



A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE FILMS OF YASUJIRO OZU

The Only Son (Hitori musuko)

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Director: Yasujiro Ozu

Production Company: Shochiku Co. Ltd.

Assistant Directors: Kenkichi Hara,

Hamao Negishi, Nobuo Nishikawa

Screenplay: Tadao Ikeda, Masao Arata

Based on an idea by: James Maki

Director of Photography: Shojiro Sugimoto

Lighting: Toshimitsu Nakajima

Camera Assistants: Yuharu Atsuta,

Kiyohisa Sakurai, Hitoshi Unozawa

Editors: Hideo Mohara, Eiichi Hasegawa

Art Director: Tatsuo Hamada

Music: Senji Ito

Sound Recording: Hideo Mohara,

Eiichi Hasegawa

Sound System: SMS

Studio: Shochiku Kamata

Cast:

Chôko Iida (*Otsune Nonomiya*)

Shinichi Himori (*Ryosuke, Otsune's son*)

Masao Hayama (*Ryosuke as a child*)

Yoshiko Tsubouchi (*Sugiko, Ryosuke's wife*)

Mitsuko Yoshikawa (*Otaka*)

Tokkan Kozo (*Tomibo, Otaka's son*)

Chishu Ryu (*Okubo, Ryosuke's teacher*)

Tomoko Naniwa (*Okubo's wife*)

Bakudan Kozo (*Okubo's son*)

Eiko Takamatsu

Seiichi Kato

Kazuko Ojima

Kiyoshi Aono

Japan 1936

83 mins

Digital

The screening on Saturday 16 September will be introduced by season curator Ian Haydn Smith.

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With special thanks to Janus Films
Kristy Matheson

A widow makes sacrifices to ensure her son gets an education. Years later, when she visits him, she is surprised by how his life has turned out and how little he has told her of it. The son in turn comes to appreciate the cost of his mother's sacrifice. Ozu underpins this moving portrait of a mother-son relationship with questions regarding the true value of material wealth and the qualities that are cherished and rewarded in contemporary society.

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The Only Son, a film about the failure of *risshin shusse*, 'getting on', is sweeping in its referential scope. Its 13-year time span includes a portrait of rural life more detailed than that in *Story of Floating Weeds*, a rare depiction of the silk-spinning industry, and a vision of Tokyo quite different from the nostalgic *shitamachi* or the jazzy metropolis seen in the earlier films. This is a new, raw Tokyo. We are no longer in the coffeeshops of the college comedies, or the trim streets of *Walk Cheerfully* and *Dragnet Girl*, nor even in the downtown of *Passing Fancy*. The city of *The Only Son* is a cluster of ramshackle tenements pasted against a wasteland of factories and weedy plains straight out of *An Inn in Tokyo*. The early silent films had revelled in an urban landscape that is kept insistently offscreen here. No outside views show the streets around Ryosuke's school or the hospital where Tomibo is taken. Okubo's pork-chop café sits in a dusty stretch of laundry lines, power poles, and vacant lots. Ryosuke and Otsune go sightseeing to Asakusa, Ueno Park, and the Kudan hill, which offers a fine view of the city; but we merely hear reports of this tour. The expedition that we actually see consists of mother and son squatting before the city garbage-treatment plant. *The Only Son* originated as a silent film to be called *Tokyo Is a Nice Place*.

Ozu's remarks about persisting in a silent style should not distract us from his accomplishments in the domain of sound. *The Only Son* introduces several of his characteristic sound techniques. The lyrical music, with one theme based on 'Old Black Joe', is not yet used to signal and smooth over transitions, but it runs throughout two scenes. With respect to dialogue, Ozu is already practicing the restraint he would maintain for the next 25 years; he will not cut so as to break a character's line, not even by a syllable.

David Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (BFI/Princeton, 1988) Reproduced by kind permission of Bloomsbury Publishing © David Bordwell