

## Document Citation

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# The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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Nagisa Oshima - A Retrospective  
Thursday, April 20  
2:00, 5:30, 8:00

The Ceremony (Gishiki). 1971. Directed by Nagisa Oshima. Scenario by Tsutomu Tamura, Mamoru Sasaki, Nagisa Oshima. Photographed by Toichiro Narushima. Art direction by Jusho Toda. Music by Toru Takemitsu. Edited by Keichi Uraoka. With Kenzo Kawarasaki, Atsuko Kaku, Akiko Koyama, Kei Sato, Kiyoshi Tsuchiya, Nobuko Otowa, Rokko Toura, Hosei Komatsu, Fumio Watanabe, Shizue Kawarasaki. A co-production of Sozosha and A.T.G. Distributed by the Shibata Organization. In Japanese; English titles. 122 minutes.

This film is a chronicle of the Sakurada family covering the twenty-five years beginning with 1946, the end of the Pacific War, and concluding with 1971, the year Oshima made the film. The family is an old one, of landed provincial stock. The grandfather was a high ranking official both before and during the war. His son, a militarist, committed suicide after the war. The son's wife returned home from China bringing with her their young son, Masao.

Masao is the central character of the chronicle. He was born around the same time as Nagisa Oshima, director of the film and, though too full an identification is not to be expected, many of the things Masao feels in this quarter century are also those things felt by Oshima himself.

The chronicle continues to unfold. The grandfather also had sons by his various mistresses, all of them growing up in the days after Japan's defeat. One of them, a Communist, arranged a very proletariat wedding ceremony in this conservative household. Another was imprisoned as a war criminal for many years and returns home, closed and cryptic -- his thoughts finally being unravelled by his own son, now an ultra-nationalist.

The grandfather also had another son, Terumichi, borne unwillingly by a woman who had been the fiancée of one of his legal children. Three years older than Masao he is the most promising of the members of this large family. Both he and Masao fall in love with yet other members of the family, more distant relatives -- Setsuo, once the mistress of Masao's father, and her daughter, Ritsuko.

The family, extremely complicated, members holding the most ambiguous relations with each other, is also an epitome of Japan itself. Despite the variety of personal and political situations with which members confront each other, they remain subject to the grandfather's authority.

There is no decisive struggle; nothing is born of their thoughts. Each fights the family, but none can give it up -- their struggles enmesh them the more deeply. All roads end nowhere. Masao fights against becoming what his grandfather would have wanted; Terumichi tries to be faithful to the traditions of the family. Masao becomes nothing; Terumichi commits suicide at his own father's death.

The chronicle is composed only of those ingredients which occurred on ceremonial days: weddings, funerals, Buddhist observances -- all of them over a twenty-five year period seen end to end. It is during such events that the power of the family is most clearly seen, and when members of the family realize how powerless they are against its demands.

The film thus symbolizes within the history of a family the spiritual authority of the state of Japan. It is commonly thought that such authority was lost after Japan's defeat. In actuality, however, it continues as it always has. Each youth respectively protests against it -- each is, in turn, caught by it. No one fully frees himself.

Tadao Sato

Translated from the Japanese;  
edited by Donald Richie.