives the Ozu film its vigor, and which makes his use of time meaningful.

Just as Ozu has restricted his subjects, so he restricts the means through which he realizes them. His technique is of the simplest yet most rigorous. He still considers sound something of a nuisance and was the last Japanese film director to enter into sound production, just as he was among the last to embrace color. His 1932 masterpiece, *I Was Born, But* . . . a silent film with titles, is typical of his finest work, and at the same time shows the forming of his style.

Ozu allows himself almost none of the mechanical conveniences of the camera because, as one Japanese critic has wisely remarked: " . . . for him the camera is no machine — it is his eyes, his hands, his very intention." As early as 1930 he gave up dissolves — "it is a handy thing but uninteresting . . .

most of the time it is a form of cheating." At the same time fades and other optical effects went out of his vocabulary — "they are only attributes of the camera." He almost never moves the camera once it is running, and a pan or a dolly is extremely rare in his films. Continuing scenes are always shot from the same viewpoint and when he wishes to recall or remind he will often insert a scene of the set, dead as it were, the characters gone. He rarely uses but one kind of shot. It is taken from the level of a person seated in traditional fashion on tatami indoors or out, it is always about three feet from floor level. This is the traditional view in repose, commanding a very limited field of vision. It is the attitude for watching, for listening — used with consummate effect in silent scenes, pregnant with meaning: the touchingly humorous scene in *Early Spring,* where the war-buddies get together for their annual meeting, leading up to that silent moment when singing the wartime songs, talking about the old days stops, and they betray the fact that they are utterly at a loss as to what to say to each other; the Noh-drama watching sequence in *Early Summer;* the long and touching final scenes of both this film and *Late Autumn.*

It is the attitude of the haiku master (with whom Ozu shares much) who sits in utter silence and with an occasionally painful accuracy observes cause and effect, reaching essence through an extreme simplification. Inextricable from Buddhist precepts, it puts the world at a distance and makes the spectator a recorder of impressions which do not personally involve him. Ozu's camera is Leonardo's mirror in the Orient.

What remains after seeing an Ozu film is the feeling that, if only for an hour or two, you have seen the goodness and beauty of everyday things and everyday people; you have had experiences indescribable because only cinema and not words can describe them; you have seen a few small, memorable, unforgettable actions, beautiful because sincere, and it is saddening too because you will see them no more, they are already gone.

Ozu's world, its stillness, its nostalgia, its hopelessness, its serenity, its beauty, is indeed very Japanese but it is because rather than despite this that his pictures are meaningful to the West. Tranquility is not happiness yet neither is it despair — limitations may limit but they also enrich. *Donald Richie*

I Was Born, But . . . One of the finest comedies ever made, a picture which contrasted the world of the adult with that of the child, which found the former lacking, yet at the same time recognized that innocence must have an end. The theme is the title: *one is born — then the trouble begins.* A typical Japanese salaried man moves up the social ladder when he moves into the suburbs. His two little boys do not adapt so well. They fight with the neighborhood children, one of whom is the son of their father's boss. They want to know why their father has to curry favor with his boss. When he tells them that if he doesn't they won't eat, the two make the heroic decision to eat no more. The elder, voicing a truth apparent only to the innocent, says that he makes better grades and is stronger than the boss' son, that if he has to work for him when he grows up, he might as well not go to school any more. But the boys are only children. Seduced by empty stomachs, their moment of truth over, they forget — life goes on: they are not yet ready for the problems awaiting them.

Late Spring. A film which was awarded *Kinema Jumpo's* "Best One" Award for 1949. A young woman, somewhat past marriageable age, lives with her father in Kamakura. She is happy being with him, and when she hears of one of his friends marrying for a second time she disapproves. The father, however, feels that he is keeping her from marriage. He introduces her to a young man, but nothing comes of it. Then her aunt tells her that her father is thinking of remarriage. She is disturbed but, believing that this is what he wants, she agrees to marry another young man. The two, father and daughter, go on a final vacation in Kyoto. When they return she is married. The father, who had no intention of marrying, is left alone.

Early Summer. Again a *Kinema Jumpo* prize-winner. The setting is again Kamakura and the subject again is marriage and the resultant breaking of the home. Unlike *Late Spring,* however, the emphasis shifts from a family to four ex-classmates from a girls' high school.

A Flavor of Green Tea over Rice. A middle-aged middle-class married couple is in trouble as they seek to avoid the responsibilities of married life and yet remain faithful to each other. The couple have lost their individual personalities, and the film shows their attempt to find themselves again.

Tokyo Story. An elderly couple come to visit their children in Tokyo only to find them completely engrossed in their own lives, with no time to spare for their parents. The only one who pays any attention to them is the widow of a son killed in the war. Back home again, the mother falls ill, and the children come to the family home for an ironic contrast to the parents' trip to the city.

Early Spring. The theme — like that in *Tokyo Twilight* — is that Tokyo corrupts people and yet they are held in the big city by ties which are nonetheless strong for being invisible. At the end, the young couple does escape, when the man accepts a company transfer, and they go to the country to find a happiness they did not know in Tokyo. Yet in the final scene, as they look out of the window of their new house at a passing train, the husband says: "If we got on that, tomorrow morning we'd be in Tokyo." She replies: "Yes. But three years aren't long. They'll pass quickly." The camera lingers on her face looking longingly after the passing train.

Tokyo Twilight. A young girl, unadjusted to society, lacks the power to rebel; instead, she exists from day to day, carrying on a tentative affair with a student younger than herself. Living with her father, she gradually becomes aware that her mother is not dead, as had been supposed, and begins to search for her, her life thus achieving some direction. Actually finding her mother only leads to more disappointments, however, and this fact, coupled with complications arising from an abortion, conspire to make her kill herself.

Equinox Flower. The first color picture by Ozu. A father sympathizes with both his old friend and his daughter who, because of her father's stubbornness, has left home, works at a bar and is living with her pianist lover. But when a stranger requests permission to marry his own daughter, he is less understanding. When preparations for the wedding, however proceed, inspite of his objections, he indignantly declares that he will not attend. Later, he attends a reunion with old friends who give their opinion that a parent must strive to make his children happy. Then while visiting Kyoto, he is finally led to accepting his daughter's marriage.

Late Autumn. A young girl is living with her mother. Though she has had many opportunities to marry she refuses, preferring to stay at home. The widowed mother, however, feels that by doing so she is wasting her life and attempts to find her a suitable husband. The daughter is against this until she mistakenly believes that the reason is that the mother wants to remarry. Though this is not true the mother does not correct her until the girl's marriage is set. Then they take a trip to Nikko together, and the girl is married. The mother returns to their apartment which is now empty and the film closes with that classic Ozu image — the parent alone, the child gone.

An Autumn Afternoon. Ozu's final film; winner of seven prizes for 1962, including the *Kinema Jumpo*. A father is enjoying life with his daughter and second son. The daughter now of marriageable age, has looked after the household since the death of her mother. One day the father and two of his old friends hold a party for their beloved teacher of their middle school when the former learns that the teacher's daughter has passed the marriageable age. This leads him to reflect on his own daughter, but when he has a meeting arranged for her with a friend's son, she refuses. She fears her getting married would inconvenience her family. When she visits her elder brother, she is told of the marriage of his friend who had once admired her. Although appearing cheerful, her father and brother know of her unhappiness. Autumn advances and the day finally arrives when the daughter leaves home for her wedding. After the ceremony, the father feels a heavy loss as if all happiness has left him; drinking with his friends, his loneliness deepens with the long autumn night.