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PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE
UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM
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THE FILMS OF KENJI MIZOGUCHI
April 5-May 26, 1976

INTRODUCTION

Kenji Mizoguchi (1898-1956) is known in the West primarily for the handful of undeniable masterworks he directed in the final years of his life: THE LIFE OF O-HARU, UGETSU, SANSHO THE BAILIFF, CHIKAMATSU MONOGATARI, EMPRESS YANG KWEI FEI, NEW TALES OF THE TAIRA CLAN. Much of his earlier work, including the two films of the mid-thirties that some Japanese consider the peak of his achievement, OSAKA ELEGY and SISTERS OF THE GION, has never been available to viewers in this country.

Over the next two months we will present the most extensive retrospective ever mounted in this hemisphere of a director whose place among the most accomplished and influential artists of this century appears increasingly secure; among his filmmaking compatriots, only Yasujiro Ozu may seriously be considered his equal. Twenty-one* films, several of them never before seen in this country, will be shown in April and May. In addition, Mr. Yoshikata Yoda, Mizoguchi's scriptwriter for nearly two decades, will be here in person for the screenings scheduled in early May. Many of the notes for our showings this month are drawn from the reminiscences of Mr. Yoda, which appeared in Cahiers du Cinema a decade ago but are here rendered into English for the first time.

Mizoguchi, born in Tokyo and trained initially as an artist, worked for a newspaper in Kobe after graduation. Returning to Tokyo, he drifted into work as an actor at Nikkatsu studios and rapidly rose to directing. The majority of his prewar films, made at various studios, were literary adaptations of widely varying quality. After the war his work was mainly for Shin Toho and Daiei, where his longtime associate Masaichi Nagata gave him a virtually free hand in fashioning his final, astonishing films.

Akira Kurosawa's RASHOMON had broken the ground for knowledge of Japanese Cinema in the West in 1950. Nonetheless, the films Mizoguchi unveiled at five successive Venice Film Festivals beginning in 1952, each of them greeted by top prizes, made a far stronger impression on the Cahiers critics; notably Godard, Rivette, and Rohmer, who were quick to recognize one of the great masters of cinema. Subsequently, valuable material has been produced in English by writers as diverse as Donald Richie, Andrew Sarris, Roger Greenspun and Robin Wood.

The most noteworthy element of Mizoguchi's visual style is his remarkable, fluid use of the moving camera. In his hands the sequence-shot, uninterrupted by editing, becomes a means of exploring the world in which his characters exist while respecting its spatial and temporal continuity. Rarely cutting in for closeups, contrary to traditional film aesthetics, Mizoguchi is able to elicit our sympathetic understanding of his players, because, paradoxically, of the distance he so rigorously maintains from them. Few directors have created so many memorable images, not so much for the perfection of their composition --though Mizoguchi's painterly eye is everywhere evident --as for the ineluctable fragility with which he invests them. For the world is almost always lost to his protagonists, usually women with extraordinary powers of endurance and understanding. It is the implacable anger with which Mizoguchi views their plight -- an almost imperceptible anger, seething just below the apparently placid surface of his films, rather like that of Carl Dreyer --that provides the clue to still-unexplored depths of his work.

--Peter Scarlet

Notes by Peter Scarlet and others for individual films will appear in our April and May Calendars, and will be distributed at certain screenings. Our Mizoguchi Retrospective was made possible through the kind cooperation of Madame K. Kawakita and the Japan Film Library Council, Tokyo. We would also like to thank Willard Morrison of MacMillan Films for his perseverance in obtaining for distribution in this country five "legendary" Mizoguchi masterworks of the 1930s and 1940s --NANIWA ELEGY (OSAKA ELEGY), SISTERS OF THE GION, STORY OF THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUMS, THE 47 RONIN, and WOMEN OF THE NIGHT.

THE FILMS OF KENJI MIZOGUCHI

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Monday, April 5

THE WHITE THREADS OF THE WATERFALL (TAKI NO SHIRAITO) 7:30
(1933, 110 mins, Silent with English voice translation of the Japanese Intertitles).

NANIWA ELEGY (OSAKA ELEGY) 9:30
(1936, 90 mins, 35mm, English titles).

Monday, April 12

SISTERS OF THE GION (GION NO SHIMAI) 7:00, 10:30
(1936, 95 mins, 35mm, English titles).

THE DOWNFALL (ORIZURO OZEN) 8:45
(1934, 95 mins, Silent with English Voice Translation of the Japanese Intertitles).

Tuesday, April 13

THE STORY OF THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUM (ZANGIKU MONOGATARI) 7:00, 9:35
(1939, 148 mins, 35mm, English titles).

Wednesday, April 14

NANIWA ELEGY (OSAKA ELEGY) 9:45
(1936, 90 mins, 35mm, English titles).

Thursday, April 15

UTAMARO AND HIS FIVE WOMEN 7:00, 9:50
(1946, 90 mins, 35mm, English titles).

THE NOTED SWORD (MEITO BIJOMARU)
(1945, 66 mins, No English titles but synopsis provided).

Thursday, April 22

THE 47 RONIN (GENROKU CHUSHINGURA) 7:30
(1942, Part One: 124 mins, Part Two: 117 mins, 35mm, English titles).

Wednesday, April 28

WOMEN OF THE NIGHT (YORU NO ONNA TACHI) 7:00, 10:00
(1948, 75 mins, English titles).

PICTURE OF MADAME YUKI (YUKI FUJIN EZU) 8:25
(1950, 84 mins, 35mm, English titles).

Thursday, April 29

MISS OYU (UYO SAMA) 7:00, 10:15
(1951, 95 mins, English titles).

PICTURE OF MADAME YUKI (YUKI FUJIN EZU) 8:45
(1950, 84 mins, 35mm, English titles).

Tuesday, May 4 Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

LADY MUSASHINO (MUSASHINO FUJIN) 7:30, 9:30
(1951, 92 mins, 35mm, English titles).

Wednesday, May 5 IN WHEELER AUDITORIUM Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

THE LIFE OF OHARU (SAIKAKU ICHIDAI ONNA) 7:30
(1952, 148 mins, 35mm, English titles).

Thursday, May 6 Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

UGETSU MONOGATARI 7:30
(1953, 96 mins, 35mm, English titles).

GION FESTIVAL MUSIC (GION BAYASHI) 9:30
(1953, 85 mins, 35mm, French titles)

Monday, May 10

Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

UGETSU MONOGATARI 7:30

(1953, 96 mins, 35mm, English titles)

GION FESTIVAL MUSIC (GION BAYASHI) 9:30

(1953, 85 mins, 35mm, French titles).

Wednesday, May 12

Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

SANSHO, THE BAILIFF (SANSHO DAYU) 7:00, 9:30

(1954, 125 mins, 35mm, English titles).

Thursday, May 13

Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

• CHIKAMATSU MONOGATARI 7:30, 9:30

(1954, 100 mins, 35mm, English titles).

Wednesday, May 19

THE EMPRESS YANG KWEI FEI (YOKIHI) 7:30, 9:30

(1955, 91 mins, 35mm, Color, English titles).

Thursday, May 20

THE TAIRA CLAN (SHIN HEIKE MONOGATARI) 7:30, 9:40

(1955, 120 mins, color, English titles).

Wednesday, May 26

STREET OF SHAME (AKASEN CHITAI) 7:00, 10:10

(1956, 88 mins, 35mm, English titles).

THE WOMAN OF RUMOUR (UWASA NO ONNA) 8:35

(1954, 84 mins, 35mm, French titles).

Thursday, May 27

AMERICAN PREMIERE!

A LIFE OF THE FILM DIRECTOR 7:30, 9:30

Directed by Kaneto Shindo. On The life and work of Kenji Mizoguchi. Winner of Kinema Jumbo Prize for Best Film of 1975. (1975, 35mm, English titles).

* After this schedule was completed, we learned of the existence in a private collection in Japan of a print of one of the most crucial of Mizoguchi's "missing" films (Mizoguchi made at least 90 films of which fewer than 30 survive): TOKYO MARCH (TOKYO HOSHIN-KYOKU), a 1929 silent in the left-wing "social tendency film" genre. We hope to add this major Mizoguchi work to our April schedule as published in our April Calendar.

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THE FILMS OF KENJI MIZOGUCHI

SCHEDULE FOR MAY 1976

Our May Calender contains the programs in the second half of our retrospective of THE FILMS OF KENJI MIZOGUCHI. However, at presstime, the program notes by Peter Scarlet had to be cut rather severely in order to fit our format. Therefore, we are printing here the full notes for the Mizoguchi films in May.

Tuesday, May 4 Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

LADY MUSASHINO (MUSASHONO FUJIN) 7:30, 9:30

Adapted from a best-seller by Shokei Ooka about a woman who is determined at all costs to protect the property left her by her father. Unable to adapt to the postwar world, she finally kills herself. "We didn't know how to adapt this Stendhalian masterpiece," wrote Yoda. "In a word, we were defeated again by literature. After WOMEN OF THE NIGHT, Mizoguchi returned to the contemporary scene with LADY MUSASHINO, which showed an upper-crust group of intellectuals who had banished all pretense and perfume. In fact, the 'intellectual' fascinated Mizoguchi."

Jacques Rivette noted that, "Mizoguchi may never have gone further in the refinement and accuracy with which he captures the least perceptible emotional shifts. In his hands the camera becomes an instrument of unprecedented precision, as sensitive to the slightest deflection of two objects as it is to the heroine's slightest sigh, the tiniest alteration of her heart. Don't ever decide on the basis of its first images, that a scene will be banal--an infinitesimal shift will suddenly make it overwhelming. Don't ever be put off by the early scenes of a Mizoguchi film--the last shots will convince you every time of your earlier blindness." -translated by Peter Scarlet

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, written by Yoshikata Yoda and Tsuneari Fukuda. With Kinuyo Takada, Masayuki Mori, So Yamamura. (1951, 92 mins, 35mm, English titles. Print Courtesy of The Japan Film Library Council)

Wednesday, May 5 Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

LIFE OF OHARU (SAIKAKU ICHIDAI ONNA) 7:30

"In 1951, Kurosawa's RASHOMON, produced by Daiei, won the grand prize at the Venice Festival. It was the first time that a Japanese dramatic film had won a grand prize at the international level. It was an event....the news stimulated Mizoguchi. He wouldn't admit that a beginner like Kurosawa could nose him out at the post: he got hold of himself, ready to fight.. So OHARU was a kind of bet ." (Yoshikata Yoda)

Surely no "bet" has ever been so richly deserved, for the film that resulted--though still insufficiently appreciated in America--is beyond question one of the most remarkable films ever made. Since Andrew Sarris was the only American to even bother to review the film when it was first shown commercially in this country in May, 1964, it seems only appropriate to quote from his remarks:

"To synopsise OHARU is to condemn it. Every disaster known to woman befalls our eponymous heroine. Her first lover is beheaded for class presumption; OHARU and her family are exiled. She becomes a royal concubine, only to have her child taken from her at birth by the jealous, infertile wife of the ruler. Sold by her parents to a house of ill repute, she is cheated by a counterfeiter. When OHARU is fortunate enough to find a loving husband, he is almost immediately murdered by bandits. Retiring to a monastery, she is hounded by a lecherous creditor; compromised, humiliated, expelled. As an aging prostitute she is pointed up to scorn by a Buddhist priest lecturing his disciples on the ultimate folly of a life of pleasure. Just one misfortune after another. Yet OHARU endures. She sees her son one last time, and then wanders into eternity as a streetsinger, a pagoda-shaped hat forming her last silhouette. In the last frames of the film OHARU pauses, turns to look at a distant pagoda, her spatial and spirutual correlative, and passes off the screen while the pagoda remains. From the first frame of OHARU to the last, one is aware of sublime directional purpose. To understand the full meaning of a Mizoguchi film is to understand the art of direction as a manner of looking at the world rather than as a means of changing it. There is not much that even the greatest director can do with a face or a tree or a river or a sunset beyond determing his personal angle and distance, rhythm and duration. With Mizoguchi's first tracking shot of OHARU weaving and bobbing a licentious world to a religious temple, we are in the presence of an awesome parable of womankind."

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, written by Yoshikata Yoda. With Kinuyo Tanaka, Eitara Shindo, Ichiro Sugai, Toshiro Mifune. (1952, 133 mins, 35mm, English titles. Print Courtesy of New Yorker Films.)

Thursday, May 6 Screenwriter, Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

UGETSU MONOGATARI 7:30

"Admired at the time of the Venice Festival, UGETSU MONOGATARI is Kenji Mizoguchi's masterpiece, and one which ranks him on equal terms with Griffith, Eisenstein, and Renoir. The action takes place at the end of the 16th Century, during the time of the civil wars. It tells the story of Genjuro, a humble country potter who is bewitched by the beautiful Wakasa, and of his brother-in-law, a vain, glorious brute who dreams of military prowess. After many disappointments in the city, they both return home to spend the rest of their lives in the fields."

"Everything which made the power and magnificence of CHIKAMATSU MONOGATARI, the cool cruelty of PICTURE OF MADAME YUKI, the jovial bawdry of STREET OF SHAME, the tenderness of NANIWA ELEGY, is here combined and the effect increased a thousandfold. It is DON QUIXOTE, THE ODYSSEY AND JUDE THE OBSCURE rolled into one. An hour and a half of film which seems to last an eternity. Subtlety of mise-en-scene is here carried to its highest degree. Mizoguchi is probably the only director in the world who dares to make systematic use of 180-degree shots and reaction shots. But what in another director would be striving for effect, with him is simply natural movement arising out of the importance he accords to the decor and the position the actors occupy within it."

"Let me quote two examples of technical conjuring tricks which are the acme of art. Genjuro is bathing with the fatal enchantress who has caught him in her net; the camera leaves the rock pool where they are disporting themselves, pans along the overflow which becomes a stream disappearing into the fields; at this point there is a swift dissolve to the furrows, other furrows seem to take their place, the camera continues tranquilly on its way, rises, and discovers a vast plain, then a garden in which we discover the two lovers again, a few months later, enjoying a picnic. Only masters of the cinema can make use of a dissolve to create a feeling which is here the very Proustian one of pleasure and regrets."

"Another example. Having killed the enchantress, Genjuro returns home. He does not know that his loving wife, Miyagi, is dead. He enters, looks in all the rooms, the camera panning with him. He moves from one room to the next, still followed by the camera. He goes out, the camera leaves him, returns to the room and frames Miyagi, in flesh and blood, just at the moment when Genjuro comes in again and sees her, believing (as we do) that he didn't look properly and that his gentle wife is really alive."

"The art of Kenji Mizoguchi is to prove that real life is at one and the same time elsewhere and yet here, in its strange and radiant beauty." (Jean-Luc Godard, 1958)

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, written by Yoshikata Yoda and Matsutaro Kawagushi, based on Uyeda Akinari's collection of Gothic tales (1776). With Machiko Kyo, Masayuki Mori, Kinuyo Tanaka, Mitsuko Mito, Sakae Ozawa. (1953, 96 mins, 35mm, English titles, Print from PFA Collection).

Thursday, May 6 Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

GION FESTIVAL MUSIC (GION BAYASHI) 9:30

A young geisha rebels against her environment, encouraged by her older sister, also a geisha, who thinks herself too far gone to change her way of life. Yet the older woman resists in her own way, refusing to become a common prostitute, the lot of many geishas after the war. The younger, soon lost in the upside-down world of the postwar geisha, is actually the daughter of a former patron of the elder geisha; their mutual sacrifices form a very severe criticism of the geisha tradition.

This remake of the 1936 masterpiece SISTERS OF GION (GION NO SHIMAI) is almost completely unknown in America. In Japan, however, the film was regarded as superior to the director's other work of that year (UGETSU MONOGATARI) and as his most fully realized depiction of geisha life.

In her 1964 book on Mizoguchi, the Vietnamese critic Ve-Ho describes the film in the following terms: 'The changes in the screenplay serve to simplify the plot, and the story no longer has the sad and shocking ending of SISTERS OF GION. The geishas' condition is still precarious and pitiful, but Mizoguchi no longer has the impassioned attitude that he had in the earlier film. In GION FESTIVAL MUSIC he shows profound compassion, infinite tenderness, and calm serenity. In comparing the two works, we can see how far the man and the artist have come. The first film, while dealing with the drama of two geishas, is concerned essentially with their social condition, while the second is enriched with the lived experience which has matured its author since that time. The fate of his characters is examined by a man who has understood and then accepted the profound meaning of the human condition.' --translated by Peter Scarlet

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, Written by Yoshikata Yoda and Matsutaro Kawagushi, With Michiyo Kogure, Ayako Wakao, Eitaro Shindo, Ichiro Sugai. (1953, 85 min, 35mm, French titles with English voice translation provided, Print Courtesy of Japan Film Library Council)

Wednesday, May 12 Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

SANSHO, THE BAILIFF (SANSHO DAYU) 7:00 & 9:30

Mizoguchi's epic masterwork of feudal Japan has achieved increasing recognition in this country as a film of unsurpassed power. The description by Mr. Yoda which follows appears, like all his comments in these notes, for the first time in English translation:

"Before leaving for Europe (for the presentation of UGETSU MONOGATARI at the Venice Festival - ed.) Mizoguchi had given Mr. Fuji Yahiro the job of drafting the scenario for SANSHO DAYU. This project rather surprised me. SANSHO DAYU is a story by Ogai Mori (great writer of the Meiji Period--1867-1912 - ed.) whose heroes are children. He scarcely liked a film whose principal characters were children. He scarcely liked children--in fact, he loathed them! I'd never seen him smile at a child. Could this have been because he didn't have any? He often said to me, 'Don't lose any time by bothering yourself with kids! An artist must not have a family, in order to be able to create his work.'"

"As soon as we were back, Mizoguchi asked Mr. Yahiro if the scenario was ready. He was dying to shoot. The award UGETSU MONOGATARI had received at Venice had given him as much energy as confidence: 'This time, we're not going to do just any old thing again,' he announced, as a kind of warning to the production company."

"Mr. Yahiro's adaptation of SANSHO DAYU was very honorable, very faithful to the original story. But Mizoguchi started in, as I'd expected. 'What! A kid story? I want the same story--but without children!' Mr. Yahiro gave up. 'Yoda, I'm giving the job to you.' As Kyoko Kagawa had been chosen for the role of Anju, the sister, and Kisho Hanayagi for the role of Zushio, the brother, I rebuilt the plot to fit the image I had of these actors. Therefore, contrary to Mori's story, I made Anju the younger sister of Zushio."

"The prologue of the film SANSHO DAYU is faithful to the story, but the later part, in which Anju and Zushio are adults-- which constitutes the major part of the film-- is almost entirely from my pen. Following his custom, Mizoguchi advised me, 'Begin by studying the history of slavery. Become familiar with the social and economic functions of slavery.' Mori's story was extremely concise, abstract, with its anecdotal and descriptive details only sketched in. My first work in adapting was therefore to paraphrase, to detail, to concretize the content, and, more particularly, to give a historical framework to the drama. For example, in the story the mother of Zushio and Anju leaves with her children in order to find her husband, who had left long before to go to the province of Tsukushi. But why had the husband gone there? Why was he still not back? The explanation wasn't given. Mizoguchi wanted him to have been exiled because of his disagreement with government policy: he had provoked the anger of the Chief of State, who refused to admit that a high functionary have his own ideas-- revolutionary ideas-- about social equality: he wanted to defend the cause of the peasants and the slaves. This ideology was mixed in, for him, with his religious faith. So, leaving on his journey, he entrusts

to his children a very rare statue of the Buddha. We thought that this statue would symbolize the faith of the characters (Anju and Zushio have the misfortune of being sold as slaves and this ill luck brings them to religious awareness and to a social reflection about the freeing of slaves) and that it would also be a dramatic device (the mother, now blind, recognizes Zushio by touching the golden statue). We tried to raise this popular fable to the level of social drama, by studying the prefeudalism and buddhism of the period (the end of the Heian Era-- 794-1185). In the film Zushio succeeds in freeing the slaves but the mother remains blind; in the story her eyes had been reopened by the miraculous power of the statue Zushio is carrying....By suppressing this anecdote, we made SANSHO DAYU a sad and pessimistic film." - translated by Peter Scarlet

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, written by Fuji Yahiro and Yoshikata Yoda. With Kinuyo Tanaka, Kyoko Kagawa, Yoshiaki Hanayagi, Eitaro Shindo. (1954, 125 mins, 35mm, English titles, Print from PFA collection.)

Thursday, May 13 Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

A STORY FROM CHIKAMATSU (CHIKAMATSU MONOGATARI) 7:30 & 9:30

"The story of how the scrollmaker, Mohei, in attempting to help his master's wife out of a financial embarrassment, is virtually forced into running away with her, so that he becomes indeed the adulterous lover of the woman he has long worshiped in secret. The couple have no peace, partly because the husband's position will not allow the dishonor, and in time they are returned (with the help of Mohei's father), and, as is the custom with adulterers of a certain rank, they are taken off in ritual procession to be crucified. The husband is ruined anyway, and, as the film ends, his scroll factory, the most prosperous in the imperial city of Kyoto, is confiscated....CHIKAMATSU MONOGATARI is about relationships and responsibilities, and about the absolutely fantastic interdependency of everything upon everything else. Therefore, the film's appearance is moment-by-moment an extension of its theme, and the stultifying closeness of every life with every other above it, and next to it is in fact the metaphysical universe of this particular Mizoguchi drama. That universe is somehow incomplete without its adulterous lovers (We see one pair at the beginning of the film, and then, of course, the hero and heroine at the end) and their sacrificial murders. They stand as if for all the potential of a responsive personal life that is rigorously excluded from the social structure of the public and familial worlds. They are outlaws and yet they are representative (everybody's life in CHIKAMATSU MONOGATARI, just below the surface is, or could be, a mess); they are dangerous and beautiful; they are necessary-- and they are genuinely intolerable." (Roger Greenspun)

A joruri (puppet play) by Monzaemon Chikamatsu, THE LEGEND OF THE GRAND SCROLL MAKER is the source referred to in the film's title; Chikamatsu (1653-1725) is recognized as Japan's greatest playwright and, in Donald Keene's phrase, as "the author of the first mature tragedies written about the common man." His play was based on an actual event which also served as the basis for a story by Saikaku, author of the source novel for Mizoguchi's THE LIFE OF OHARU. This story, "The Almanac-Maker's Tale" provides many of the film's most important elements, notably its tragic ending, which is not in Chikamatsu.

Nonetheless, Mizoguchi makes significant departures from his sources. The attention he pays to Mohei at work as an artist and a craftsman will come as no surprise to viewers familiar with his emphasis on work and art in UGETSU, and UTAMARO among others. Equally important is the invention by Mizoguchi and his collaborators of the character of Ishun, the husband. This memorably self-involved lout (played, as so often in Mizoguchi's films by Eitaro Shindo) seems to represent for Mizoguchi all of society's greed and self-interest, against which his lovers--in one of the screen's most remarkable depictions of "amour fou"-- can only struggle for a moment. For Chikamatsu, the point is fatality--one of his characters says, "What we suffer now was preordained from the beginning of the world." For Saikaku, it's the violation of the social order, which he condemns despite his sympathy for the outlaws. For Mizoguchi, on the other hand, his lovers are right in the tradition of the romantic outlaw couple. Indeed Osan and Mohei are only a gun barrel's length from Bowie and Keechie, or Bonnie and Clyde.-- Peter Scarlet

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, written by Yoshikata Yoda, Matsutaro Kawaguchi. With Kazuo Hasegawa, Eitaro Shindo, Kyoko Kagawa, Sakae Ozawa. (1954, 100 mins, 35mm English titles, Print courtesy of New Line Cinema.)

Tuesday, May 18

THE EMPRESS YANG KWEI-FEI (YOKIHI) 7:30 & 9:30

"EMPRESS YANG KWEI-FEI is a love story that becomes a ghost story before it is over. It concerns the Emperor Huan Tsung, the last great power of the T'ang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) who falls in love with and takes for his concubine one Yang Kwei-Fei, formerly a scullery maid in her cousin's house. Huan Tsung is an artist, a musician, and a doting lover, but not much of an emperor, and the government of China comes under the control of the girl's relatives, the evil clan of Yang, which includes not only corrupt politicians but also three useless, nasty sisters to the sweet and accomplished Kwei-Fei. Eventually there is a military revolution. Rebels kill all the Yangs, including Kwei-fei, and Huan Tsung becomes the prisoner of his own son, ending his days in his chambers, worshiping at a statue of his beloved. As he dies, the voice of Kwei-fei is heard, calling him to join

her in unending happiness. Slowly the camera turns toward a stone courtyard, empty, gray, without feature; until it is filled suddenly with the lovers' ghostly laughter--in what must be one of the most chillingly beautiful moments in all cinema." (Roger Greenspun)

Mizoguchi's first film in color was a co-production between Daiei and Run Run Shaw, though there appears to be some uncertainty as to whether it was shot in Hong Kong or Kyoto studios. In any event, this first Sino-Japanese coproduction bears remarkably few traces of the usual aesthetic inflation endemic to international, big-budget ventures of this sort.

"It was the first time a film had been made inspired by Chinese history. But, if Mizoguchi was a great lover of the art objects of the T'ang Dynasty, and a connoisseur of the aesthetics and manners of that period, I on the other hand know nothing about those things. Mizoguchi brought me along on several occasions to visit museums and temples. Thus I learned how our civilization of the Nara era (550-750 A.D.) had been influenced by that of the T'ang era. I was overwhelmed and dazzled by Chinese civilization of this period, which I studied through all the available documents: 'The Never-Ending Wrong' (or 'The Song of Endless Sorrow') by Po Chu-I and 'Ballad of the Lute' by Tu-Fu, poems which tell of the famous love of Emporer Huan Tsung for Yang Kwei-fei; the revolt of An Lu-shan; the historical significance of the Road of Silk, of the Zone of the West, of the Igre civilization; the role of eunuchs and harems; Chinese holidays and manners, etc. But I had many difficulties. In the initial scenario, to emphasize the fundamentally scheming character of Yang Kwei-fei, I wanted to insist on at least two points (which, furthermore, are historically authentic): 1) Yang Kwei-fei was first the legitimate wife of Tch'iu, son of Emporer Huan Tsung. Later she was promoted to the rank of empress. 2) Once an empress, Yang Kwei-fei no longer dissembled; her pride and egotism were flaunted. But we ignored these elements, first of all to simplify the plot, and above all to make Yang Kwei-fei a 'heroine'; we made her a pure and naive woman exploited by the self-interest of those around her. This led me to a melodramatic draft for the scenario and I suddenly felt very detached from it. It was Mr. Kawaguchi who did the final writing of it. YOKIHI was Mizoguchi's first color film. I believe he'd studied the colors of Kyoto's temples and art treasures to find the right colors for his film." (Yoshikata Yoda)

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, written by Yoshikata Yoda, Matsutaro Kawaguchi, Ton Chin, and Masashige Narusawa. With Machiko Kyo, Masayuki Mori, So Yamaura, Sakae Ozawa. (1955, 91 minutes, color, 35mm, English subtitles, Print Courtesy of New Yorker Films.)

Thursday, May 20

THE TAIRA CLAN (SHIN HEIKE MONOGATARI) 7:30 & 9:30

Based on a best-selling novel by Ei-ji Yoshikawa (itself an adaptation of a famous 13th Century chronicle), Mizoguchi's second color film was dismissed by some critics as an uncharacteristic and over-complicated work. Certainly it has an epic scope rarely attempted by the director, and women appear in it only briefly (though far from unimportantly). Nonetheless, this story of a hero's moral growth fully justifies Andrew Sarris' description as "a film that I must call sublime even at the risk of sounding ridiculous."

The film begins in 1137 at a time when Japan had two courts, the Emperor's Court and the ex-Emperor's Cloister. The main power is held by the temples, which have thousands of soldier monks. Finding his successor unable to deal with the general lawlessness, the ex-Emperor, who had retired to a life of pious contemplation, resolves to regain power. However, yet another faction appears, the samurai, who although they are professional soldiers, represent a more democratic outlook. SHIN HEIKE MONOGATARI centers on the Taira (or Heike) clan of samurai and, in particular, Kiyomori, the son of its leader. After the death of his father and after many intrigues, Kiyomori resolves to assume leadership of the clan by facing down the monks and committing the sacrilege of destroying their idols. --Peter Scarlet

"The first shot opens on a view of the distant mountainous horizon, held for a brief moment of majestic calm before craning down into the middle of a vast chaotic marketplace teeming with people. Seldom if ever has an historical period been evoked so vividly as by this image of the brutal, frenzied, and uncertain daily life of 12th Century Kyoto, on the eve of a struggle between rich and powerful monasteries and the families of samurai upon whom the emperor's authority has increasingly come to depend. Small groups gather to discuss the situation amid the shrill cry of merchants and armorers as the camera moves slowly through the crowd, craning suddenly up and over a wall to the right to reveal a large road down which the troops of the Taira Clan are returning from battle. This single shot lasts for several minutes, and in its controlled observation of an abundance of life which seems to overflow the frame, it exemplifies the most ambitious exercises in mise-en-scene ever attempted." (Michael McKegney)

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, written by Yoshikata Yoda, Masashige Narusawa, and Kyuichi Tsuji. With Raizo Ichikawa, Yoshiko Kuga, Michiyo Kogure, Eitaro Shindo. (1955, 110 mins. color, English subtitles, Print courtesy of New Line Cinema,)

Tuesday, May 25

STREET OF SHAME (AKASEN CHITAI) 7:00 & 10:10

Mizoguchi's last completed film. "Portraits of five women who are prostitutes in a brothel called Dreamland in the Yoshiwara district of Tokyo; a realistic and violent study of the feminine condition. Although certainly a continuation of Mizoguchi's presentation of the Japanese woman and her problems, AKASEN CHITAI has aroused more disagreement about its qualities than any of Mizoguchi's other films. For some, it is a pedantic, melodramatic, pseudo-documentary on the life of prostitutes. For others, although clearly on a lower plane than his other achievements, it remains a work of importance. In it, Mizoguchi seems to be seeking a new style, more detailed and accumulative, which will allow him to reveal the underlying moral attitudes of a society which create 'red-light districts' and the people who inhabit them. Despite the intrusive melodramatic incidents, the film remains as a penetrating social analysis. If it is not, by any means, the best conclusion to the development of Mizoguchi's rich visual style it is, at least, a summing-up of his attitudes to society and to women. The acting is excellent, notably Machiko Kyo as Mickey, and reveals again Mizoguchi's abilities in the handling of actresses."

(Peter Morris, Mizoguchi) "Originally Mizoguchi planned to make the film in a semidocumentary fashion, filming extensively on actual locations. But at the time legalized prostitution was encountering so much public opposition that the brothel owners, fearful of attracting further attention to their operations, refused to cooperate, and Mizoguchi had to retreat to the studio to make his picture. The finished film appeared during the heated and widely publicized Diet debates which were shortly to result in Japan's anti-prostitution law, and was a box-office smash. It was also a success in the United States where it was the very first outstanding film on Japanese contemporary life to command a large American audience." (J.L. Anderson and D. Richie, The Japanese Film)

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, written by Masashige Narusawa. With Machiko Kyo, Ayako Wakao, Michiyo Kogure, Eitaro Shindo. (19 56, 88 mins. 35mm English titles, print courtesy of Kino-International)

Tuesday May 25

THE WOMAN OF RUMOR (UWASA NO ONNA) 8:35

Yoshikata Yoda, Mizoguchi's longtime collaborator, writes, "After SANSHO DAYU, Mizoguchi made UWASA NO ONNA, transposing the life of Shimabara prostitutes (a famous licensed quarter of Kyoto) to our day. I have the feeling that Mizoguchi put more personal feeling into it than the subject demanded."

A middle-aged brothel-keeper loves a young doctor, who solicits money from her with which to open his own hospital. She is about to make sacrifices for him when her daughter returns from boarding school, trying unsuccessfully to get over an unhappy love affair. The young woman reacts with disgust to the atmosphere of vice in which her mother operates. The mother assigns the doctor to take care of her; the two young people get along well and soon fall in love with each other. The doctor immediately has the idea of taking his new conquest to Tokyo-- with the help of the check he's expecting from her mother for his hospital. Inevitably, the mother discovers the two lovers together. The denouement occurs with the man's departure and the reconciliation of the two women. The daughter replaces the failing mother at the head of the house. She conducts business brilliantly and takes care of the unfortunate prostitutes: she has lost her prejudice against the trade.

Luc Moullet, in Cahiers du Cinema, describes the film as a prelude to AKASEN CHITAI. The conception is very open and neither mother or daughter are prejudged. The style, says Moullet, falls somewhere between Ophuls and Renoir, while the film's resemblance to the style and method of Preminger is striking, both in the shot compositions and in the presentation of the heroine.

---- Peter Scarlet

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, written by Yoshikata Yoda and Masahige Narusawa.

With Kinuyo Tanaka, Yoshiko Kuga, Eitaro Shindo. (1954, 84 mins. 35mm French titles with English voice translation provided. Print courtesy of Japan Film Library Council.)