



Late Spring (Banshun)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

A widowed professor lives harmoniously with his grown-up daughter until a meddling aunt intervenes and suggests that it is time for her to marry. Ozu's film expertly explores the complexities of the struggle between Japan's older conservative generation and the modern post-war sensibilities of its youth. The change to family customs is portrayed with tenderness and humanity by Chishu Ryu and Setsuko Hara who would go on to collaborate on further cinematic gems with Ozu. (Richard Hillard)

Is this my favourite of the works of the great minimalist Ozu? You can summarise the plot of *Late Spring* in a couple of lines: the professor (Chishu Ryu) lives happily with his daughter Noriko; her aunt announces Noriko must marry before she is too old; the professor pretends he will marry so Noriko will not feel guilty about leaving him on his own. She marries. Even this is enough to understand that Ozu's preoccupation with the precarity of happiness frames his greatest works. Just a glance – the professor's at Mrs Miwa (Kuniko Miyake) during the Noh performance he attends with Noriko (Setsuko Hara) – is enough for a swirl of connections to run through Noriko's mind. Ozu, who insisted on working over and over again with the same actors, knows that he need do nothing other than let his camera rest on Hara's face and the slightest change of expression will tell us more than any words. (Ruth Barton)

I'm always startled when *Tokyo Story* (1953) gets named the 'greatest Asian film' when Ozu himself made one that strikes me as better – briefer, richer and more profoundly moving. (John Powers)

If I could pack *Late Spring*, *Tokyo Story* and *Good Morning* (1959) into one No. 1 spot, I would, but the first is the one I keep coming back to – it seems to hover so closely to the rhythms and regrets of ordinary life. (Ty Burr)

Deeply poignant and tender, yet restrained, dignified, almost stoic, it is narrated in Ozu's typically minimalist style. Although it is difficult to pick just one from his extraordinary body of work, *Late Spring* was my first encounter with Ozu. (Nandana Bose)

A search for the balance between the part and the whole, at once profoundly sad and upliftingly heart-warming. (Sam Ho)

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Late Spring, directed by Yasujiro Ozu, is about a young woman, nearing thirty, still living very happily with her widowed father. She at first ignores, then almost virulently comes to resent the efforts of others to get her married. Eventually she yields, though her feelings are still unresolved. Throughout the film, Ozu makes her complex response to the impending separation from her father clear and vivid: fear and anger, a feeling of helplessness verging on panic, regret that she should cause so much trouble. The idea of letting go of her father is shattering to her, but he has to convince her that she must let go: one unstated reason – he will die some day, and if she stays on with him she will then be left completely alone. Dramatically, the film concerns the effect of the break on her. The father's response to her departure is withheld until after she has left; until the next to last shot in the film. After mechanically and methodically peeling an apple, he absently lets the peeling drop, and his head falls slightly. Is it too much to suggest that Ozu and his scriptwriter Kogo Noda designed the film to set off this one shot? Perhaps it is – the shot is not the whole film. It does not, that is, so much sum up as complement the rest.

The slight falling movement of Ryu's head is the suggestive emotional centre of *Late Spring*, as Setsuko Hara's great performance is the expressive centre. The emotion made explicit in the character of the daughter is implicit, in that one shot, in the father: the rupture will affect him as much as it does her.

In his scenes with Hara, Ryu invariably sits erect, kidding her, lecturing her, advising her, but never it seems openly revealing his own feelings, while in the latter half of the film she typically sits slumped, head bent in defeat. At the Noh drama, they spy the woman he says he intends to marry when his daughter herself is married. He smiles courteously at the lady and resumes watching the play. A look of resentment and disappointment comes over Hara's features; sullenly she bows her head as, with retrospective irony, she formally bowed during a tea ceremony at the very beginning of the film. Later, her father sits admiring her in her wedding costume. Her head bowed, partly perhaps by the weight of the costume, she thanks him, through tears, for 'everything'. Only alone, at the end, does he bow his own head.

If Ryu's bowing of his head is meant emotionally to balance and set off the whole of Hara's performance, it is also then, in a sense, a continuation of that performance, a reiteration of key moments in it. It is the key to character that is missing from earlier, rather frail Ozu dramas like *The Only Son* (1936) and *There Was a Father* (1942), which seem distinctly inferior to early, essentially comic Ozu films like *I Was Born, But...* (1932) and *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family* (1941) and which too schematically oppose figures of duty (the mother in one film, the father in the other) with figures of sentiment (the son, in both films). The last scene in *Late Spring* respects and preserves Ryu's character – patient, selfless, stoic. It keeps his and Hara's characters quite distinct in kind, yet firmly links him with her.

The final shot of Ryu is followed by one of waves washing up on a beach. Throughout the film, the father's insistence on his daughter marrying has seemed harsh and unreasonable, almost inhuman; as the daughter's resistance has seemed almost pathological, humanly unreasonable. The final slump of his body is then the link between her humanity and the film's sense of the father as representative of an impersonal force or fate; specifically, it is the link between the images of Hara's bowed head and the last shot of the film – the waves, an image of cosmic incessancy.

Don Willis, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1978-79

LATE SPRING (BANSHUN)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu

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Production Company: Shochiku Co. Ltd.

Producer: Takeshi Yamamoto

Assistant Directors: Kozo Yamamoto, Tsukamoto Shokichi, Kozo Tashiro, Buichi Saito

Screenplay: Kogo Noda, Yasujiro Ozu

Based on the novel *Chichi to Musume* by: Kazuo Hirotsu

Director of Photography: Yuharu Atsuta

Lighting: Haruo Isono

Camera Assistants: Seiji Inoue, Takashi Kawamata, Motoshige Oikawa, Yoshitsugu Tonegawa, Takeo Matsuda

Editor: Yoshiyasu Hamamura

Art Director: Tatsuo Hamada

Set Designer: Kintaro Yamamoto

Set Decorator: Mototane Komaki

Costumes: Bunjiro Suzuki

Film Processing by: Ryuji Hayashi

Music: Senji Ito

Sound Recording: Hidekata Sasaki

Sound Mixing: Yoshisaburo Senoo

Studio: Shochiku Ofuna

Cast

Chishu Ryu (*Professor Shukichi Somiya*)

Setsuko Hara (*Noriko, Somiya's daughter*)

Yumeji Tsukioka (*Aya Kitagawa*)

Haruko Sugimura (*Masa Taguchi, Noriko's aunt*)

Hohi Aoki (*Katsuyochi Taguchi*)

Junya Usami (*Shoichi Hattori, Somiya's assistant*)

Kuniko Miyake (*Akiko Miwa*)

Masao Mishima (*Yuzuru Onodera*)

Yoshiko Tsubouchi (*Kiku, Onodera's wife*)

Yoko Katsuragi (*Misako, Onodera's daughter*)

Ichiro Shimizu (*owner of Takigawa restaurant*)

Jun Tanizaki (*Seizo Hayashi*)

Toyo Takahashi (*Shige Hayashi*)

Yoko Benisawa (*tea ceremony instructor*)

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108 mins