



A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE FILMS OF YASUJIRO OZU

I Flunked, But... (Rakudai wa shitakeredo)

I Graduated, But... (Daigaku wa deta keredo)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu
Production Company: Shochiku Co. Ltd.
Screenplay: Yoshio Aramaki
Based on an idea by: Hiroshi Shimizu
Director of Photography: Hideo Mohara
Studio: Shochiku Kamata
Cast:
Minoru Takada (*Tetsuo Nomoto*)
Kinuyo Tanaka (*Machiko*)
Utako Suzuki (*Tetsuo's mother*)
Kenji Ōyama (*Sugimura*)
Takeshi Sakamoto (*secretary*)
Shinichi Himori, Kenji Kimura
Japan 1929
10 mins (fragment)

I Flunked, But... (Rakudai wa shita keredo)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu
Production Company: Shochiku Co. Ltd.
Assistant Directors: Jiro Ogawa, Ko Sasaki
Screenplay: Akira Fushimi
Based on an idea by: Yasujiro Ozu
Director of Photography: Hideo Mohara
Assistant Photographers: Yuharu Atsuta,
Minoru Kuribayashi, Yuji Harada
Lighting: Toshimitsu Nakajima
Editor: Hideo Mohara
Set Designer: Yoneichi Wakita
Properties: Kotaro Kawasaki,
Shotaro Hashimoto
Costumes: Bunjiro Suzuki
Studio: Shochiku Kamata
Cast:
Tatsuo Saitō (*Takahashi*)
Kaoru Futaba (*landlady*)
Tomio Aoki (*landlady's son*)
Kinuyo Tanaka (*waitress*)
Hiroo Wakabayashi, Ichiro Okuni (*professors*)
Dekao Yokoo, Tokio Seki, Hiroshi Mikura,
Goro Yokoyama (*flunking students*)
Ichiro Tsukita, Chishu Ryu, Fusao Yamada,
Kenji Satomi (*passing students*)
Japan 1930 65 mins
35mm

With live piano accompaniment by
Costas Fotopoulos (2 September)
Neil Brand (13 September)

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Tokyo Story (Tōkyō monogatari)

From Fri 1 Sep

I Flunked, But... (Rakudai wa shitakeredo)

Sat 2 Sep 16:15; Wed 13 Sep 20:35

Tokyo Chorus (Tōkyō no kōrasu)

Sat 2 Sep 18:30; Sun 17 Sep 16:00

An Autumn Evening with Yasujirō Ozu

Mon 4 Sep 18:15

I Was Born, But... (Umarete wa mita keredo)

Mon 4 Sep 20:30 (+ intro by Jinhee Choi, King's
College London); Fri 15 Sep 18:30

Tokyo Twilight (Tōkyō boshoku)

Thu 7 Sep 18:00; Wed 27 Sep 20:15

The Only Son (Hitori musuko)

Fri 8 Sep 20:40; Sat 16 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by
season curator Ian Haydn Smith)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

I Flunked, But...

As the obverse of *I Graduated, But...*, told from the standpoint of one who escapes unemployment, *I Flunked, But...* deflects attention from economic conditions and romanticises student life in the manner of *Days of Youth*. The *Kinema Jumbo* reviewer singled out the work's basic virtue: it is very funny. This short film, shot in a week, offers a convenient occasion to analyse Ozu's characteristic comic techniques. For once, the American sources of Ozu's comedy are not cited via movie posters. Still, the film's inspiration is clearly drawn from Ozu's two mentors. As in a Lubitsch film, the audience enjoys superior knowledge. From Lloyd's *The Freshman* comes the collegiate milieu and the remarkable jigs that the students dance. Both directors built their scenes out of many brief shots of isolated details. The two directors tutored Ozu in comic structure as well. They taught him how to establish and sustain running gags, how to build up extended comic scenes, and how to create gags out of overt narrational comments.

Days of Youth had already displayed Ozu's proficiency at handling running gags of socks, gloves, and room-for-rent signs. Here too most of the motifs are objects (as in American films): sugar cubes, the tie that Takahashi's girlfriend is knitting for him, the bread the cramming students order and later can't afford to buy. The most elaborate running gag involves acting in unison, here developed to a still higher pitch than in *Walk Cheerfully*. Ozu gives Takahashi two sets of four pals each so as to multiply the possibilities of movement *en masse*. Our introduction to Takahashi's gang consists of a lingering shot of the courtyard into which all five loafers shamble in synchronisation. During the first exam, the boys break out in a rash of identical gestures. The gang has its own cross-legged march, as well as its fraternal jig. Variants appear. Sleeping in a row, the four roommates roll over one by one and start studying. As they awake, all wield toothbrushes at the same time. The faculty seem to have caught the disorder from the students: when one student visits the office, the two principals thrum their fingers in the same tempo. The motif comes to a fine climax. In the last scene, in a repetition of Takahashi's gesture after he had flunked, the four unemployed graduates flop back one by one and then simultaneously swing their feet up onto the table and start to pound out a rhythm. Ozu cuts to a student audience applauding in exactly that rhythm, a powerful expression of the graduates' kinaesthetic nostalgia for school days. Ozu then reveals Takahashi's gang as cheerleaders, executing a wigwagging number – the ideal application of their choreographic abilities.

Ozu is no less concerned to build up to fully-developed comic scenes. His handling of ignorance and misunderstanding is skilful. Takahashi lounges in the confidence that his shirt will pull him through, but we have already seen it taken by the laundryman. The most prolonged case of the comedy of ignorance depends upon crosscutting, which Ozu even this early in his career usually avoids. Both Lubitsch's and Lloyd's films deceive the audience by encouraging untenable expectations. Lloyd was fond of satiric intertitles, and Lubitsch

A Story of Floating Weeds (Ukigusa monogatari)

Sat 9 Sep 11:50; Sat 23 Sep 16:00

Good Morning (Ohayō)

Sat 9 Sep 18:10; Sat 30 Sep 20:40

Floating Weeds (Ukigusa)

Sat 9 Sep 20:30; Sun 1 Oct 11:30 BFI IMAX; Mon 2 Oct 18:00

Late Spring (Banshun)

Sun 10 Sep 12:15 (+ intro by season curator, Ian Haydn Smith); Fri 22 Sep 20:50

Early Summer (Bakushu)

Sun 10 Sep 15:00; Wed 13 Sep 14:30; Sat 23 Sep 20:35

Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family (Todake no kyōdai)

Mon 11 Sep 18:00; Sat 30 Sep 18:20

There Was a Father (Chichi ariki)

Mon 11 Sep 20:40; Thu 28 Sep 18:20

City Lit at BFI: Ozu: Cinema of Everyday Life

Tue 12 Sep – 3 Oct 18:30-20:30

Record of a Tenement Gentleman (Nagaya Shinshiroku)

Tue 12 Sep 20:30; Wed 20 Sep 21:00; Sat 23 Sep 18:30

Early Spring (Sōshun)

Thu 14 Sep 20:10; Sun 1 Oct 18:00

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

Fri 15 Sep 20:45; Sat 30 Sep 15:30

The Anatomy of Ozu

Sat 16 Sep 12:00-17:00

Late Autumn (Akibiyori)

Sun 17 Sep 18:20; Sat 30 Sep 12:30

Equinox Flower (Higanbana)

Thu 21 Sep 18:00; Sun 1 Oct 15:10

An Autumn Afternoon (Sanma no aji)

Sun 24 Sep 18:25 (+ intro); Tue 3 Oct 20:45

Influence and Inspiration**Make Way for Tomorrow**

Sat 2 Sep 12:40; Sun 24 Sep 15:50 (+ intro by season curator Ian Haydn Smith)

Tokyo-Ga

Sun 3 Sep 14:00; Mon 2 Oct 20:45

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emphasised them along with highly judgmental cutaways, such as that in *Lady Windermere's Fan* which ironically points up the couple's quarrel by cutting to the birthday presents that the husband has bought. Like these filmmakers, Ozu will self-consciously mislead the audience. The lengthy opening shows us two boys quarrelling, but they are of no consequence to the film's intrigue. After Takahashi has flunked, he gravely takes out scissors and tests their sharpness by pricking at his neck. He ceremoniously turns from the camera. Seppuku? A close-up reveals a tabi [traditional Japanese sock] flung off, and a reverse-angle shot shows him starting to trim his toenails.

As usual, the film's comedy is tempered with melancholy. The scenes after Takahashi's failure slow the film's rhythm in the manner of Yamamoto and Watanabe's brooding in *Days of Youth*. Takahashi's roommates hold a dinner to celebrate their graduation, but the running gag of uniform movement turns sour here as they mimic his dejected gestures, slowing when he does, eating when he does. This film moves through melancholy to a placid acceptance of the resources one still has. 'Even if you didn't graduate,' says the shopgirl, 'nobody can stop your wearing a suit.' And what one still has includes, principally, male friendship. At the end, the gang is back together, performing for a crowd of appreciative boys. *I Flunked, But...* traces, in a comic tint, the basic emotional trajectory of many early Ozu films.

I Graduated, But...

Synopses of *I Graduated, But ...* suggest a socially-conscious revision of *Dreams of Youth*. In the late 1920s, over two-thirds of university graduates could not find work. The title quotes a popular saying of the period, a rueful joke on the false promise of higher education. The juxtaposition of Tetsuo Nomoto's failure and his visiting mother's belief that he has succeeded anticipates the dramatic crux of *The Only Son*, while the revelation of Machiko's job looks forward to the more melodramatic *Woman of Tokyo*. The now obligatory citation of Hollywood cinema, a poster for Lloyd's *Speedy* in Minoru's apartment, suggests a bitter comparison of American and Japanese conditions.

Yet the film's lightness of touch is also evident. Tetsuo informs Machiko that he's jobless by pointing to the banner of the *Sunday Mainichi* (i.e. *Sunday Daily*) and saying: 'For me, every day is like this.' The plot's construction appears to be symmetrical in the manner of *Days of Youth* and American comedy. The film begins and ends with a session with the tailor; and Tetsuo's two visits to the company are marked by encounters with a giggling secretary. He deceives Machiko by pretending to have a job; then she deceives him by pretending not to have one. He sees her light a man's cigarette at the bar, and when she starts to light his own at home, he announces that he knows her secret. Yet the *Kinema Jumbo* critic found such playfulness jarring. The happy ending divorced the film from social reality, he claimed.

Extracted from *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* by David Bordwell (BFI/Princeton 1988)

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