



## A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE FILMS OF YASUJIRO OZU

# There Was a Father (Chichi ariki)

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Director: Yasujiro Ozu

Production Company: Shochiku Co. Ltd.

Assistant Directors: Nobuo Nishikawa,  
Kiyoshi Suzuki, Kozo Yamamoto,  
Yoshio Tsukamoto

Screenplay: Tadao Ikeda, Takao Yanai,  
Yasujiro Ozu

Director of Photography: Yuharu Atsuta

Lighting: Katsumi Naito

Camera Assistants: Tsuyoshi Saito, Kozuo Suzuki.

Yasuji Inoue

Editor: Yoshiyasu Hamamura

Art Director: Tatsuo Hamada

Music: Kyoichi Saiki

Studio: Shochiku Ofuna

Cast:

Chishū Ryū (*Shuhei Horikawa*)

Shuji Sano (*Ryohei, Horikawa's son*)

Haruhiko Tsuda (*Ryohei as a child*)

Shin Saburi (*Yasutaro Kurokawa*)

Takeshi Sakamoto (*Makoto Hirata*)

Mitsuko Mito (*Fumi Hirata*)

Masayoshi Otsuka (*Seiichi Hirata*)

Shinichi Himori (*Minoru Uchida*)

Seiji Nishimura (*priest*)

Shinyo Nara (*doctor*)

Chiyoko Fumitani (*Horikawa's maid*)

Shoichi Kofujita

Haruhiko Tsuda

Reiko Tani

Kanji Kawara

Kenichi Miyajima

Kenji Oyama

Koji Mitsui

Masao Hayama

Tatsuro Nagai

Shojaro Fujimatsu

Teruo Kisaragi

Katsumi Kubota

Morihiko Kezuka

Tsuneo Osugi

Japan 1942

87 mins

Digital

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**SIGHT  
AND  
SOUND**

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

Widely acknowledged as the first great performance in an Ozu film by the director's regular on-screen collaborator Chishū Ryū, *There Was a Father* finds him playing a schoolteacher who, following a tragedy, finds his life and his relationship with his son irrevocably changed. Ozu's drama follows both as they grow older, detailing the emotional bond that matures between them. It's a generous and moving portrait of parental love.

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Ozu's films are not all and not equally 'Buddhist'. There can be no doubt, however, that *There Was a Father* frequently draws upon Buddhist imagery. Many intermediate spaces consist of still-life shots of Buddhist *stupas* – squat stone pillars consisting of stacked solids, each with a symbolic value: the cube (earth) surmounted by a sphere (water), a pyramid (fire), a crescent (air), and a sphere with a pointed tip (space). By cutting away to them, Ozu connotes an overriding harmony and calm. On the boys' outing they visit the Great Buddha statue in Kamakura. We see Buddhist funeral rites, complete with drum and chanting, and for a time Horikawa lives in a Buddhist temple with a priest. We must recall here not only Ozu's earlier, satiric use of such imagery but also the fact that by 1942 Buddhism had become a distinct political and ideological force. In March of 1941, only a year before *There Was a Father* was released, the Great Japan Buddhist Association was formed, with the purpose of supporting the government and the war effort. After Pearl Harbour, temples sent priests to war plants and embarked on fund drives to pay for aircraft. In this film, Buddhism operates not as a vague transcendental atmosphere but as a historically specific construct and a citation for particular ideological purposes.

More broadly, *There Was a Father* participates in ideological production by virtue of its constant references to 'Japaneseness'. The school outing is a veritable itinerary of traditionally revered spots: the Imperial Palace, Imperial and Buddhist shrines, and Lake Ashinoko, across which one can see majestic Mount Fuji. The road down which the boys hike is the famous Tokaido highway, immortalised in poetry and woodblock prints and granted a remarkably empty shot by Ozu. The film's very first image, two women passing on a bridge and framed by tree branches, introduces a picturesque, self-conscious 'Japaneseness' closer to Mizoguchi's late 1930s work than to Ozu's previous films. The cutaways to the river during the spa episode and the shots of the steaming tub there evoke the Shinto purification rite of *misogi*, or ablution; purity becomes a thematic issue in the film. The castle at Ueda, the *go* motif, shots of temple gardens, mention of a classic verse about primroses blooming by a river – all cite intrinsic Japanese traditions. No reference to Western life – not even the Germanic references of *Toda Family* – mars this placid, insular world.

Tradition, however, is always selective, and this film's Japaneseness consists of self-sacrifice and acceptance of one's rank. Horikawa's doctrine of supreme effort leads him to quit his job – 'I didn't do my best' – even though no one

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### Tokyo Story (Tōkyō monogatari)

From Fri 1 Sep

### 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 Summer (Bakushu)

Wed 13 Sep 14:30; Sat 23 Sep 20:35

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

Wed 13 Sep 20:35

### Early Spring (Sōshun)

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

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

Fri 15 Sep 18:30

### 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

### The Only Son (Hitori musuko)

Sat 16 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by season curator Ian Haydn Smith)

### Tokyo Chorus (Tōkyō no kōrasu)

Sun 17 Sep 16:00

### 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

### Late Spring (Banshun)

Fri 22 Sep 20:50

### A Story of Floating Weeds (Ukigusa monogatari)

Sat 23 Sep 16:00

### An Autumn Afternoon (Sanma no aji)

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

### Tokyo Twilight (Tōkyō boshoku)

Wed 27 Sep 20:15

### Good Morning (Ohayō)

Sat 30 Sep 20:40

### Floating Weeds (Ukigusa)

Sun 1 Oct 11:30 BFI IMAX; Mon 2 Oct 18:00

## Influence and Inspiration

### Make Way for Tomorrow

Sun 24 Sep 15:50 (+ intro by season curator Ian Haydn Smith)

### Tokyo-Ga

Mon 2 Oct 20:45

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blames him. The first words he speaks reveal his austerity, when he insists that his old shoes will last. This attitude had a particular significance in 1942, not only because of the increasing deprivations suffered on the home front but also because austerity became identified with the sanctified concept of purification. *Yase-gaman*, or 'emaciated endurance', came to be treated as a spiritual exercise which would prove Japanese superiority. Horikawa's insistence on separating himself from his son becomes a domestic analogue of the toughening of the soul that the war required of every citizen.

Along with purification went the notion of commitment to one's allotted task, no matter how lowly it might be. One could trace the idea back to the principles of Confucianism, but the pertinent document is the *Kokutai no Hongi* (*Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*). Published in 1937 as an official statement of government ideology, it put the family at the centre of Japanese culture, and Horikawa's philosophy might have come straight from it. One slogan of the period ran, 'Every day is a work day'; during his collapse, Horikawa tries feebly to rise, saying, 'I never take a day off.' *There Was a Father* received a Bureau of Information award as an outstanding national-policy film.

What the foregoing discussion does not take into account is the way in which the unfolding of the film *modulates* into the wartime propaganda stance. Horikawa's initial motivation is psychological, since his failure to keep the boys off the lake makes him more severe in his dedication to duty. Moreover, his justification of the separation from Ryohei comes straight from *The Only Son*: he will work to earn the money to send his son to high school, and then college. Horikawa's self-sacrifice is identified with the stereotype of the late-Meiji parent who sees education as the only way to advance. But once Ryohei grows up and the story moves into the contemporary period, Horikawa appeals to a new principle, that of doing one's appointed job, no matter how lowly or grim. 'A man has to serve his country.' In this respect, *There Was a Father* is a reversal of *The Only Son*. Whereas Otsune pleads for her son to show ambition, Horikawa urges acceptance. The original script for *There Was a Father* was written in 1937, immediately after *The Only Son*, and can be seen as an implicit answer to the dilemma of the early film. Teaching in a backwater is not demeaning if one's job makes a contribution to society. Thus the later film becomes a critique of the *risshin shusse* careerism depicted in Ozu's early 1930s work, but a positive critique, one whose point is all the more acceptable in that the national-policy message becomes a 'natural' growth of Meiji assumptions about material advancement.

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