



JAPAN 2021: 100 YEARS OF JAPANESE CINEMA

Tokyo Story

(Tôkyô monogatari)

Ozu described *Tokyo Story* as his ‘most melodramatic’ movie, an observation taken by most western commentators, dazzled by the director’s minimalist style and resolutely quotidian material, as ironic. But irony was never Ozu’s preferred tone, and his comment surely reflected the film’s uncharacteristic explicitness: this is an almost didactic film about the disintegration of Japanese family values, full of characters and incidents designed to spell out social and psychological points with diagrammatic clarity. In calling the film ‘melodramatic’, Ozu may also have had in the back of his mind the story’s origin in co-writer Kogo Noda’s memories of the 1936 Leo McCarey film *Make Way for Tomorrow*, which similarly contrasts the emotional stoicism of an elderly couple financially ruined in the Depression with the brash impatience of their urbanised children, but does so with a directness entirely normal in Hollywood movies.

Although it is not a precise match with any other Ozu film in theme, tone or structure, *Tokyo Story* obviously shares characteristics and concerns with many of them. Its interests in parent-offspring relations, in urban/rural contrasts, and in the evanescence of happiness are all entirely consonant with earlier films, from *The Only Son* (1936) through conservative wartime films like *Brothers and Sisters of the Todo Family* (1941) and *There Was a Father* (1942) to other films of the post-war ‘reconstruction’ like *Late Spring* (1949) and *Early Summer* (1951). It also uses most of Ozu’s well-known visual tropes, from the use of low camera positions for domestic interiors to patterns of cutting based on visual analogies rather than conventional eyeline matches. What’s different here is, again, the overall explicitness of the film’s aim. The fact that this is a film in which the main characters frequently and directly discuss the issues that confront them (for example, parents’ disappointment in their children’s levels of assessment, or a young woman’s disgust at her elder sister’s uncaring meanness) militates against both the psychological nuancing and the structural playfulness that Ozu elsewhere used freely.

In part, the film’s overt seriousness springs from its persistent undercurrent of social commentary. This is absolutely a film of its moment: it faithfully records everything from Tokyo’s post-war rebuilding boom to the raucous and hedonistic behaviour of young people in a hot-spring hotel, the latter an early sign of the ‘Sun Tribe’ delinquency that was to become Japan’s hottest social topic only three years later. (Since Ozu and Noda habitually retreated to hot-spring resorts themselves to work on their scripts, it’s amusing to speculate that they themselves had experienced the same kind of sleepless night suffered by the Hirayama couple). Equally topical was the core theme of the chasm between traditionalist, rural parents and their city-based sons and daughters: the breakdown in age-old family support structures in the years of American occupation and ‘democratisation’ was a widely discussed topic in the early 1950s. And the financial plights of Koichi and Shige, one struggling to run a suburban medical practice, the other managing a tawdry hair salon, both in conspicuously unfashionable areas of the city, are observed with the same fastidious eye for social and economic demographics.

The characters are also somewhat less nuanced than in many other Ozu films, even when played by the directors’ favourites from the Shochiku ‘stock

company’ of contract actors. Haruko Sugimura’s account of Shige, for example, is a nakedly explicit picture of the death of sentiment: the woman is a cypher for selfishness, opportunism and greed. Ozu allows himself one set-piece of comedy (in an otherwise generally sombre movie) at her expense: the scene in which she is embarrassed to have her drunken father and two equally comatose strangers dumped on her late at night by the police. The chief exceptions to this tendency towards caricature are Shukichi, the emotionally repressed patriarch played by Chishu Ryu, and Noriko, the more than dutiful daughter-in-law played by Setsuko Hara, Japanese cinema’s ‘perennial virgin’. Shukichi’s feelings for his wife are expressed only silently, in worldless scenes after her death, while his only avenue for open discussion of his frustrations as a parent is while drinking with long-unseen buddies in a bar. Noriko, shown to be both a hyper-efficient ‘office lady’ and a model of selfless consideration, is given dialogue scenes (most notably with Kyoko and Shukichi, in quick succession at the film’s climax) to admit her inner doubts and insecurities, especially in relation to her fidelity or otherwise to her late husband. Both actors achieve the deepening of their characters with practised ease and supreme conviction.

Aside from Taizo Saito’s lush but sparingly used Hollywood-style score, the film’s soundtrack is dominated by three elements: chirping crickets, boats chugging and sounding their sirens, and train noises. The crickets evoke the rural ambience of Onomichi, while the other two sound elements evoke travel and the space between places – and by extension, people. But Ozu is far too subtle and humane an artist to reduce his sound design to a matter of schematic symbols. In a film concerned with constant journeying, it’s significant that the only shot of anyone in the act of travelling is the image of Noriko on the train back to Tokyo in the end. In the shot, she pulls out Tom’s heirloom, the pocket watch, and examines it with deep emotion. The shot mysteriously clinches the association between the idea (or sound) of travel and the motif of evanescence. This may be the least ‘melodramatic’ moment in the film. It is also probably the most truly Ozu-esque.

Tony Rayns, *Sight & Sound*, February 1994

Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu
Production Company: Shochiku Co. Ltd.
Producer: Takeshi Yamamoto
Production Manager: Tomiji Shimizu
Assistant: Shohei Imamura *
Assistant Director: Kozo Yamamoto
Screenplay: Kogo Noda, Yasujiro Ozu
Director of Photography: Yuharu Atsuta
Assistant Cinematographer: Takashi Kawamata
Lighting: Itsuo Takashita
Editor: Yoshiyasu Hamamura
Art Director: Tatsuo Hamada
Set Designer: Toshio Takahashi
Set Decorator: Setsutaro Moriya
Costume Designer: Taizo Saito
Music: Kojun Saito
Sound Recording: Yoshisaburo Senoo
Studio: Shochiku Ofuna

Cast

Chishu Ryu (*Shukichi Hirayama*)
Chieko Higashiyama (*Tomi, Hirayama’s wife*)
Setsuko Hara (*Noriko, Hirayama’s daughter-in-law*)
Haruko Sugimura (*Shige, Hirayama’s elder daughter*)
Sô Yamamura (*Koichi, Hirayama’s elder son*)

Kuniko Miyake (*Fumiko, Koichi’s wife*)
Kyôko Kagawa (*Kyôko, Hirayama’s younger daughter*)
Eijirô Tono (*Sanpei Numata, Hirayama’s friend*)
Nobuo Nakamura(*Kurazo Kaneko, Shige’s husband*)
Shirô Osaki (*Keizo, Hirayama’s younger son*)
Hisao Toake (*Osamu Hattori, Hirayama’s friend*)
Teruko Nagaoka (*Yone*)
Mutsuko Sakura (*woman at oden counter*)
Toyo Takahashi (*Noriko’s neighbour*)
Toru Abe (*railway clerk*)
Sachiko Mitani (*woman at Noriko’s apartment*)
Zen Murase (*Minoru, Koichi’s elder son*)
Mitsuhiro Mori (*Isamu, Koichi’s younger son*)
Junko Anan (*hair salon assistant*)
Ryoko Mizuki, Yoshiko Togawa (*hair salon customers*)
Kazuhiro Itokawa (*tenant*)
Fumio Toyama (*patient*)
Keijiro Morozumi (*policeman*)
Tsutomu Niijima (*company section chief at Noriko’s office*)
Akira Suzuki (*clerk at Noriko’s office*)
Yoshiko Tashiro, Haruko Chichibu (*maids at inn*)
Takashi Miki (*singer at inn*)
Toshinosuke Nagao (*other doctor*)

Japan 1953
136 mins

* Uncredited

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Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari)

Mon 18 Oct 20:20; Thu 21 Oct 14:30; Sat 13 Nov 14:10; Tue 30 Nov 14:00

Throne of Blood (Kumonosu-jô)

Tue 19 Oct 18:10; Thu 21 Oct 20:35 (+ **Inside Cinema: Akira Kurosawa**); Wed 27 Oct 20:30; Tue 9 Nov 20:40; Fri 12 Nov 14:15 (+ **Inside Cinema: Akira Kurosawa**); Sat 27 Nov 20:50

Early Spring (Sôshun)

Tue 19 Oct 14:30; Wed 20 Oct 20:15; Thu 21 Oct 17:30; Sat 20 Nov 14:50; Tue 23 Nov 17:40

Early Summer (Bakushû)

Tue 19 Oct 20:35; Wed 20 Oct 17:50; Thu 18 Nov 20:20 (+ intro by Professor Alastair Phillips, University of Warwick); Sun 21 Nov 11:30

Yojimbo

Tue 19 Oct 20:55; Thu 21 Oct 17:55; Fri 19 Nov 14:30 (+ **Inside Cinema: Akira Kurosawa**); Fri 26 Nov 18:10; Sun 28 Nov 12:00 15 (+ **Inside Cinema: Akira Kurosawa**)

An Actor's Revenge (Yukinojô henge)

Wed 20 Oct 14:15; Mon 1 Nov 14:30; Thu 11 Nov 20:40 (+ intro by Jennifer Coates, The University of Sheffield); Sat 20 Nov 12:15

The Flavour of Green Tea over Rice (Ochazuke no aji)

Wed 20 Oct 20:40; Thu 21 Oct 14:40; Mon 8 Nov 14:30; Tue 23 Nov 14:40

Souls on the Road (Rojô no reikion)

Fri 22 Oct 18:00; Sat 30 Oct 15:30

A Page of Madness (Kurutta ichipeiji)

Sat 23 Oct 13:00; Mon 15 Nov 20:50

Silent Cinema presents: I Was Born, But... (Otona no miru ehon – Umarete wa mita keredo)

Sat 23 Oct 15:00; Sun 28 Nov 14:45 (+ intro by Bryony Dixon, BFI National Archive curator)

Our Neighbour, Miss Yae (Tonari no Yae-chan)

Sun 24 Oct 12:40; Mon 1 Nov 18:15 (+ intro by season co-programmer Alexander Jacoby)

Humanity and Paper Balloons (Ninjô kami fûsen)

Sun 24 Oct 15:00; Tue 2 Nov 20:45

Talk: A Time of Change and How Japanese Film Bore Witness to It

Mon 25 Oct 18:20

Children of the Beehive (Hachi no su no kodomotachi)

Mon 25 Oct 20:45 (+ intro by season co-programmer Alexander Jacoby); Mon 8 Nov 18:20

The Life of Matsu the Untamed (aka The Rickshaw Man) (Muhomatsu no issho)

Tue 26 Oct 20:40; Sun 7 Nov 11:40

Fallen Blossoms (aka Flowers Have Fallen) (Hana chirinu)

Sun 31 Oct 13:00; Wed 3 Nov 18:20 (+ intro by Japanese film scholar Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández)

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With special thanks to:



My Love Has Been Burning (aka Flame of My Love) (Waga koi wa moenu)

Fri 5 Nov 18:30; Mon 15 Nov 17:40

Love Letter (Koibumi)

Sat 6 Nov 12:30; Sun 21 Nov 14:40 (+ intro by Irene González-López, co-editor of ‘Tanaka Kinuyo: Nation, Stardom and Female Subjectivity’)

An Inn at Osaka (Ôsaka no yado)

Sat 6 Nov 15:30; Sun 21 Nov 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by Professor Hiroshi Kitamura, College of William & Mary)

Godzilla (Gojira)

Sun 7 Nov 15:50; Tue 23 Nov 20:40

Marital Relations (Meoto zenzai)

Sun 7 Nov 18:20; Thu 25 Nov 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by Professor Hideaki Fujiki, Nagoya University)

Sansho the Bailiff (Sansho Dayu)

Mon 8 Nov 20:40; Sun 28 Nov 18:20

She Was Like a Wild Chrysanthemum (Nogiku no gotoki kimi nariki)

Tue 9 Nov 18:20; Tue 30 Nov 20:40

Harakiri (Seppuku)

Wed 10 Nov 18:00; Tue 16 Nov 20:25

Night Drum (Yoru no tsuzumi)

Wed 10 Nov 20:50; Tue 16 Nov 18:15

Talk: Female Archetypes in Classical Japanese Cinema

Thu 11 Nov 18:10

Yearning (Midareru)

Fri 12 Nov 18:20; Fri 26 Nov 21:00

Elegant Beast (aka The Graceful Brute) (Shitoyakana kedomono)

Wed 17 Nov 20:50; Sat 27 Nov 18:30 (+ pre-recorded intro by Professor Yuka Kanno, Doshisha University)

Talk: The Family and Home in the Golden Age of Japanese Cinema

Thu 18 Nov 18:00

Onibaba

Fri 19 Nov 20:50; Tue 30 Nov 17:50

Tokyo Olympiad (Tôkyô orinpikku)

Sat 20 Nov 16:40; Wed 24 Nov 18:40

J-HORROR WEEKENDER

Ring (Ringu)

Fri 29 Oct 18:10

Dark Water (Honogurai mizu no soko kara)

Fri 29 Oct 20:30

Cure (Kyua)

Sat 30 Oct 18:00

Pulse (Kairo)

Sat 30 Oct 20:40

Audition (Ôdishon)

Sun 31 Oct 15:20

Ichi the Killer (Koroshiya 1)

Sun 31 Oct 18:00

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