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**THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS
OF THE OZU FAMILY:**

**Constructing Family Roles and Social Dynamics
in the Post-War Films of Ozu Yasujirô 1947–1962**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation deals with the post-war films of Japanese filmmaker Ozu Yasujirô. It focuses on the production and construction of family and gender roles in the fifteen films that Ozu directed between 1947 and 1962. These films serve as the primary source material. The study combines film history and cultural history and adds elements from sociology, gender studies and East-Asian studies. It looks at the post-war period in Japanese history as a time, when the nation undertook a large-scale renegotiation of social roles pertaining to categories such as age, gender, and social status, and highlights the role of cinema during this time of turmoil. It studies, first, the ways in which Ozu constructs the families who serve as the lead characters of his films and second, what kind of values, attitudes and notions are communicated through this depiction.

The dissertation consists of nine chapters. The first two analyse Ozu's career and the cultural framework in which he operated. They look at the director's development as an artist and track down the elements of his film-making that characterise his personal angle to film narratives and creation of characters. An optimal viewing strategy for Ozu's work, called 'comparative individualism', is also introduced. Furthermore, the chapters consider the effect of outside forces, such as the Japanese studio system and the film censorship of the occupation period. Chapters 3 to 7 cover the various roles and repeated character types of Ozu's output, as well as the cultural social expectations that are attached to these categories and points in human life. The dissertation discusses the juxtaposition between the custom of arranged marriages, and the alternative that challenges it, unions based on romantic attraction. The study also offers individual chapters to the expected life path for both men and women and what kind of arguments the films contain in the display of this everyday reality. Chapter 6 covers how Ozu depicts childhood in both the immediate post-war, and later in the more comfortable period of economic growth in the 1950s. It is then followed by an assessment of the material aspects and physical reality of domestic life present in these films in chapter 7. The final two chapters steer towards the more abstract subject matters of distance (chapter 8) and change (chapter 9), in order to gain the best possible understanding about the emotional texture woven into Ozu's character networks.

This dissertation argues that cinema has unique abilities to affect the way social roles are viewed in society. It makes the case that Ozu's films are more argumentative and political than has been previously established. The study looks at gender and family roles as social constructions that can be maintained, questioned, or challenged through film narratives. It argues that Ozu can even take part in these activities simultaneously in his attempt to capture his society and the direction in which it is moving. By focusing on the way the networks of social roles are assembled and how characters are depicted, the dissertation shows both the significance of the post-war era in the societal transformation of Japan, as well as the important role played by cultural products in this process.

KEY WORDS: Film history, Japan, Ozu Yasujirô, Gender roles, Family

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä väitöskirja käsittelee japanilaisen elokuvantekijän Ozu Yasujiro'n sodanjälkeisiä elokuvia. Se keskittyy perhe- ja sukupuoliroolien tuottamiseen ja esitystapaan niissä viidessätoista filmissä, jotka Ozu ohjasi vuosien 1947 ja 1962 välillä. Nämä elokuvat toimivat väitöskirjan pääasiallisena lähdemateriaalina. Tämä tutkimus on osa elokuva- ja kulttuurihistoriaa ja sisältää elementtejä sosiologiasta, sukupuolentutkimuksesta ja Itä-Aasian tutkimuksesta. Se tarkastelee sodanjälkeisiä vuosikymmeniä aikana, jolloin japanilainen yhteiskunta todisti laajamittaisen sosiaalisten roolien uudelleen neuvottelun iän, sukupuolen ja sosiaalisen statuksen kaltaisissa kategorioissa. Tutkimus korostaa elokuvan roolia tässä yhteiskunnallisessa myllerryksessä. Väitöskirja tutkaillee ensinnäkin tapoja, joilla Ozun elokuvien perheet rakentuvat, ja toiseksi sitä, millaisia arvoja, asenteita ja ajatuksia kuvauksen kautta välitetään.

Väitöskirja koostuu yhdeksästä luvusta. Kaksi ensimmäistä analysoivat Ozun uraa ja sitä kulttuurillista viitekehystä, jossa hän työskenteli. Ne pohtivat hänen kehitystään taiteilijana ja tuovat esiin ne elokuvanteon elementit, joissa korostuu hänen persoonallinen tapansa rakentaa elokuvanarratiiveja ja hahmoja. Tutkimus esittelee myös optimaalisen katselustrategian, jonka kautta syvenytään tähän tuotantoon, nimeltä ”vertaileva individualismi” (engl. *comparative individualism*). Lisäksi luvut pohtivat elokuvien ulkopuolisten voimien vaikutusta, kuten japanilaista studiojärjestelmää ja miehitys vuosina voimassa ollutta filmisensuuria. Luvut 3–7 kattavat erilaisten roolien ja elämänvaiheiden kirjon Ozun elokuvissa, sekä ne sosiaaliset odotukset, joita näihin kategorioihin assosioidaan. Väitöskirja pureutuu vastakkainasetteluun järjestettyjen avioliittojen ja romanttisen rakkauden pohjalta solmittujen liittojen välillä. Se myös sisältää omat lukunsa miesten ja naisten oletetuille elämänpoluille ja sille, millaisia argumentteja filmit sisältävät tämän arkitodellisuuden kuvauksessa. Kuudes luku käsittelee tapoja, joilla Ozu kuvaa lapsuutta sekä sodan päättymistä seuranneina vaikeina aikoina että 1950-luvun taloudellisessa nousukaudessa. Seitsemäs luku analysoi materiaalista todellisuutta ja fyysistä toimintaa Ozun kuvaamassa perhearjessa. Viimeiset kaksi lukua syvenyvät abstraktimpiin aiheisiin, etäisyyteen (luku 8) ja muutokseen (luku 9) saadakseen täyden ymmärryksen Ozun perheverkostojen emotionaalisesta tekstuurista.

Väitöskirja argumentoi, että elokuvalla on ainutlaatuisia kykyjä vaikuttaa tapaan, jolla sosiaaliset roolit koetaan yhteiskunnassa. Se väittää, että Ozun elokuvat ovat argumentoivampia ja poliittisempia kuin mitä on aiemmin esitetty. Teos tutkii perhe- ja sukupuolirooleja sosiaalisina konstruktioina, jota elokuvat voivat kuvastollaan ylläpitää, haastaa tai joille ne voivat esittää vaihtoehtoja. Väitöskirja esittää Ozun kykenevän näihin akteihin jopa samanaikaisesti yrityksessään vangita aikalaisyhteiskunta ja sen suunta. Keskittymällä tapoihin, joilla sosiaalisten roolien verkot luodaan ja kuinka hahmot kuvataan, väitöskirja näyttää sodanjälkeisen aikakauden merkittävyyden Japanin yhteiskunnallisessa murroksessa ja sen tärkeän roolin, jonka kulttuurituotteet näyttelivät tässä prosessissa.

AVAINSANAT: elokuvahistoria, Japani, Ozu Yasujirô, sukupuoliroolit, perheet.

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Ozu's films were adamant that whether we want it or not, time goes on around us. The composition of this dissertation took place during a period of transition in my life. During this time, I lost my mother to cancer, which served as a painful reminder about the passing nature of human existence, but also cast light on how precious life is. It further motivated me to pursue life through my own creative individuality – much like Ozu did in his time. For this, and for many other things, I am eternally grateful for my mother. My father, my sister, my brother and various other relatives also supported me in beautiful ways during these years. I am very glad that the concepts of distance and change that are tackled in this dissertation have not eroded these family networks, which greatly improve the quality of my life.

When I started working on this dissertation, I was a lad of 24 and now, as I put the finishing touches to it, have somehow morphed into a bearded, beer-bellied 29-year-old. One could make the case that during this period I left behind my care-free *days of youth*. Like many Ozu characters, I grew tired of the bustling city environment and moved to the peaceful rural countryside, where my thoughts have endless space to wander. Then again, like Ozu's male characters, I have maintained much of the mischievous energy of my youth, through which I look at the world and question everything. Ozu and I are also kindred spirits in the way alcohol has fuelled our creativity. I think if he knew how much time his scholar spent in pubs over the course of these years, he would be very pleased indeed. Therefore, I want to send my best wishes to the various pubs frequented by me during the last decade from Pikku Havanna in Turku to Mack Ølhallen in Tromsø, from Eskolan baari in Kannus to Kymppikerho in Ylivieska, and from Rainbow Bar and Grill in Los Angeles to Pub Kyttälä in Tampere – and most of all Gastropub Hiivari in Turku, my official home away from home. Whenever I have been in need of a break, you have allowed me my moment of leisure and therein kept my creative juices flowing. Cheers for that!

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In Sievi,
21 May 2024.
Topi E. Timonen

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Introduction

Background: Ozu's films and post-war history

Ozu Yasujirō¹ (1903–1963) was a man who understood the cultural importance of film. From an early age he was a devoted movie fan, who loved cinema's ability to summon different worlds before our eyes and to expose us to distant cultures. He especially loved American films and hoped for the cinema of his native Japan to develop, in quality, so as to match the American output. Ozu lived a colourful life. He never married nor had any children, but instead spent his days watching films and drinking with his large group of friends. The amounts of alcohol he consumed turned his life into the stuff of legends.² He died on his sixtieth birthday, after witnessing the most intense decades of his country's modernisation. During those decades, he was briefly a teacher, and briefly a soldier, but mostly and most importantly, he was a filmmaker.

In this study, I explore how Ozu's films depict family and gender in post-war Japan, the way Ozu sews his narratives together, and what he manages to achieve with the full tapestry of his works. Through this, we can gain a better understanding of cinema's ability to participate in the renegotiation of social roles and conventions, as well as the power of films as ideological raw material, from which the audience can draw ideas and further develop their notions of the world and the self. During his career, Ozu directed fifty-four films, thirty-seven of which have survived to this day. Fifteen of these films were made in the post-war period and form my primary source material. All of Ozu's surviving films are set in their contemporary present and the great majority belong to the genre *shomin-geki*, which means drama that focuses on the everyday lives and the home environment of ordinary Japanese people, often with urban, middle-class identities. The director spent nearly his whole career from 1926 to 1963 in the services of the same studio, Shochiku, that specialised in depictions of the present day (*gendai-geki*), often with happy but unresolved endings that 'obscured the points that could have led to a more

¹ In this study, Japanese names appear in the traditional Japanese form: family name first.

² Richie 1974, 26.

meaningful social insight'.³ Therefore the way these films present normality, both in terms of characters and situations, becomes a telling testament to the time they were made, apt material for a historical reading of contemporary social roles.

I inspect the works of Ozu from a cultural historian's perspective, by studying the films in correlation with the society and historical period that produced them. Ozu's films are known for the juxtaposition of conservative Japanese values and modern outlooks in everyday life. In them, Ozu depicted fathers arranging marriages for their daughters, who in turn face the sadness of leaving their childhood homes. He depicted middle-aged businessmen pondering their unexciting existence. He showed his audience elderly people approaching the end of their lives and young schoolboys only just discovering the nature of things. The audience got to witness families being broken apart, families being formed, functional families and dysfunctional ones, smaller troubles and larger crises. Ozu's filmography includes both dramatic and comedic works, with most of his films forming their flavour by mixing these elements together. He was well known for disliking films with plotlines, a notion that has been greatly debated among scholars.⁴ Instead, the films draw their recognisable inner realism from the pathos and the nuances of mundane things and ordinary lives. Donald Richie, a famous scholar of Japanese film, has estimated that the charm of these films lies in their ability to make the audience love the characters presented to us.⁵ While this is evidently the case, in this study I suggest that the process of engaging the audience within these films goes far beyond this, with more complex and wide-ranging tactics for the weaving of narrative texture.⁶ The works continue engaging new audiences to this day, inspiring both admiration and research, and Ozu is regularly considered one of the greatest directors in world cinema.⁷

Ozu's post-war filmography is characterised by its seemingly calm composure, but the films were nevertheless made during a turbulent period. In the decades following the defeat in World War II, Japan underwent a series of societal reforms and changes that transformed the fabric of society. Co-operating with the American occupation forces, Japan set course on a road to a democratised, pacifistic welfare-

³ Joo 2017, 194.

⁴ Schrader 1972, 19. Kathe Geist (1992, 93) argues that there has been a level of misunderstanding surrounding these kinds of comments by Ozu, and Ozu in fact only hated '*obvious plots*' (italics by Geist).

⁵ Richie 1974, 191.

⁶ Film scholar Murray Smith (1995, 5) has, for instance, proposed a more nuanced structure of sympathy governing the several distinct levels of audience engagement. See: Smith 1995.

⁷ In 2012, *Sight and Sound* magazine conducted a poll, which asked 358 acclaimed directors for their favourite film of all time. Ozu's *Tokyo Story* received the most votes, and his previous *Late Spring* was fifteenth in the ranking.

state. The first two post-war decades brought about many changes in the shared everyday life and the values of the Japanese people. A central transition was the slow but evident transformation of family roles. This was indicated by early legislations about, among other things, women receiving the right to vote in 1945. In the post-war years, the ways in which the Japanese people viewed family roles, marriage, parenthood, and education and the general expectations that individuals received based on their age, gender, and class, were challenged by new, more liberal alternatives.

This is also highly visible in the movies produced at the time. While analysing the wartime film culture, film historian Hori Hikari writes that ‘film and visual culture served as an important arena for negotiations of national identity formation, for enactment of citizens’ desire and pleasure, and for dialogue between Japanese practises and global cultures’.⁸ This continued to be the case after the war, and if anything, the intensity of the negotiation, the need for new ideas and ways of seeing oneself increased during the transitional period. During this time, cinema was the most popular source of mass entertainment.⁹ Besides being popular entertainment, cinema filled an important need in the presentation of current reality, as well as the documentation of the ever-changing ways of institutions and individuals. The artform possesses unique abilities to take an active role in the shaping of society, by offering audiences behavioural models and social commentary, through which it can alter the way reality is perceived, support the existing status quo or propose change. This is why I believe it to be very important to study films as a platform, and an outlet for societal discussion.

Research problem and disposition

This study analyses the ways in which Ozu’s films depict family roles in post-war society, how these depictions are constructed, and what the films communicate with their audience through this. I am interested in the ways in which the filmmakers deal with the changing values, and how the thematic content of the films gets positioned within this societal transformation. I view the term ‘role’ to mean the different categories that affect the way one is viewed and can exist in a society: for Ozu, these include a set of possibilities, expectations, obligations, and interactions. These roles are cultural constructions that get assigned to a person based on things such as gender, age, position in one’s family network and other social connections. The undertaking of the roles by various individuals, both similar and different from one

⁸ Hori 2017, 5.

⁹ Yomota 2019, 110. Only in the mid-to-late 1960s would television grow to be the dominant force.

another, is the central narrative mechanism that gets displayed in Ozu's films. While Ozu presents these roles as permanent at their basic level, the way they have to adapt to new times and constantly re-define themselves is what I call 'dynamics'. Within these dynamics, the cinematic imagery is employed to assess the contemporary sentiments and social needs of the individuals, for whom the films were made. According to historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki:

'via differing depictions of the ideal family, notions of femininity and masculinity have been deployed and combined in various ways to create visions of the nation which suited particular historical and political contexts.'¹⁰

While Ozu does not necessarily frame any character within his filmic output as an ideal, the modes of behaviour that we witness strive to appear normal and relatable in the context of the times. This presumed sense of normalcy adds an argumentative edge to the way social roles are executed and the way dynamics get played out within the imagined cinematic space, inviting us to look at the bigger picture that is formed by the multitude of films covering similar narrative ground.

I argue that the increasingly individualist way of viewing people was a key factor in this renegotiation. I do not try to claim that Japanese people lacked individuality prior to 1945, but that individualism flourished both in post-war society as well as the cinema it produced. As Americans viewed nationalism to be the main reason for the Pacific war, a central goal of the occupation policy was to make the Japanese people view themselves on a more individualist manner.¹¹ Ozu himself was a man driven by his individuality, with his films being the central manifestation of this sentiment.¹² Through this, his body of work gains a temporal intensity that allows the ordinary things depicted in the films to resonate as deeply meaningful commentary about the way the surrounding society is changing, providing audiences with alternative ways to view life overall. My hypothesis is that the films offer examples of individual agency and present their audiences with ingredients with which they can construct and evolve their own selfhood: this process transcends the grasp of the films to also affect real, living people. Film historian Jennifer Coates has viewed this display of alternatives as a central feature of Japanese audiences' engagement with cinema during the post-war decades. According to Coates:

'Following the narratives of particular characters and stars, both onscreen and off, presented a variety of lifestyles and opinions. In many cases, the ways of

¹⁰ Morris-Suzuki 1997, 135.

¹¹ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 160–161.

¹² Kometani 2021, 49.

living, and ways of being a person, presented onscreen were narrated as suggesting alternatives to the ways of thinking and behaving that were observable at home.’¹³

The films were not made in a vacuum, but instead responded to the issues that characterised contemporary family culture, and through their imagery, allowed the audiences to mirror their own lives and draw conclusions with this background.

The unusually character-driven manner in which these films have been constructed directs the audience to adopt a unique way of viewing them. In Chapter 1.4, I present the term *comparative individualism* as a core mechanism for Ozu’s production of the family system: by showing us a multitude of individuals in similar societal roles, the films relay an understanding of the options and limitations that they attach to these categories. I propose that Ozu’s works employ comparative strategies to such an extent that a new way of viewing films is required, to fully understand the greater narrative playing through the post-war filmography. Much of this study focuses on the social expectations given to these different family roles: what is included in the depiction of different social groups and what kind of a cultural outlook over society these films produce in their imagery and narratives. Is the intent within these films to try force people into certain moulds, or is the social imagery instead displayed to evoke criticism? As they undertake these roles, comply with convention or challenge it through rebellion, what kinds of feelings and sentiments do the characters display and how do the films rationalise this? The purpose of this study is to explore film as a cultural medium in a historical moment, able to project the direction of the surrounding society, and actively shape the national family culture into a more modernised form. Along with social roles and categories, this is a study of storytelling, and the way Ozu’s body of work paints the human condition.

I use Ozu’s filmography in the constructivist sense and maintain that these constructions stem from, and must be contextualised within the historical development of post-war Japan. I agree with political scholar Benedict Anderson’s famous argument about countries being imagined communities. According to Anderson, the concepts of nation and nationality are cultural artefacts.¹⁴ Mass media, later also including cinema, affects our notions of the world, and allows us to share a communal feeling with others of the same nationality, even though we have never met most of these people.¹⁵ Thus, through shared language, Japanese, and shared social meanings, those of the Japanese culture, Japanese films including Ozu’s, serve as a mirror of nationalistic reflection to the national audience, for whom they were

¹³ Coates 2022, 96.

¹⁴ Anderson (1983) 2007, 37.

¹⁵ Anderson (1983) 2007, 39.

initially made, even if the films have subsequently gained a much wider audience abroad. As the films are artificially constructed, so is in a broader sense the national feeling that they generate, and which exists among their target audience. Much like the concept of a nation, I view family and gender roles to be social constructions that are never finished, but instead exist in a constant state of change, or even that of evolvment: this is also visible in the films I study, though they also express unease about the unwritten future.

By focusing on cinema's role as a provider of imagery about roles and expectations, we can study the process of renegotiation and the meanings it can produce. By renegotiation, I refer to cinema's ability to engage the audience in a dialogue, in which previously held opinions are turned around in different ways, questioned, and perhaps presented with alternatives. Another term I use when talking about roles and social expectations is 'producing'. This refers to the industrially constructed nature of cinema, as well as the socially constructed nature of the concepts tackled in the films.¹⁶ By these terms I mean to cast spotlight in the process of Ozu's filmmaking: how the films are crafted from the surrounding society, what is included and what is left out, and how the finalised product appears in comparison to the society, and the people who view it. The dialogue that the films have with their audiences, their reception and later history, should be viewed as important, as the production history and content. Often this is not the case.¹⁷ Although they may currently seem to enjoy universal acclaim, Ozu's films have historically evoked a variety of reactions. Their dedication to mundanity has been praised in the West but challenged among Japanese critics and younger filmmakers.¹⁸ In his lifetime, the major criticism that Ozu faced for his work, was his attempt to present Japan in a way viewed to be unrealistic by his countrymen.¹⁹ Especially in the late 1950s and early '60s, younger filmmakers protested against Ozu's dedication to form, his alleged catering to middle-class tastes, as well as the very definition of Japanese-ness presented in his films.²⁰ We can thus gather that the question of realism is also

¹⁶ According to philosopher and film scholar I.C. Jarvie (1978, 140), reality is so infinitely wide that the problem of its cinematic reproduction is which parts to select for depiction, as no film can cover it all, and all films are therefore partial. Mikko Lehtonen (1996, 108) has made the case, that cultural texts do not attempt to copy reality, but instead produce reality textually.

¹⁷ Salmi 1993, 37.

¹⁸ Richie 1974, xiii.

¹⁹ Donald Richie (1974, 6) takes up the criticism that Ozu's films and the bourgeois lifestyle depicted in them are 'too pretty, too neat', but does not cite a source. He also states that Ozu was frequently criticised for being old-fashioned and reactionary, or lacking interest in societal problems (Richie 1974, 69).

²⁰ Bordwell 1988, 11 & 15.

a debated human construct, and can lead to a polarised discussion, when applied to narratives that are at core, fiction.

The disposition of this study has been constructed to investigate family roles as social categories and the films' repeated motifs as comments about the direction of history. The first two chapters of this study introduce the time period and lay out details about Japanese film production, Ozu's career, and the way this study views his filmography. In so doing, my aim is to frame Ozu's position amidst his native film industry and to showcase how his works both contributed to the larger production customs of Japanese filmmaking, and also considerably differed from what was being produced by other studios and other directors. I propose that the major narrative component of his filmography is his unique brand of everyday realism that he achieves through comparison-based storytelling, and that the audience must adjust their way of viewing films to accommodate this. While it is crucial to understand the aspects that are 'distinctly Ozu', it is simultaneously important to avoid the notion of the films having been devoid of other influences. Chapter 2 begins by analysing Ozu's position of power, in relation to the themes of his filmmaking, and then extends the conversation to consider the system of censorship, which affected what was possible for the filmmaker in the first place. This also allows us to understand the historical context of politics and values, in which Ozu had to operate while making his films.

In Chapters 3 to 7, I analyse the specific representations of different post-war family roles. The narrative element that is probably associated the most with Ozu's work is the marriage of a young daughter. I analyse the contrast of arranged marriages and love matches as portrayed in Ozu's films and offer the needed historical background for understanding the politics of Ozu's worldbuilding. I lay out the dynamics through which marriages come to be in Ozu's films and consider the motivations people have for wanting to encourage people into marriage – or for themselves to escape the institution. I conclude the chapter with a look into the curious way Ozu voices sentiments about divorces and second marriages and how this aligns with the larger depiction of domestic marital culture. After this, I give men and women their own individual chapters, and study the social obligations that the films tie into these binary gender roles. Through this, we gain an understanding about the present social order and pick up on the ways the films can slip in criticism. I am interested both in the socio-economic structures that enforce the depicted system as well as the emotional state of the people involved: I scrutinise what everyday life is like for both men and women, and whether the films present these normative patterns to champion or to challenge them.

This is followed by chapters dedicated to the inspection of childhood, as well as the material and physical sides of married life. Through depicting children both in the poverty of the immediate post-war years and the later, wealthier period that

followed, Ozu captures how the culture and the values of the Japanese have developed during this time, and also expresses worry about the nation's future prospects. The theme of consumerism pops up both with the director's comedic framing of modern childhood, as well as his adult protagonists, whose thinking is also affected by the joys brought by the little things. Chapter 7 studies the Japanese home both as a material space and a narrative stage, on which the characters appear at their most intimate. I analyse their domestic behaviour both through their physical interaction, as well as the wardrobe that plays a surprisingly crucial role in the framing of character within Ozu's films. Through these themes and angles we gain an understanding about the characters' mundane existence both during normal times, and periods of crisis. The director's ability to simultaneously romanticise certain aspects of domestic life while mourning the presence of others will also become evident through this analysis, guiding us to consider the ambiguity of the depiction.

The final chapters (8 to 9) suggest new focus points within the director's filmic output by exploring more abstract subject matters, in order to get a clear picture of the Japanese hopes and fears about the future. Chapter 8 considers the different forms of distance, that are shown to separate individuals from their loved ones, thereby loosening the ties that bind the depicted family networks together. This is done in order to properly understand how Ozu's characters view themselves, their communality and the direction of history. The final chapter dives into the concept of change to view Ozu's post-war films as a cinematic watershed signifying the end of an era. I am fascinated by the temporal awareness of the director's filmmaking, which continuously appears to anticipate the approaching end while also attempting to capture the beauty of the fleeing moment. In terms of the family networks and role expectations, the concepts of distance and change prove themselves crucial for our understanding of the narrative stage, and the way mundane existence is framed within Ozu's works.

My hypothesis is that through close reading, comparison, and contextualisation, Ozu's films will reveal themselves to be more representative, and more argumentative, than they appear at first glance. I also suspect that Ozu's films are not as apolitical as they can first appear, and my cultural-historical reading of them sets out to examine, how Ozu uses the multitude of unique individuals to comparatively build a discussion about society and its inhabitants. By focusing on the social commentary included within these everyday narratives, this study shows the significance of the post-war era in terms of social progress and individual freedoms, highlighting the role of cultural products in this process. I argue that though Ozu's films are fictional, the filmmaker is trying to create a world with coherent inner realism: the films' own recognisable way to present *Japan* and *Japanese-ness*.

Sources and methodology

This study is interdisciplinary between cultural history and film studies, but also draws from theoretical insights in the fields of sociology, gender studies, and East-Asian studies. Before laying out the framework of scholarly literature that has benefitted my work, I will give central focus to the films that serve as my source material and the methodology through which I inspect them. The primary sources are the fifteen films that Ozu Yasujirô directed after the war. They are, in chronological order, *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (Nagaya shinshiroku, 1947), *A Hen in the Wind* (Kaze no naka no mendori, 1948), *Late Spring* (Banshun, 1949), *The Munekata Sisters* (Munekata kyodai, 1950), *Early Summer* (Bakushû, 1951), *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* (Ochazuke no aji, 1952), *Tokyo Story* (Tôkyô monogatari, 1953), *Early Spring* (Sôshun, 1956), *Tokyo Twilight* (Tôkyô Boshoku, 1957), *Equinox Flower* (Higanbana, 1958), *Good Morning* (Ohayô, 1959), *Floating Weeds* (Ukikusa, 1959), *Late Autumn* (Akibiyori, 1960), *The End of Summer* (Kohayagawa-ke no aki, 1961) and *An Autumn Afternoon* (Sanma no aji, 1962). When viewed alongside one another, these films cover the entire spectrum of life's changes, and the director gives birth to a stylistic cohesion in the presentation of his everyday reality by also continuously collaborating with the same actors and the same staff. All of the post-war releases were produced by the studio Shochiku, except for *The Munekata Sisters* (Shintoho), *Floating Weeds* (Daiei) and *The End of Summer* (Toho). I refer to these films by the English language titles, with which they have most famously been distributed in the West.²¹

Dividing Ozu's catalogue into dramas and comedies does not really do justice to these films, as even the darkest of them have scenes of comedic brilliance, and even the most light-hearted have a trace of sadness within. That being said, of the post-war films *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*, *Early Summer*, *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*, *Equinox Flower*, *Good Morning*, and *Late Autumn* would be the films that I personally view to be more oriented towards comedic storytelling. *A Hen in the Wind*, *Tokyo Story*, *Early Spring* and *Tokyo Twilight* are the most serious of these works. I would suggest that one of the issues with many earlier scholars of Japanese cinema has been the way individual films get highlighted, as this special attention

²¹ Some of the titles are quite direct translations, while others like *Sanma no aji* (literally 'The Taste of Sanma') have taken poetic license by turning into *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962). The English title for *Nagaya shinshiroku* (1947), *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*, has widely been judged, as the film is not about any one gentleman, but instead an elderly woman and a young boy. David Bordwell re-named the film 'A Who's Who of the Tenement', a title with which Edward Fowler also refers to it. Yet for the sake of clarity, as the film is still distributed as *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*, I will refer to it as such, or 'Record'. Bordwell 1988, 296. Fowler 2000, 274.

gives their depiction of the ordinary a weight that can shift our notions of the director's overall thesis. By viewing the post-war filmography as a corpus and dismissing the qualitative differences between the films, we can better shed light on the patterns and contradictions within Ozu's storytelling. My focusing on the post-war films is also by no means a qualitative assessment of Ozu's work. Due to the length of this study, it proved more sensible to focus on one historical period, and to keep the director's previous filmography as a frame of reference, from which we can analyse the post-war changes to the family culture. I also argue that thematically the director's pre-war works differ from the post-war, since the early films are more centred around societal modernisation, and the late films bring it to the more individualist family context.

Ozu's lead characters were usually close to his own age while making the films.²² This helps to create a sense of natural aging and advancement to his filmography. Film scholar Kometani Shinnosuke remarks that Ozu's post-war focus on middle-aged protagonists 'alone makes him an exceptional director, unlike any other in the world'.²³ His late filmography would often return to themes of his earlier films to rework their narratives to the present moment. Though this practise has been highlighted specifically with Ozu and his remakes of his old films, Ozu was not the only one doing so. In the 1950s, many studios remade old hit films from the 1930s because they were likely to be hits again and the technology had advanced.²⁴ In Ozu's case overall, the thematic similarities within his body of work support a comparison-based mode of studying them. Ozu's filmmaking itself was in many ways a linear process. After he finally agreed to make talkies in 1936, he never went back to making silent films. Likewise, when his pictures gained colour in 1958's *Equinox Flower*, he would never again make a film in black and white.

For the purposes of cultural history, other sources must be used alongside the films to create a scholarly contextualisation.²⁵ In order to gain an understanding of the larger picture, I have built my contextualisation thematically. Besides the comparative analysis of the inter-familial roles and dynamics, I compare the films with one another, as well as consider them in relation to societal developments and earlier scholarly literature. I use films made in Japan during the same time by other filmmakers as a frame of reference: a cultural background that enables thematic comparisons. This helps to show, how Ozu's work differs from his colleagues'. For instance, film critic Robin Wood has noted that Ozu's subtle feminism is often left

²² Bordwell 1988, 60.

²³ Kometani 2021, 131.

²⁴ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 271. Though it was not always the same director doing the remake, most of them were much more direct reproductions than the Ozu reworkings.

²⁵ Salmi 1993, 56.

unnoticed.²⁶ This, most likely, has to do with the more intense social outcries presented in the films of Mizoguchi Kenji or Naruse Mikio. Thus, by taking other major forces in Japanese cinema into consideration, Ozu's work and his position within the post-war film industry can be better understood.²⁷ Although my work here narrows itself to the Japanese movie industry and one director, themes such as nationalism, colonialism, and modernisation were common ones not only for Ozu's Japanese colleagues, but also for many filmmakers working in other East Asian film cultures.²⁸ My focus on Ozu therefore does not intend to suggest a case of Japanese exceptionalism, but instead shed light on the narrative tactics that came to form a unique and highly exciting assessment of these themes within the historical context of post-war Japan.

The central method of this study is the close reading, or close viewing, of Ozu's post-war filmography. By close-reading, I do not simply refer to the classic definition of a 'careful examination of the text itself', but instead a more complex process. While Ozu has often been subjected to *stylistic* close reading, my approach to his filmography comes in the form of *thematic* close reading. The disposition of my work features individual chapters for different family roles and different narrative patterns, and in so doing, directs the flow of the hermeneutic analysis.²⁹ I direct my close reading to give special focus to the elements that get repeated within Ozu's everyday depictions, whether they be role patterns, storyline similarities, or common sentiments evoked by the narratives. As Jennifer Coates has rightly observed, repetitive subject matter is not only a characteristic of Ozu, but of post-war Japanese cinema overall.³⁰ Yet I would suggest that Ozu's handling of it displays a more coherent, consistent, and internally communicative cultural text than that of other *shomin-geki* directors. By aligning plot threads and depicted elements with their similar counterparts in other films, while simultaneously assessing the differences and similarities through the historical continuum, the cohesion and conflict within the Ozu filmography reveal a nuanced network of role expectations and the broader implications established by this mode of storytelling.

²⁶ Wood 1986, 552.

²⁷ Literary scholar Mikko Lehtonen (1996, 151 & 166) has posited, that our understanding of the meanings formed by cultural products develops through contextual information, which we gain by subjecting ourselves to various texts of the same category, in my case, various Japanese films.

²⁸ Yau 2009, xviii.

²⁹ Traditionally, hermeneutic analysis has tackled questions such as how meaning gets assigned to a text, the role of the author's intentions within the produced meanings, how the meanings change with history, and what kind of role the reader plays in the formulation of meaning (Lehtonen 1996, 177).

³⁰ See: Coates 2016.

While some formalists like David Bordwell have dismissed the role of interpretation as part of film analysis, later scholars like John Gibbs and Douglas Pye have theorised that ‘to be concerned with film style and its significance is inevitably to be involved in interpretation’, this interpretation also ‘being inseparably linked’ to evaluation.³¹ Of course, in order to achieve verifiable basis for discussion, interpretation must be rooted in the observable detail of the film.³² In Ozu’s case, the ambiguity within the storytelling highlights the importance of dialogue between the author and the reader, the filmmaker and his audience: one could even suggest that Ozu forces his viewer to fill in the gaps with an interpretation of the narrative meanings.³³ Of course, this means that the films contain different potential meanings for different audiences, and, as we shall see in the following chapters, this has given birth to a lively discussion surrounding the filmmaker and his body of work.

I have dedicated chapters to those elements of everyday life that I view to be central for Ozu’s works, and the smaller subchapters further divide the focus on elements within the films’ internal harmony.³⁴ As opposed to narrower modes of close reading, my approach combines the study of small details with that of wider themes, while striving to pay attention to both the repeated motifs that establish the concept of the mundane and the exceptions that shake these foundations. Not only are the actions of the characters put under scrutiny, but also the motivations and the mixed emotions that affect their existence as individuals and as members of a community. Though Ozu is often studied for his technical genius, my interpretive framework highlights the elements that are visible in the finished works, the comments Ozu makes of his contemporary reality, the connections between the narrative patterns, and their communicative relationship with a possible audience.³⁵ A central element of *comparative individualism* is to not only compare the characters in a singular Ozu film, but also Ozu’s films with each other. I inspect the ways similar roles and narrative patterns have been presented in different films, and by examining these sequences side by side, strive to showcase the subtle arguments revealed by comparison-based close reading. It goes without saying, that such a viewing strategy, which heavily depends on revisiting films and scenes time and again, is a luxury of

³¹ Gibbs & Pye 2005, 2 & 5.

³² Gibbs & Pye 2005, 4.

³³ Mikko Lehtonen (1996, 152) maintains that overall, the meanings within a cultural text come to be through the reader’s dialogue with the text.

³⁴ By close reading, I do not mean analysing the films shot-by-shot in their chronological order, since such elaborate reading is not always necessary. Salmi 1993, 143.

³⁵ John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (2005, 2) have summarised the last few decades of film scholarship to find new focus points in representational issues, questions of ideological orientation, as well as ‘the investigation of modes of address and the development of forms and subjects in cinema’. My approach utilises much of this with the subject of Ozu.

the modern times. Ozu's initial audiences, who witnessed these films in cinemas when they were new, had far more limited possibilities to analyse the core motifs and repetitive structures of his storytelling. Therefore, revisiting these films during the age of DVDs and streaming grants an advantage and allows a deeper understanding of both the entirety of the director's oeuvre, as well as the details within individual works.

In the larger context of cultural studies, my way of viewing characters in fictional films draws from theory by Richard Dyer, who has argued that the way social groups are treated in cultural products is directly linked to the way they are treated in real life, discrimination being instituted by representation.³⁶ It is fascinating to apply Dyer's representational theory to Ozu's body of work, as it reveals these films to be more political than they appear on a surface level. In addition to film studies, the scholarly framing of this work draws from other fields, such as history and sociology. Throughout this work, the concept of performativity, as coined by Judith Butler, also aligns itself with the way I inspect the behaviour of the characters in these films.³⁷ I view that the films renegotiate Japanese gender roles by showing the audience the everyday routines and behaviours of the characters, and through these patterns constantly crafting the relationship between individual identities and social roles in a wider sense. Concepts like gender and sexuality are therefore formed through actions, or the lack thereof, instead of existing naturally.

Ozu studies is a wide, international field, where much of the writing and communication is conducted in English, but I should note that a language barrier has affected how I have been able to investigate Ozu and his films. Although a student of Japanese language for many years, I do not possess sufficient reading skill of Kanji characters to properly delve into Japanese sources. Furthermore, a case of astonishingly bad timing was involved, as the writing of this study happened to take place simultaneously with the COVID-19 pandemic, preventing me from going to Japan during the writing process. While saddened by this, I choose to look at these setbacks as a silver lining that opens a direction, by which I can further pursue my research in years to come. Not being a contemporary countryman of the director's, I view these films from a different cultural context and with a different background than their original audience, with awareness of the afterlife these films have had

³⁶ Dyer (1993) 2002a, 1. According to Dyer, 'the representation of women and other oppressed groups was, and by and large still is, a relentless parade of insults'.

³⁷ Butler (1990) 2007, 34.

since Ozu's days and the new ways that have been introduced to their inspection.³⁸ For example, Ozu never mentioned the concept of *mono no aware*,³⁹ yet legions of writers have used it as the universally agreed-upon term for the aftertaste of an Ozu dish. The term is most often defined as the melancholy feeling felt while acknowledging the transient nature of all things,⁴⁰ and while it is a fixture of Japanese art in general, Ozu fans have in particular treasured it as part of their vocabulary.

Deciding the precise terminology within scholarship is, in a wider sense, an on-going process for those studying the cultural history of Japan. According to Tessa Morris-Suzuki:

‘Historians of Japan become accustomed to dealing with slippery concepts. They wrestle with definitions of development, modernization, and Westernization; they worry over the application to the Japanese experience of concepts like feudalism, fascism, and democracy.’⁴¹

Morris-Suzuki has, for instance, opted to use the word *traditions* in plural form, instead of using generalising concepts like ‘Japanese culture’. By traditions, she means ‘words, phrases and bodies of thought which are passed on from one generation to the next and are in the process constantly reinterpreted, reworked and interwoven.’⁴² Though I do not use the word in the plural, I view it similarly in this study. A word must also be added about the terminology of historical periods.⁴³ In this study, the term ‘wartime’ refers to the period of World War II (1939–1945), even though Japan’s militaristic expansion to continental Asia had begun decades

³⁸ The hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer stresses the importance of dialogue in the analysis of cultural products, which can transcend historicity and language. The historian engages in dialogue with the tradition, the sum of preserved texts from the past, and the dialogue itself gives birth to the questions that carry the research forward. Due to the nature of this interaction and the fact that historical tradition can only articulate itself through the analysis of the historian, historical knowledge is always also knowledge about our present selves. Ollitervo 2015, 198–200.

³⁹ Richie 1974, 52; 175.

⁴⁰ Bordwell 1988, 28. Joan Mellen (1976, ix) has argued that the historical identification is the central aspect of all Japanese cinema: ‘Above all, the Japanese film has captured the trauma of a culture in transition.’

⁴¹ Morris Suzuki 1997, 9.

⁴² Morris-Suzuki 1997, 6.

⁴³ The Japanese have their own division of historical periods. The important ones for this work are the Meiji period (1868–1912), the Taishō period (1912–1926), and the Shōwa period (1926–1989), which are timed by the reigns of emperors. Due to the long reign of Hirohito especially, these periods are not accurate enough to function as terminology for a modern historian.

earlier.⁴⁴ The term ‘post-war’ (Jap. *Sengo*) and the duration of the period to which it refers, are also heavily debated among historians and the Japanese.⁴⁵ For the purposes of clarity, I have decided to divide the terminology. I use the term ‘the immediate post-war’ to describe the period from the end of the war to 1948.⁴⁶ The term ‘the occupation period’ self-evidently refers to the period from 1945 to 1952, when the occupation ended. Finally, I use the term ‘the post-war decades’ to refer to the time from 1945 to 1963, when Ozu died, in order to have a term for a period that covers Ozu’s entire post-war filmography. Unless specified otherwise, by using the term ‘younger generation’, I refer to characters and people, who were too young to have fought in the war, or to have given birth during it. ‘Older generation’ refers to people who lived through the war experience as adults. I am aware that the division is both imprecise and loose, but it would be difficult to further subdivide characters based on their age, and the presence of a generational gap amidst Japanese people is too central a theme in Ozu’s work for us to ignore.⁴⁷

Previous research

This study has greatly benefitted from earlier scholarship on Ozu and Japanese film culture as these works provide the scholarly contextualisation for my own. Due to the director’s massive critical acclaim and popularity, Ozu has been studied from a multitude of perspectives over a lengthy period of time. Therefore, to properly contextualise the way Ozu has been interpreted, assessed, and presented by writers and scholars, these different approaches must be considered. In my scholarly pursuit, I strive to give equal attention to older, ‘classic’ analyses provided by the likes of Donald Richie, Joan Mellen and David Bordwell, as well as newer voices within Ozu studies, such as Woojeong Joo and Kathe Geist. While many of the scholars cited in this study come from an academic background, this is not always the case, and the contributions of essayists and film critics are likewise considered: after all, the critical reaction history to the Ozu canon consists of a much wider choir of voices,

⁴⁴ The scholarly timeframe in this case has less to do with the beginning of the war in Europe, and more with the 1939 Japanese film law, which turned the country’s film industry into the propagandistic arm of the nation state.

⁴⁵ Joo 2017, 142–143.

⁴⁶ In terms of films, this covers *A Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (1947) and *A Hen in the Wind* (1948). The Japan of these two films is still clearly coping with the aftermath of the war, whereas *Late Spring* (1949) shows things for the most part having returned to normal, or at least, a new normal.

⁴⁷ Of course, the elderly will still be referred to as the elderly, adults as adults, and so on. Kathe Geist (1992, 92) has observed that usually an Ozu film features the representation of four generations: ‘underaged children, young adults, middle-aged parents and senior citizens’.

than just the academic corner. Whereas the time of composition and the nationality and background of the author affect the way that the films are viewed, and this must be kept in mind, cultural studies hugely benefit from this variety. At different times, different elements get highlighted, and thus the scholarly chronology viewed with a wider scope is required as the ground level, which new interpretations add and build upon.

The international field of studies dedicated to Japanese film culture is relatively young, as in the West, Japanese cinema was discovered late.⁴⁸ Though a few⁴⁹ Japanese films had been seen, for instance competing at foreign film festivals, for decades these were rare curiosities that failed to spark a broader interest to this distant film culture. Things changed after Kurosawa Akira's *Rashomon* (Rashômon, 1950) won the Golden Lion at the 1951 Venice film festival. Due to the overnight interest, Japanese films started to get distributed to foreign countries before there was a theoretical or critical context through which foreigners could properly understand them.⁵⁰ The central pioneer of Japanese film studies was American film historian Donald Richie (1924–2013). David Bordwell, one of the foremost authorities on Ozu, recognises Richie for his special role, noting that Richie 'almost single-handedly introduced Ozu to Western viewers'.⁵¹ In 1959, Richie wrote *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*, together with Joseph L. Anderson. The book introduced much of Japanese cinema to Westerners for the first time, also offering a much-needed historical contextualisation of the country's film industry. Richie later continued paving the way with his 1974 *Ozu*, still the most oft-referenced work about the director. In his 1959 foreword to *The Japanese Film*, Kurosawa Akira recognised the need for the book:

⁴⁸ Then again, film histories overall were not very common before the 1950s.

⁴⁹ Naruse Mikio's *Wife! Be Like a Rose!* (Tsuma yo bara no yô ni, 1935) is often considered to be the first Japanese 'talkie' to be shown in the United States, where it received a cold response from the audience. After Japan aligned itself with the Axis Powers, the country gained entrance to the Venice film festival. Sasaki Kôjirô's *Moon Over the Ruins* (Kôjô no tsuki, 1937) and Shimizu Hiroshi's *Children of the Wind* (Kaze no naka no kodomo, 1937) both competed for the 'Mussolini Cup' at the 1938 Venice Festival, whereas Tasaka Tomotaka's propagandistic war film *Five Scouts* (Gonin no sekkôhei, 1938) actually won a prize the following year, in the category of 'Popular Culture Ministry Cup'. For Japanese film networks in East Asia (especially Hong Kong), see: Yau 2009.

⁵⁰ Nygren 2007, viii–ix.

⁵¹ Bordwell 1988, ix.

‘Yet, though pleased, happy and proud, many of us within the industry have come to feel that, while apparently liking what it has seen, the West actually knows all too little of both Japan and the Japanese cinema as they really are.’⁵²

Kurosawa argued that while the West had enjoyed historical films such as *Rashomon*, Japanese films set in the present-day still awaited to be discovered.⁵³ In their own introduction, Anderson and Richie note that Japanese cinema would have deserved international attention long before *Rashomon*.⁵⁴ Hence, from the very beginning, the scholarly writing about Japanese cinema has been characterised by a sense of correcting the previous wrongs by bringing new evidence, new (old) films into the light.

Richie’s writings present Japanese cinema as a historical continuum, but also feature the qualitative assessment of the films.⁵⁵ Through his work, Japanese film studies was from the start centred on films that were felt to have artistic merit. The discipline was also heavily focused on so-called *auteur*-directors, even if the term itself was not used: *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* was dedicated to ‘that little band of men who have tried to make the Japanese film industry what every film industry should be: a director’s cinema’.⁵⁶ Thus, besides introducing films to a broader, international audience, the writing about Japanese cinema has also included this attempt to create a historical canon of masterworks, to which later writers have attempted to add films by writing about them. This canon was built gradually, as for decades no other comprehensive historical account of Japanese cinema challenged *The Japanese Cinema*, which was published in an expanded edition in 1982.⁵⁷ Since then, such books have been written, but the notion of a singular history for a national cinema has also been challenged: in her book *A New History of Japanese Cinema: A Century of Narrative Film* (2005), film scholar Isolde Standish writes that instead of *history*, we should be talking about *histories*, since there is no ‘grand narrative’ that would take all the facts and put them in the definitive order.⁵⁸

Ozu in particular has been studied from a multitude of angles and the time that has elapsed since the writing of some of these works has enabled additional perspectives for the later Ozu scholars. David Bordwell’s 1988 work *Ozu and the*

⁵² Kurosawa (1959) 1982, 13.

⁵³ Kurosawa (1959) 1982, 13.

⁵⁴ Anderson & Richie 1982, 15.

⁵⁵ I would also like to note that his writing is often absolutely beautiful and captures the joy of discovery better than that of almost any film scholar.

⁵⁶ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 5. ‘Band of Men’ as a term also excludes Japan’s first female directors Sakane Tazuko and Tanaka Kinuyo, much as the early scholarship did.

⁵⁷ Anderson & Richie 1982, 16.

⁵⁸ Standish (2005) 2012, 14.

Poetics of Cinema provided a thorough analysis of Ozu's filmography, from a neo-formalist perspective. His approach, 'poetics of cinema', studied how the films have been put together, while also grounding Ozu's filmmaking historically, through his influences. With this, Bordwell offered his answers to many of the most-often discussed questions about the director's work. For Bordwell, 'the form is the process and the system of the making',⁵⁹ though he still views this system from a more aesthetic and technical perspective than I do: Bordwell emphasises style over meaning by carefully studying how the films have been constructed, whereas my intent is to capture, how the social constructions within Ozu's narrative world work, how they come to be, and what kind of arguments they can be viewed to contain. Though less so than Richie, Bordwell's book too slips over the socio-political aspect of Ozu's films. The neo-formalist viewing strategy has also been applied to Ozu by Kristin Thompson, whose work has also benefitted my own.

Woojeong Joo's *The Cinema of Ozu Yasujiro: Histories of the Everyday* (2017) is a masterwork of later Ozu studies, a study written from a cultural historian's perspective. Joo argues that the Japanese-ness of the films must be studied through Japan's modern history, and notes that the approaches of Richie and Bordwell ignored the Japanese audiences.⁶⁰ In his book, Joo looks at the historical everyday depicted in Ozu's work, and studies it through the correlation between the films and society.⁶¹ I agree with him that all films must be contextualised in the history of the nations that produced them, as well as the history of the medium. Joo's book analyses the historicity of Ozu's films extensively and outlines the different historical periods of Ozu's everyday depiction, as well as the different types of films he made, further challenging the notion of Ozu's films forming a seamless, homogenous continuation. My personal approach differs from his, due to my study centring around post-war family roles and narrative production methods, especially on how Ozu builds his stories through character comparability. I study the argumentative (as well as the comedic) effects that the post-war filmography can achieve, when the films are inspected alongside one another, shifting between elements in the presented physical reality, abstract themes such as the forms of distance covered in chapter 8, and storyline structures that come to define the director's body of work. I also view the possibilities of the medium of film from a more universalist angle. I agree with Joo that the central area of Ozu's post-war everyday depiction is the gender-specific differentiation, and that 'the everyday' is the dominant force in these films as

⁵⁹ Bordwell 1988, 31.

⁶⁰ Joo 2017, 2.

⁶¹ Joo 2017, 3.

opposed to tradition.⁶² However, whereas Joo's interests lie in the construction of the everyday, I am interested in the ways that the character networks lead the audience to comparatively re-consider the very essence of social roles in society.

As I was making final revisions to my manuscript, long-time Ozu scholar Kathe Geist published *Ozu: A Closer Look* (2022), which allowed me to review and consider some of the views expressed in my own work. The Geist book explores all of Ozu's surviving filmography with an art historian's perspective, focusing on the iconography of the director's work: the visual motifs, signs and symbols, the objects and sounds, as well as how this language of images contributes to the films' narratives. She carefully reconsiders much of the earlier Ozu scholarship and makes interesting new observations about several films, proving that even though much has been written about the director, new assessments still manage to find plenty of new elements to be considered within the filmography. My approach differs from Geist's, as I focus less on the composition of the director's images and the visual surface of his works, and more on composition of the narratives. As opposed to the chronological timeline of his career, I gaze upon the post-war continuum in a circular motion: inspecting similar narrative patterns alongside one another and considering the clash of arguments that gets relayed when the filmography is inspected with a wider scope. Geist proposes, that while people in the West often consider things to be 'either...or', the Japanese mentality with which Ozu presents the theses of his films tends rather toward 'both...and'.⁶³ She notes how the Japanese are traditionally known for experiencing a conflict between duty and personal feeling, which does indeed get voiced through the director's work, though I view the mechanisms of this thinking process as working in a more complex manner. My study inspects these dynamics, gives central attention to the historical period of the post-war years, and looks at the films not only as artworks but as carefully considered commentary on roles and institutions. While all Ozu scholarship arguably has to consider patterns and repetition, it is a testament to the richness of these films that different viewers walk away from them with widely different interpretations, having engaged with different details in the filmmaker's storytelling.

While the beforementioned works by Richie, Bordwell, Joo, and Geist are entirely dedicated to the inspection of Ozu, several other researchers have been instrumental to this study as well. Hirano Kyoko's book *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo* (1992) is a highly relevant study of Japanese culture under the American occupation, and the effect this had upon the cinematic output. Hirano's work was continued by Lars-Martin Sorensen, who has made dedicated observations about the occupation

⁶² Joo 2017, 157. He argues that tradition is only invoked in the form of imagery without the films actually endorsing tradition against modernity.

⁶³ Geist 2022, 102.

era films by Ozu and Kurosawa. Joan Mellen's *The Waves at Genji's Door* (1976) has helped me understand why many of the earlier scholars have highlighted Ozu as a conservative figure, and while I frequently disagree with her views, they have enriched the canon of scholarly voices within this work. Another scholar whose angle on Ozu is highly unique is Paul Schrader, whose 1972 study offers interesting viewpoints. Schrader's viewing of the Ozu style is different from that of most scholars, as he frequently brings up concepts such as *Zen* and focuses on religion in his reading of the films. Unlike Schrader, I view Ozu as a secular director, and the 'transcendental' elements of his style as not directly religious.⁶⁴ Yet Ozu studies benefits from the wide timespan between the scholarly literature, and while some of the earlier entries may appear at times out-of-date, they are still important to acknowledge and consider.

On the other hand, even during my writing process, new takes on Ozu emerged to enrich the scholarly context, such as Kometani Shinnosuke's *Chasing Ozu* (2021), a delightful work that helped me better understand Ozu's personality. Within wider Japanese film studies, my study has benefitted from the works of Jennifer Coates, who has studied both the repetitive motifs in the wider frame of post-war Japanese cinema, as well as the movie audiences of the era, their engagement with films, and the process of going to the movies in post-war Japan. Film historian Fujiki Hideaki likewise recently published an extensive study about the relationship between Japanese film production and movie audiences, which also contributes fascinating background for those studying Japanese media culture by focusing on the cinema audiences as social subjects. In recent decades, many collections of academic articles have been written about both Japanese film and Ozu, and through these books, I have gained additional perspective from the works of scholars like David Desser, Edward Fowler, Arthur Nolletti, Jr., and Alastair Phillips, among many others. I also greatly admire the take on Ozu that was offered by Robin Wood in his masterful *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond* (1998), which inspired re-viewings of several Ozu films.

Film scholar Cecilia Sayad has argued that performing authorship is 'not just a mode of expression, but a way of looking'.⁶⁵ Though so-called *auteur* directors exist in most national cinemas, the way in which Ozu has been viewed as one, demands attention. Ozu viewed the films as extensions of himself that turned out the way they did because he followed himself and his individuality.⁶⁶ Ozu wrote the screenplays for all of his post-war films. He always had a collaborator, and from *Late Spring* on,

⁶⁴ Abé Mark Nornes (2008, 81) writes that 'Schrader continues to use the term transcendental style to discuss Ozu, although no one else has'.

⁶⁵ Sayad 2013, 147.

⁶⁶ Richie 1974, 189.

he solely worked with Noda Kôgo.⁶⁷ Much of the early scholarship posits that Ozu controlled every aspect of the filmmaking process from the screenplay to the finished product. His unique way of directing actors has been viewed as eliminating acting from his films, and the actors who appear in these films have been viewed as colours in Ozu's palette.⁶⁸ Though I myself view Ozu as a consistent artist, who had the means to define much of the meanings of his films, I find the practise of viewing him as a painter and the sole creator of his artworks distasteful to the people who worked on these films. Auteurism also neglects the role of the audience. Writing about the process of critical evaluation, David Bordwell makes the case that alongside referential, explicit, and implicit meanings (which the director can control) films can also include repressed or symptomatic meanings that rely on the viewer's interpretation.⁶⁹ This is evident in the work of Ozu. Even if Ozu did play the most central role in the pre-determination of the meanings his films include, he could not know how the audience would come to assess them, or what kind of an afterlife the films would have. It has been suggested that instead of viewing the intentions of the author as part of the text, the author should be viewed as part of the context.⁷⁰ This is also how my study views Ozu's authorship over his films.

Ozu's body of work being fairly cohesive both aesthetically and thematically, most scholars tend to write about it as a whole.⁷¹ This enables them to talk about a cultural entity larger and more important than any singular film. It enables comparisons and the study of larger questions, such as the aspect of Japanese-ness or the vision of everyday life. Many writers have also felt the need to distinguish how the films are not as similar to one another, as some have thought.⁷² There are huge differences between the amounts of scholarly interest that individual films have sparked. Though he was one of his country's most acclaimed directors in the pre-war period, it was Ozu's post-war films that allowed him his Western breakthrough.

⁶⁷ Ozu and Noda had worked together previously in the early 1930s, but then had a long break between collaborations. Noda was a prominent writer in his own right, but never directed a film. The two films in Ozu's post-war filmography not written with Noda are *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (1947, written by Ozu and Ikeda Tadao, another pre-war collaborator) and *A Hen in the Wind* (1948, written by Ozu and Saitô Ryôsuke).

⁶⁸ Richie 1992, 122–125. Yoshida (1998) 2003, 75. Ryû (1964) 2011, 14.

⁶⁹ Bordwell 1989, 9.

⁷⁰ Lehtonen 1996, 113.

⁷¹ Bordwell 1988, 61. Bordwell writes that 'Ozu is unusual in that he self-consciously exploits his entire output as one vast 'text' of which each film can be seen as a chapter'. The number of parallels combined with the mundane narrative matter has also sometimes been viewed as a challenge by those writing about Ozu. In 1963, when Ozu was just being discovered in the West, Tom Milne wrote about *An Autumn Afternoon*: 'It is difficult, without literally retelling the entire film, to convey the manner in which each scene is dependant on every other scene for its meaning.' Milne (1962) 2012, 184.

⁷² Bordwell 1988, 2. Rayans 2010, 23.

These films were for years the only half of his filmography available with subtitles. Among the post-war films, there are also clearly popular films, and less popular ones. *Tokyo Story* and *Late Spring* have been analysed most thoroughly, as they have been viewed to be his most critically beloved films. *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (1947), and *The Munekata Sisters* (1950), on the other hand, have been viewed as stylistically and thematically atypical for the director, and thus largely left out of both distribution and discussion.⁷³ Even though I view Ozu's post-war filmography as a corpus, I acknowledge the risks of an auteur-centric method of viewing, as it can shift the attention away from the artistic choices and creative details in individual films, bringing forth a looming risk of viewing the body of work as more uniform than it is. I am interested in covering the differences as well as the similarities between the films, the harmony as well as the conflict, in order to gain an optimal understanding about the commentary woven into the larger texture. Therefore, by placing the lesser-discussed films on an equal pedestal with their more famous siblings we can better witness the extent of narrative mechanics, roles, and dynamics at play.

Much of the previous research about Japan by Western scholars has focused on the theme of modernisation.⁷⁴ Due to the frequency of the term 'modernisation', it is important we define it for the context of this study. By modernising, I mean Japan reforming the practises that characterise the country's history before and during the war. These reforms included legislative and ideological changes that formed a bridge between the past and the country's current state. Though many of these things seem similar to institutional changes in other developed countries, I do not mean to present Japanese modernisation as just the sum of things the country adapted from the American occupiers, but instead its own historical development.⁷⁵ Then again, I also maintain that this is not a study of Japanese exceptionalism: while many developments and phenomena find parallels in modern histories of other countries, I concentrate on the way Ozu captures and processes the Japanese experience of modernity. I believe that only by viewing art in relation to the society that produced it can we gain a deeper understanding about the currents within it, as well as the conversations it engages in. My assessment of Japanese gender roles and the post-war society has gained information from the writings by social psychologist Iwao Sumiko, cultural anthropologists such as Anne Allison and Tokuhiko Yoko,

⁷³ Bordwell 1988, 302. Bordwell says this about *Hen*.

⁷⁴ According to scholar of Japanese tradition Robert N. Bellah (2003, 78), modernisation is usually discussed through economic and political changes, and the cultural dimension of modernisation has been studied less thoroughly.

⁷⁵ Furthermore, it has been suggested that the occupation period brought about a collective amnesia for the Japanese about the modernised society that had existed before the war. Wada-Marciano 2008, 7.

sociologists Hashimoto Akiko and Anne E. Imamura, as well as historians like Barbara Sato, Igarashi Yoshikuni, and Marc McLelland.⁷⁶ The everyday life depicted by Ozu is an enormous texture with a multitude of details. Therefore, individual subchapters of my work, whether focused on the divisions in wardrobe or the inclusion of farts in Ozu's films, can apply scholarly context from works in their respective fields of studies.

I have previously written two theses about Ozu, as well as non-academic articles about Japanese cinema. My bachelor's thesis (2017) dealt with the depiction of contemporary happiness and the narrative structure of *Equinox Flower* – my personal favourite of Ozu's films. Following that, my master's thesis (2019) was about the depiction of everyday life in Ozu's first three post-war films. The composition of these theses inspired me to write this continuation, as Ozu's films continued to inspire further research, and the inclusion of the director's full post-war filmography would enable me to look at the bigger picture. Though I understand why it is tempting to write about Ozu in general, I do not think it wise to assume all of his films are arguing the same things. This study starts with the notion that the films present ideas and arguments that can be conflicting with each other. Anything else would feel odd, as the films feature central characters from such different stages of life, different social roles, and different identities.

⁷⁶ Of course, much of the sociological scholarly literature stems from a time period later than Ozu's films, but this also helps many of these works carry a deeper historical understanding about their subjects.

1 Ozu in the post-war cinematic landscape

This chapter frames Ozu's standing and position within Japan's post-war film industry. The Japanese have historically had a unique genre system that greatly affects the films produced in the country. Ozu's long association with Shochiku studio likewise helps explain some of the core elements in the director's body of work. After introducing the studio, I offer a brief look at the personal history and career development of Ozu, in order to establish where he was, creatively, during the post-war period. I also consider Ozu in relation to his colleagues, other directors of roughly the same generation, the stylistic differences between them, as well as Ozu's influences on a wider level. Finally, this chapter introduces the way I view Ozu's filmography, a viewing strategy I call *comparative individualism*. While the films very much 'hold up' as individual works of art, looking at them as linear narratives only allows the audience to see some of the story woven into these textures. I propose that as time and technology have introduced the opportunity, Ozu's films benefit from being viewed together: the repeated narrative patterns reveal a broader canvas when inspected side by side, affecting the images of the Japanese family, roles, and dynamics that are communicated through the director's works.

1.1 The Japanese genre system and Shochiku

The national cinema of Japan, like that of many countries, had an era dominated by large studios, which lasted roughly from the 1920s until the mid-1960s. The most powerful studios changed a few times over the decades, but Shochiku, the studio where Ozu worked, remained an eminent player throughout the decades. The output of the studios was guided by a genre system, formed in the 1910s.⁷⁷ According to film scholar Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro, 'genres as institutions are created by the film industry largely to control the mode of film reception and consumption'.⁷⁸ They help and direct audiences to discover the types of films that fit their tastes, as films in the

⁷⁷ von Bagh 1981, 8.

⁷⁸ Yoshimoto 2001, 207.

same genre incorporate similar narratives, themes and character types. Unlike other nations, the Japanese divided their films into those taking place in historical periods (*jidai-geki*) and those set in the contemporary present (*gendai-geki*). Both genres have a multitude of sub-genres, and films often move fluently across the genre network. Film scholar Peter von Bagh has estimated that the two main genres in this division exist in a much closer contact than is often assumed, and it has become the norm for Japanese directors to move between the past and the present in a casual manner.⁷⁹ David Bordwell has theorised that the conventions of popular cinema are not necessarily constraints as is often thought, but that they instead attract an audience based on familiarity and give the filmmakers a structure that enables them to best exercise their talents.⁸⁰ Even though the subject matter covered by a particular genre can appear highly repetitive, the genres are not fixed entities, but ever-changing institutions that adapt influences and evolve, even if the change is slow and almost unnoticeable. According to Yoshimoto, to satisfy their audience, genres must simultaneously stay in recognisable form and introduce new elements and variations.⁸¹

Shomin-geki is a *gendai-geki* sub-genre, which as a depiction of contemporary everyday life has had to adapt to different times. Not only do the genres evolve as a reflection of society, but also because of an intertextual conversation taking place within the genres themselves.⁸² We can well witness this in the case of Ozu, whose filmography is just as keen to offer variations and points of consideration for the previous films within it, as it is to comment societal change. This study is interested in the post-war developments of the *shomin-geki* genre and the variety of family roles therein. Whereas period films often presented a highly masculine worldview, the *gendai-geki* films often catered for female tastes, this also being evident in the films' view of gender roles. *Gendai-geki* and *shomin-geki* films have been divided into various categories based on the narrative content, such as the *haha-mono* (mother film), salaryman-film, and *keiko eiga* (tendency film), but for our purposes the term *shomin-geki* is used to include various narrative variations.⁸³ While listing the differences between Japanese and Western filmmakers, Anderson and Richie argue that the Japanese are more genre-aware than filmmakers elsewhere: films are not merely stand-alone entities, but specifically made according to the agreed-upon

⁷⁹ von Bagh 1981, 9.

⁸⁰ Bordwell 2000, 149.

⁸¹ Yoshimoto 2001, 207. Bordwell (2000, 150) likewise makes the case that at the centre of any genre there is an interplay between familiarity and novelty, convention and innovation.

⁸² Bordwell 2000, 153.

⁸³ Bordwell 1988, 18. The sub-genres of the Shochiku films are explored extensively in Joo's book, while Wada-Marciano Mitsuyo has explored the middle-class film genre of the 1930s in her book *Nippon Modern* (2008).

features of a genre and its subdivisions.⁸⁴ It is likely that Ozu saw himself as a subdivision of the home drama subgenre, as he often liked to call himself a tofu maker, who could make tofu dishes of great quality, but from whom we should not expect anything other than tofu.⁸⁵ Then again, remarks like this may have been a conscious attempt to guide or even manipulate the audience to view his body of work as unified and ordinary by its nature, as opposed to seeing the great variety among these pictures.

To understand Ozu's development as an artist, we should first look at the history of the studio where he worked. Shochiku was founded in 1895, but initially only produced *kabuki* theatre. The studio began making films in 1920, making it one of Japan's older production companies. In the 1920s, Shochiku was known for adapting American influences more fluently and more determinedly than the other production companies.⁸⁶ After a rocky beginning in the 1920s, the studio had gained a steady position in the Japanese film industry by the next decade. The Great Kanto earthquake in September 1923 destroyed all film studios located in Tokyo, except for Shochiku's Kamata studios: afterwards the competition relocated, and Shochiku was the only Tokyo-based studio from 1923 to 1934, giving its films a unique position to examine Tokyo being built into a modern city.⁸⁷ In 1924, producer Kido Shiro, then thirty years old, took charge of Shochiku's Kamata lot, and during his reign the studio became best-known for *shomin-geki* productions.⁸⁸ The genre consisted of mundane tragi-comedic depictions of the middle-class. Before Kido's reign, the studio had been known for *shinpa*⁸⁹-styled melodramas, preferred by producer-director Nomura Hôtei, but Kido transformed the studio's image. This also created the famous *Kamata* flavour of their movies, named after the area of Tokyo where the studios were located.⁹⁰ Kido wanted Shochiku's output to appear modern by adapting Western practises of filmmaking, as well as wanting the films to avoid overtly sentimental melodramatic tropes, and instead try to depict everyday life in a realistic manner.⁹¹ Thus, we can see that several core principles of Ozu's filmmaking did not originate with him, but were instead a product of the studio where he worked. As scholars like Woojeong Joo have noted, Ozu was not the first director (or even the first Yasujiro) to turn Kido's ideas into films.⁹² The genre later known as *shomin-*

⁸⁴ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 315.

⁸⁵ Rayans 2010, 23; Kometani 2021, 56.

⁸⁶ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 40-41.

⁸⁷ Wada-Marciano 2008, 5.

⁸⁸ McDonald 2000, 175.

⁸⁹ *Shinpa* is a form of melodrama which originated in theatre stage. The early Shochiku films aiming for this style often tried to make their audiences cry as much as possible.

⁹⁰ Joo 2017, 26.

⁹¹ Joo 2017, 27.

⁹² Joo 2017, 32.

geki was developed in the films of directors such as Shimazu Yasujiro and Gosho Heinosuke, joined a few years later by Ozu.

Due to the industry's efforts to compete with the influence of Hollywood, Japanese film production during the 1920s grew to finally dominate the domestic market: by 1924, the number of Japanese films shown in Japan had surpassed that of American films.⁹³ Isolde Standish writes that until the mid-1920s, Japanese movie audiences were divided into 'the educated', who wished to see foreign films, and the others who were contented with *shinpa* melodramas and *chanbara* (swordplay) dramas, the latter group consisting mostly of women and children.⁹⁴ This also created a division between the filmmakers, who adapted influences from foreign films, and those who found it preferable to stay within the bounds of the genre tradition.⁹⁵ The cosmopolitan Shochiku was the trend-setter for the modern approach, and its films yielded more critical acclaim than the period films produced at other studios. Then again, the studio-contracted *gendai-geki* actors who starred in films by the likes of Ozu never became superstars like the master swordsmen of the *jidai-geki* productions.⁹⁶ As a studio focused on female-oriented dramas however, many of the top female stars of the silent age would be Shochiku-contractors, and the studio continued to produce popular actresses in the post-war decades. Many of them appeared in Ozu's films and the director, who otherwise tended to side with the older generation in his post-war works, had a great talent for capturing the beauty of youth. Kometani Shinnosuke has made the observation that 'one of the unmistakable joys of Ozu films is looking at actresses'.⁹⁷

Though many Shochiku productions share visual likeness and the directors have often been compared with one another, the studio encouraged them to develop personal, recognisable styles. What had originally been a star-centred system like the other studios, started to turn into a director-centred system after 1924.⁹⁸ In the 1950s, in order to stabilise the industry, the big studios divided the audiences by specializing in different genres. Shochiku led the market of female audiences with their home dramas.⁹⁹ Some of the early Western scholars assumed Ozu's audience to have

⁹³ Fujiki 2013, 165. By 1926, the critics also started considering that the quality of the domestic output could match that of the American film industry.

⁹⁴ Standish (2005) 2012, 64–65.

⁹⁵ Standish (2005) 2012, 64–65. According to Robert N. Bellah (2003, 188), no society in the world has 'maintained a stronger sense of what is native and what is foreign' than the Japanese. This categorisation goes way back to the centuries after Japan had imported Chinese culture into their society.

⁹⁶ Yomota 2019, 47. The early Japanese star system and the effect of American film actors on the domestic film stardom is excellently covered in Fujiki 2013.

⁹⁷ Kometani 2021, 72.

⁹⁸ Standish (2005) 2012, 37.

⁹⁹ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 260.

consisted mostly of women, but later scholarship has challenged the notion. Overall, studies have concluded that in the late 1940s and early 1950s, female viewers were a minority within the Japanese movie audiences, and most female viewers tended to be young, either students or working women.¹⁰⁰ One could suggest a calculative element within Ozu's output, as young, single women are heavily presented in the narrative core of his pictures. The films seem to strike a good balance with their gender depictions, and masculine concerns about the societal space are also skilfully woven into their texture so as to also appeal to the male moviegoers, who as a group formed the majority of the films' spectators. Shochiku's roster of popular young actresses and likable older character actors formed a good combination to tell stories that affect both the older and the younger generation, even if themes of many a director aged alongside them, also affecting the audience demographics.

Thus, for his entire career, Shochiku remained the place to be for a director like Ozu. The association was mutually beneficial, and the studio did not want to lose a director with such great critical acclaim. However, the decades-long relationship between the filmmaker and the company also affected both of their images. As the post-war period continued, Shochiku was viewed by the younger generation as an obsolete entity that did not understand where the wind was blowing from anymore. Ozu's standing, as the most-Shochiku thing next to the studio-logo depicting Mt. Fuji (**Graphic 1.1**), did not help him win any new fans from these sceptics, even if the older age groups made sure that his films did not bomb at the box-office. Both in terms of quality and quantity, the 1950s was a golden age for Japanese cinema. The industry had coped with the war, many of the studio-heads that were trialled as war-criminals returned to their old positions, and after the occupation ended, the censorship guidelines loosened. And there were a lot of films. 1960 was the all-time record year for Japanese cinema, when the country produced a total of 547 films.¹⁰¹ During the early 1950s, Shochiku had survived the financial problems of the late '40s and was once again on the rise, but by the 1960s the company had drifted towards crisis, sliding from being the top-grossing studio in 1955 to being the fifth highest-grossing studio in 1958.¹⁰² This sent a clear message of stagnation across the industry. Ozu films, having maintained the attention of critics and audiences, were a positive exception amidst diminishing returns. However, films about aging salarymen and re-workings of Ozu's old 1930s hits did not help the studio gain a youthful image.

¹⁰⁰ Coates 2022, 126. For this information, Coates also cites a study by Hori Hikari. Coates admits she has not found comprehensive figures for the gender demographics of audiences in the occupation period.

¹⁰¹ Schilling 1999, 7. The total attendance of audiences had peaked in 1958 with 1.127 billion. Igarashi 2021, 111.

¹⁰² Joo 2017, 174.



Graphic 1.1. *Equinox Flower* (1958). All Shochiku productions started with the studio logo depicting Mt. Fuji. (Screenshot by the author)

1.2 Ozu's career and background

Whereas the search for autobiographical elements in works of art is a central strategy of auteur-centric viewing, the amount by which Ozu's personal history serves to explain the worldview of his films has also been greatly debated. Kometani Shinnosuke explains that he views Ozu's screenplays as 'his own words and messages', because he wrote all of them, while David Bordwell cautions that although Ozu famously loved alcohol, not every drunk in his films 'becomes Ozu'.¹⁰³ In this particular argument, director Yoshida Kiju seems to be on Bordwell's side, as he advises us to watch Ozu's films without being confused by the playful things Ozu said in interviews and the like.¹⁰⁴ This subchapter looks into the personal history and career of Ozu in order to establish a proper understanding of his career path before addressing the individual films. I do not mean to write his full biography, nor to be derailed by the director's playful comments, but to instead relate only the things

¹⁰³ Kometani 2021, 8. Bordwell 1988, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Yoshida (1998) 2003, 15.

that are important to know, so as to understand the development of his works and the narrative elements therein.

Ozu Yasujirō was born in 1903, in Fukugawa, Tokyo. His father was a merchant, selling a plant that was used as a fertilizer. Ozu had four siblings. In 1913, his father sent the family to live in the countryside in the small town of Matsukasa, in the Mie prefecture, while he himself remained in Tokyo. The reason for this was that as an old-fashioned man, he did not believe Tokyo, with its modern features, to be a proper place to raise children.¹⁰⁵ If one were to look for connections between Ozu's life and the contents of his works, one could thus see the theme of departing families stemming from childhood. From early on, Ozu had lots of friends.¹⁰⁶ His adolescence and young adulthood took place during the Taishō period (1912–1926). During this era, the concepts of individuality, democracy, and freedom flourished in Japan, providing a more relaxed atmosphere as well as a thriving popular culture.¹⁰⁷ It was fertile ground for both Ozu's unique sense of individualism as well as his love for cinema. During this time, cinema was initially viewed as a mere children's pastime, but it quickly grew to be adored by older people as well.¹⁰⁸ Ozu first became interested in films during his high school years. It was after seeing the film *Civilization* (1916), by American director Thomas Ince that he decided to become a filmmaker.¹⁰⁹ Ozu was an enthusiastic, but also a picky filmgoer. He later said that during his childhood he only went to see foreign films. He loathed Japanese films, finding them to be immature in contrast to foreign output.¹¹⁰

Film studios were companies like any other, and thus also featured the seniority advancement system. Ozu started his film career as a camera assistant in 1923.¹¹¹ By 1927, he had advanced in rank to become a director. In the post-war years, prominent directors such as Imamura Shōhei and Shinoda Masahiro started their careers by working as Ozu's assistant directors, though it would take much longer for most to advance into director-hood. At Shochiku, directors were also required to learn to write a screenplay. According to Isolde Standish, until the late 1910s Japanese films were made without screenplays and in the 1920s Shochiku began to stress the importance of having a well-constructed screenplay, thus also affecting the house style of the studio.¹¹² Ozu is one of the big names of world cinema that is impossible to separate as a writer and as a director. Besides writing and learning from older

¹⁰⁵ *I Lived, But...* (Ikite wa mita keredo - Ozu Yasujirō den, 1983), timecode: 09.10.

¹⁰⁶ *I Lived, But...* (Ikite wa mita keredo - Ozu Yasujirō den, 1983), timecode: 11.50.

¹⁰⁷ Hane 2001, 235.

¹⁰⁸ Kitamura 2010, 8.

¹⁰⁹ Richie 2001, 28.

¹¹⁰ *I Lived, But...* (Ikite wa mita keredo - Ozu Yasujirō den, 1983), timecode: 12.15.

¹¹¹ *I Lived, But...* (Ikite wa mita keredo - Ozu Yasujirō den, 1983), timecode: 16.35.

¹¹² Standish (2005) 2012, 77.

directors, young filmmakers were expected to watch an abundance of films, and to discuss their merits and let-downs, which undoubtedly affected their before-mentioned genre awareness.¹¹³ Young Ozu is even depicted in this activity in the 1987 film biography of Tanaka Kinuyo, *Actress* (Eiga joyû, 1987).¹¹⁴ Critics were also a source of constructive criticism for filmmakers since the 1910s, and directors actively read their reviews in order to improve on their job.¹¹⁵ Japan's oldest film magazine, *Kinema Junpo*, established in 1919, started an annual ranking of Japanese films in 1927, and this ranking has since been considered highly prestigious. Ozu topped it six times during his career, more than any other filmmaker.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, this was not completely for the benefit of the director: after Ozu had won three years in a row from 1932 to 1934, he felt 'as if he wanted to crawl into a hole and hide', because the studio figured him to be a man whose focus was making artistic pieces aiming to seduce the critics, as opposed to the general public who bought movie tickets.¹¹⁷

If his late films are recognisable quality tofu, Ozu's early filmography shows him as an adventurous chef, who prepared his audience a variety of dishes, from American-style student comedies to gangster films and emotional melodramas, slowly discovering what worked and what did not. Ozu's 1930s' works explored the national culture and tradition in modern society. As the decade went on, the role of tradition grew to be a more crucial element. Yet he would still study foreign cinema heavily, and adapt influences from directors he liked, such as Ernst Lubitsch, King Vidor, and Charles Chaplin.¹¹⁸ Donald Richie has noted that it is very customary for Japanese people to explore foreign customs while they are young, and at an older age, return to Japanese things.¹¹⁹ While this excited sense of discovery no doubt characterises the young artists of other nations as well, it does get a particularly thrilling manifestation in the Japanese cinema of the 1930s. The majority of lost Ozu films cover his formative years, with all of the lost films being silent ones. Though this is a tragedy, there is an arguable silver lining for Ozu's subsequent world-fame: many of the lost films like *The Revengeful Spirit of Eros* (Erogami no onryo, 1930) and *The Luck Which Touched the Leg* (Ashi ni sawatta koun, 1930) received a cold

¹¹³ Standish (2005) 2012, 38.

¹¹⁴ Ozu, seen only briefly, is portrayed by Ogi Shigemitsu.

¹¹⁵ Gerow 2000, 20.

¹¹⁶ Bordwell 1988, 10–11. The winning films were *I Was Born, But...* (1932), *Passing Fancy* (1933), *A Story of Floating Weeds* (1934), *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family* (1941), *Late Spring* (1949) and *Early Summer* (1951).

¹¹⁷ Kometani 2021, 110–111.

¹¹⁸ Joo 2017, 76.

¹¹⁹ Richie 1974, xi.

response from the critics¹²⁰ and were, based on their synopses (and titles!) considerably worse in quality than the masterpieces which survived intact. By 1938, Ozu was considered Japan's greatest director alongside his friend Yamanaka Sadao.¹²¹ One reason for Ozu's elevated stature was his keen decision to stick with silent cinema. Ozu was the last Shochiku director to give up the medium, with his first 'talkie' *The Only Son* (*Hitori musuko*) in 1936. In the meanwhile, many other big-name directors had struggled to master the new cinematic form. Ozu had the chance to learn from their mistakes, while simultaneously being viewed as a 'master of silent cinema'.¹²²

Though an avid consumer of foreign films, Ozu was not a travelling man. The first time he ever left Japan for a foreign country was in 1937, when he got drafted to serve in China.¹²³ Ozu's military service, and his two wartime films *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family* (*Toda-ke no kyôdai*, 1941) and *There Was a Father* (*Chichi Ariki*, 1942), have evoked much debate among scholars. Ozu rose in rank from a corporal to a sergeant, and led a squad of his own, being mostly tasked with transport and communication: Woojeong Joo suspects that based on the available details about his military service, it is likely that Ozu did not directly take part in battles.¹²⁴ When he returned to Japan for the first time, the national wartime propaganda found its way into his films and *Toda Family*, for instance, ends with the idealistic family members leaving for Manchuria in search of a better life. Bordwell calls the two Ozu films from this period 'deeply didactic' in their explicit response to the earlier critique of Meiji promises.¹²⁵ Kathe Geist has pointed out that the *Toda* film especially has become a problem for Western audiences, who do not want to see Ozu on the wrong side of history.¹²⁶ For purposes of cultural history, the moralising question of right or wrong sides is not relevant. Films are products of their own time and in Ozu's case the two films feature clear attempts to purify the nation through a combination of Buddhism and nationalism as the core ideology of the family system. Yet the films are far from the harshest propaganda produced by Japanese studios during war. Even under these circumstances, Ozu was humane as opposed to hateful.

The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family was Ozu's first considerable box-office hit.¹²⁷ Though arguably much of this had to do with the film resonating well with the national ethos of the time, another reason might be that the audience had

¹²⁰ Bordwell 1988, 210–211.

¹²¹ Bordwell 1988, 11. Bordwell sites critic Tsumura Hideo as a source.

¹²² Joo 2017, 64.

¹²³ Joo 2017, 115.

¹²⁴ Joo 2017, 111–112.

¹²⁵ Bordwell 1988, 42.

¹²⁶ Geist 2006, 118.

¹²⁷ Joo 2017, 128.

had time to miss Ozu's recognisable brand of filmmaking. For most of his career, the general flow of Ozu films to Japanese movie theatres was a steady one. Until his military service, Ozu directed several movies per year. His service in China put a gap of four years between the release of *What Did the Lady Forget* (*Shukujo wa nani o wasureta ka*, 1937) and *Toda Family*, and after he finished *There Was a Father*, Ozu had his longest-ever gap between films that amounted to five years. Yet his first post-war films, *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* and *A Hen in the Wind*, proved to be flops with both contemporary critics and audiences. After he resumed working in the post-war period, the now prestigious 'elderly statesman of Japanese cinema' made one film per year except for 1959, when he allowed Shochiku to also borrow his services to Daiei studios for *Floating Weeds*.¹²⁸ The only gap amidst his post-war filmography is the period between *Tokyo Story* and *Early Spring*, during which time Ozu helped Tanaka Kinuyo with her directorial work *The Moon Has Risen* (*Tsuki wa noborinu*, 1955), based on a vintage Ozu script that he chose not to film himself.

While he was stationed in Singapore during the war, Ozu had managed to see new American films confiscated by the Japanese army. Despite what many assumed, they had no direct effect on his own style of filmmaking.¹²⁹ Woojeong Joo notes, however, that through seeing these new American films Ozu also witnessed the modern, Western society that had given birth to them, which affected the way he viewed his own Japanese-ness as a filmmaker.¹³⁰ This is probably accurate, as in the post-war films the notion of American culture looms in the background, forming a contrast to the depicted Japanese space. Overall, Ozu was in a better position than most Japanese directors during the occupation years. The genres he had excelled in during his pre-war career, *shomin-geki* and women's films, were ripe for studying modernity under the new political system. As many directors returning to work stumbled with their first efforts, Ozu took more time. He was held in a detention camp and returned to Japan with the last of his outfit on 12 February 1946. It took another fifteen months before *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* hit the theatres, during which time Ozu no doubt had witnessed the early post-war efforts of colleagues like Mizoguchi, Naruse and Goshō, thus being able to evade some of their flaws.

That is not to say he discovered his post-war *mojo* instantly. *Record* and *A Hen in the Wind* appear as a separated twosome in the writings of most Ozu -scholars, for a variety of reasons, usually in the writer's attempt to reason why Ozu's actual post-war filmography starts from 1949's *Late Spring*. The two films' lack of success and later lack of international distribution among the rest of the post-war catalogue may be a

¹²⁸ Though it should be noted that *The Munekata Sisters* (1950, Shintoho) and *The End of Summer* (1961, Toho) were also made on loan to other studios

¹²⁹ Bordwell 1988, 6.

¹³⁰ Joo 2017, 148.

contributing factor, but more often this separation gets justified through their credits and contents. According to Joo, *Late Spring* presents some common elements of Ozu's post-war filmography, such as the imagery of traditional Japan in contrast to modernity, whereas *Record* and *Hen* 'are more explicitly concerned with the struggle to get by in Occupation-era Tokyo'.¹³¹ The visual space also forms a dividing line, as in 1949 the immediate post-war period had made way for economic growth and better societal balance. Bordwell points to credits and highlights the big difference in Ozu's cast, as many pre-war regulars made their final Ozu appearances in the two films, whereas *Late Spring* introduced several key-players of the post-war era.¹³² While the post-war cinema of many a country saw the arrival of new stars, Ozu's new core crew gives out the image of a filmmaker reacting to historical change by discovering a recurring cast that best helped him cover the themes he viewed important.

Late Spring also kicked off Ozu's post-war writing collaboration with Noda Kôgo. Noda had previously written films like *Tokyo Chorus* (Tôkyô no kôrasu, 1931) and *Woman of Tokyo* (Tôkyô no onna, 1933) with Ozu but had not worked with him since the now-lost *Innocent Maid* (Hakoiri musume, 1935). In the interval of 1945 and *Late Spring*, the only film Noda had written was Mizoguchi's *The Victory of Women* (Josei no shôri, 1946), which like Ozu's first post-war efforts, failed to win the love of critics. By the time they re-united, both writers were ready to distance themselves from the didacticism of their initial post-war releases. Though it can be hard to separate from Ozu's growth as a person and as a writer, the changing of his writing collaborators also greatly affected his work. *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* was written with Ikeda Tadao, and stylistically resembles their pre-war Kihachi series. *A Hen in the Wind*, on the other hand, was a collaboration with Saitô Ryôsuke, and the outright societal anger of the screenplay can partly be contributed to him. Ozu's commitment to Noda for the last thirteen films of his career is only one example of the director finding the right person for the right job, and then sticking with them: actor Ryû Chishû, cinematographer Atsuta Yûharu and composer Saitô Takanobu were likewise steadily employed once the director discovered what they could bring to the films. During the 1950s, Ozu enjoyed considerable critical prestige and steady box office returns. As he was not prone to self-praise, there is not an abundance of statements by him that would relay which

¹³¹ Joo 2017, 152.

¹³² Bordwell 1988, 12.

of the films he was particularly happy about.¹³³ It is much easier to find remarks that express his distaste for some of these pictures. Perhaps the fact that scholars are aware of Ozu viewing some of his films as failed experiments, affects the way they have been treated among the Ozu canon, since these views have been part of the scholarly discussion ever since the Richie book. Ozu voiced negative opinions at least about *A Hen in the Wind*, *The Munekata Sisters*, and *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*.¹³⁴ *Tokyo Twilight* was his first film in nearly twenty years not to make the annual *Kinema Junpo* top ten, and Ozu considered the scandalous film as one of his failures.¹³⁵ It is very telling that the films Ozu was least proud of were ones that brought conflict and clash to his body of work, thereby disrupting the harmonious cohesion that he was attempting to achieve. This suggests, that much like modern audiences, Ozu himself at least partly wanted to view his catalogue as a monument formed by the multitude of his films.

Though viewed by Japan-based foreigners like Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie, Ozu's films, like those by many other directors making films set in contemporary Japan, did not receive instant international fame. The reason for this has been up for debate. The films have either been viewed 'too Japanese' for other nations to understand them, or not exotic enough. To an extent, there can be truth in both. Ozu's films do not have samurais or giant Gojira-like monsters, and for escapist purposes they are far too mundane. Yet their mundanity is recognisably Japanese, and therefore requires a cultural understanding. Ozu himself famously did not think foreigners understood his films, and claimed they used generalising concepts such as 'Zen' to describe them.¹³⁶ Anderson and Richie suggest that the Japanese people also have the tendency of placing 'foreign' things in one class and 'Japanese' things in another: some films were made to appeal for foreign tastes, 'while others, like those directed by Goshu or Ozu, are scarcely ever let out of the country, being considered by the Japanese as 'far too Japanese to export''.¹³⁷ The writers elaborate on this, speculating that Ozu's great popularity among Japanese critics was a factor in this: 'the Japanese themselves are very afraid his excellence will not be recognised

¹³³ Richie (1974, 235) states that Ozu's personal favourites from his works were *There Was a Father*, *Late Spring*, and *Tokyo Story*. He does not cite the source for this particular trivia, but the source material for his book certainly could have contained such a statement by Ozu, possibly in the form of a journal entry or an interview. Yoshida Junji (2018, 160) notes that in 1952, Ozu ranked the wartime film *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family* as one his favourites.

¹³⁴ Richie 1974, 234, 236, 238. Joo 2017, 166.

¹³⁵ Bordwell 1988, 342. The film was nineteenth (!) in the *Kinema Junpo* ranking.

¹³⁶ Nornes 2007, 79.

¹³⁷ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 37.

abroad and, in true Japanese fashion, prefer not to try rather than fail.’¹³⁸ Thus, we can gather that Japanese film exporters also play a key role in the shaping of the internationally acclaimed canon of Japanese national cinema.

As a possible consequence, when the films finally did receive a wider international distribution, Ozu was introduced to the world as ‘the most Japanese director’ of all. The accolade signals his work to have a uniquely national ethos, which requires special effort for foreigners to understand.¹³⁹ This claim, which seems to have existed as long as Ozu himself, is often the starting point for the books and articles about him.¹⁴⁰ Personally I have always found it to be an annoyance, as I believe Ozu would have too, had someone dared to say it to his face. This notion distracts the conversation to a question that can ultimately never be solved, as it is impossible to make deductions about the extent of a filmmaker’s Japanese-ness in comparison to his countrymen-colleagues.¹⁴¹ It also mystifies the Japanese-ness of the films and directs people to view them from an angle that could justifiably be called orientalist. The charm of Ozu’s films is in the mundanity of the narratives and the universality of the themes.¹⁴² The films are clearly Japanese, but this should not necessarily be the focus point, or at least the sole focus point of the conversation surrounding them. Many modern scholars view it important to de-mystify the Japanese-ness of the films.¹⁴³ I suggest that a way to establish this is to consider Ozu alongside other Japanese filmmakers of his day, while grounding the interpretations of the films in the commonness of what is depicted.

¹³⁸ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 359. However, Woojeong Joo (2017, 146) has offered a slight criticism of this, calling the unwillingness to export Ozu a ‘legend’. Joo states that already in the mid-50s Ozu’s films were shown in foreign art cinemas and were known to academic circles, possibly referring to Anderson and Richie. One could also point out that *Tokyo Story* won the first-ever Sutherland trophy at London Film Festival in 1958. Kathe Geist (2022, 229) also has found an Ozu influence in Arthur Lubin’s 1957 film *Escaped in Japan*. Yet it is usually acknowledged that the films have gained their international popularity through the decades starting from the 1960s. Robin Wood (1998, 95) argues that, as opposed to feeling that his films were inaccessible, a more likely reason for the Japanese being unwilling to export Ozu would have been that by the late 50’s, he was considered by them as ‘old-fashioned, conservative and rather boring’.

¹³⁹ Joo 2017, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Donald Richie, David Bordwell and Woojeong Joo all refer to it instantly in the introductions of their books, though Bordwell and Joo do so, in order to present the general conceptions held by critics and scholars. Richie 1974, xi. Bordwell 1988, 1. Joo 2017, 1.

¹⁴¹ Timonen 2019, 9.

¹⁴² Another thing that highlights the universality of the films, is that the filmmakers to whom Ozu has been compared, like Carl Theodor Dreyer, Robert Bresson, Abbas Kiarostami and Aki Kaurismäki, are often not Japanese.

¹⁴³ Rayans 2010, 23.

Ozu's lifespan and his work serve as a bookend for an era. Had he lived only ten years longer, the Tokyo of his films would have transformed almost to a point being of unrecognisable. The 1960s was the decade of Japan's largest economic growth, but also the era when the traditional studios lost their hegemony. The Tokyo Olympics brought great changes to the capital city, with modernised infrastructure and the first high-speed train. The Vietnam war caused turmoil in Japan's relations with the United States, and partly through Western influence, the popular culture, music, literature and cinema, changed drastically. Some of the changes had begun during Ozu's lifetime, and films such as *Good Morning* even commented upon the newest cultural developments. Yet his late filmography grew to guard the essentially traditional elements of Japanese culture, even while acknowledging that all this must fade.

1.3 Ozu in contrast to his contemporaries

The scholars who analyse Ozu's work do not often compare him to other filmmakers of his day. Instead, the visibility of his American influences is often the talking point in the discussion about his early films.¹⁴⁴ In the 1920s, the appeal of Hollywood cinema (and the financial threat posed by it) became acknowledged in the Japanese film industry, and, wanting to maintain the domestic market, the industry woke to improve the quality of its output, often by studying what was done abroad.¹⁴⁵ Despite this, Ozu's early efforts seem spontaneous in their expression of admiration, as well as specific as to which Hollywood directors had earned such a show of respect, Ernst Lubitsch being particularly hailed. The director's considerable talent in visual storytelling also owes a lot to the national practice of silent films being accompanied by the *benshi*. These were performers whose job was to explain the films as they played in the theater. The creative live-narration style made the *benshi* at times more popular than the actors in the films, and at the same time, allowed the directors to be more subtle in their storytelling. This contributed to the way Japan was very slow to give up the medium of silent films, as the inclusion of sound made the *benshi* obsolete and unemployed.

While his love of American cinema was initially a great source of inspiration, Ozu's work equally benefited from the house style of Shochiku's Kamata studios. The role of producer Kido is visible in the resemblance of the films made by directors who trained under his watch. Yet Ozu found his style, as well as the love of critics,

¹⁴⁴ For example: Bordwell 1988, 152. Besides referring to the oft-discussed similarity between *Tokyo Story* and Leo McCarey's *Make Way for Tomorrow* (1937), Bordwell discusses the effect that films by Charles Chaplin, Ernst Lubitsch and Harold Lloyd had upon Ozu's early career.

¹⁴⁵ Kitamura 2010, 2.

relatively early. Others, like Naruse Mikio and Shimizu Hiroshi, directed dozens and dozens of films before finding their personal angle to filmmaking. Ozu's perfectionism also made it easy for anyone, even a non-cinephile, to recognise an Ozu picture when they saw one. In her article about Shimizu, Keiko I. McDonald compares their styles, noting that Shimizu was 'rather carefree in his approach', 'more of a generalist', as well as 'a company man' willing to do any picture the studio assigned him.¹⁴⁶ The estimate is fair, and Ozu's reputation benefits both from his filmography being largely preserved and available, as well as the limited number of titles therein. As opposed to Ozu's fifty-six films, thirty-seven of which survive, Naruse directed ninety-two, Gosho Heinosuke 100, and Shimizu 169 films. Due to their prolific pace, the 'essence' of these other directors is present in only *some* of their films. Ozu's work has been seen unique enough and cohesive enough to warrant the adjective *ozu-esque*.¹⁴⁷

Instead of Ozu being compared to other directors, the fame he achieved in the 1930s caused the opposite effect, with younger directors more often being compared to him. At Shochiku, Kido famously told Naruse Mikio, whose early style resembled the studio's number one director, that he did not need two Ozus.¹⁴⁸ When Ozu became famous abroad starting from the 1960s, no other *shomin-geki* directors were known outside Japan, which made the director's work seem even more distinctive. Kurosawa and Mizoguchi were so completely different that it was not fruitful to compare them with Ozu, whereas other, thematically closer colleagues like Gosho or Shimizu are relatively unknown in the West to this very day. Therefore, American and European scholars have always struggled with the danger of giving Ozu too much credit for his one-of-a-kind voice within world cinema, by not acknowledging the larger trends within Japan's domestic film production. Then again, if Ozu is viewed as emblematic of 1950s Japanese cinema (which he rarely is in more modern writing), this ignores the abundance of younger voices in the Japanese film community.

Non-Japanese directors that Ozu has been compared to include Robert Bresson and Carl Dreyer,¹⁴⁹ but a more meaningful comparison for the sake of this study are the connections that have been noted existing between his work, and that of English novelist Jane Austen. Donald Richie was probably first to point this out,¹⁵⁰ and silent film curator Bryony Dixon also makes the comparison. According to her, Ozu 'chose

¹⁴⁶ McDonald 2000, 174.

¹⁴⁷ Rayans 2010, 23.

¹⁴⁸ Bordwell 1988, 25.

¹⁴⁹ Most notably by Paul Schrader (1972), who dedicated a book to the three directors he found to be stylistically similar.

¹⁵⁰ Richie 1974, 71.

to observe human behaviour outside the complex context of dramatic world events in much the same way as Jane Austen in her novels, and as unapologetically'.¹⁵¹ I would agree, and if we go down the path of English literature, I also see a common element between Ozu and Charles Dickens, in their way of creating memorable characters and networks through which these characters associate, letting the narrative play out through these characters' interactions, viewing modernity from a critical perspective while also acknowledging that change is the only constant, as well as using humour to address darker subject matters. It would also be quite hard not to think of Tolstoy's immortal opening to *Anna Karenina* (1877) while watching the world of Ozu's families: 'Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way'.¹⁵²

Ozu's films are, on a technical level, better suited to allow the establishing of time's elapse, being considerably longer than average Japanese films of the time. According to the estimate of Anderson and Richie, in the 1950s half of Japanese films were from 80 to 100 minutes in duration, and only five per cent were longer than 110 minutes.¹⁵³ Of Ozu's fifteen post-war features, a total of ten are over 110 minutes.¹⁵⁴ The durations alone relay to the audience that these are films out of the ordinary (though very much *of the ordinary* in their content); something into which they must invest time and attention to enjoy. According to Richie, Ozu's films are longer than most, with less story than most, but instead of being slow, they create their own form of psychological time.¹⁵⁵ The greater duration allows Ozu not to rush the narrative forwards too hastily. It allows greater emphasis on atmosphere and character development. We as the audience are allowed to live in these families for a limited while, get to know them, their habits and situations, as well as their acquaintances and networks. Bordwell has written about Ozu's 'near-obsessive concern with controlling every aspect of the image': he argues that the basic unit of his filmmaking is the shot, the construction of which followed the intricate set of rules that he had laid out for himself.¹⁵⁶ The strangely specific and specifically strange way of structuring his films, combined with the director's perfectionism, is one key element that separates Ozu from his contemporaries. Yet it should not be viewed as the only dominant marker of the *ozu-esque*. I find the technical analysis of Ozu's filmmaking by Bordwell and others accomplished, even interesting, but it

¹⁵¹ Dixon 2010, 4. The comparison is made in the DVD introduction of *Good Morning* (1959), and Dixon might be basing this argument at least primarily on this film.

¹⁵² Tolstoy (1877) 2009, 17.

¹⁵³ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 332.

¹⁵⁴ Only *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*, *A Hen in the Wind*, *Late Spring*, *Good Morning* and *The End of Summer* are under 110 minutes long.

¹⁵⁵ Richie 1974, xiv.

¹⁵⁶ Bordwell 1988, 74.

is not the area of Ozu's films that in my mind warrants most attention to study.¹⁵⁷ For that, we move to the construction of the characters and the strategies used to build a unified vision of Japanese family and gender roles.

1.4 Comparative individualism

The world presented by Ozu's films seems internally unified, though also consisting of differing parts. Ozu's fifteen post-war films include a variety of perspectives from which the stories are told. From the solitary young wife of *A Hen in the Wind* to the large family of *Early Summer*, and from the elderly couple of *Tokyo Story* to the kids in *Good Morning*, these different stages of life allow us to view the Japanese life from different points of view. Yet there are also repeated patterns that make the protagonists of these films recognisably *ozu-esque*. This subchapter looks at these patterns and Ozu's play with them, through which I introduce my personal approach to analysing the character networks of Ozu's films as a narrative strategy, which relies on the viewer making comparisons between different people and situations in the post-war films. While all Ozu scholarship arguably has to tackle the issue of repetitive patterns of various sorts, I suggest that the comparative way of contextualising the themes, with the full body of evidence on display, reveals in the clearest way the points that the roles and dynamics of the filmography attempt to achieve. I further argue that Ozu's narratives regulate the essence of the close reading that is required to appreciate them fully, by engaging the audience through a number of paralleling characters. I call this practise *comparative individualism*.

Again, it must be stressed that the seemingly repetitive narrative patterns were a common feature of post-war Japanese cinema overall, partly institutionalised by the structures of the genre system discussed earlier.¹⁵⁸ However, Ozu's body of work goes beyond simple repetition with its carefully constructed parallels, the use of which is a commonly agreed-upon feature that characterises these films.¹⁵⁹ According to Bordwell:

¹⁵⁷ Robin Wood (1998, 96) has also made the point that the technical analysis of Ozu's filmmaking covers a disproportionate amount of the critical attention given to these films. According to Wood, people did not go see Ozu's films to 'count the number of times the camera crosses the 180-degree line'. I wholeheartedly concur.

¹⁵⁸ Coates 2016, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Bordwell 1988, 57. According to Bordwell, Donald Richie was the first one to focus on it. Richie (1974, 8–15) gives a list of similarities between Ozu's films in the first chapter of his book. Yoshida Kiju's view is that Ozu uses the motifs of repetition and difference to voice his disbelief in storytelling, as repetition creates stagnation and forms an obstacle for drama. Yoshida (1998) 2003, 28.

‘In Ozu, parallels create equivalences among characters, actions, situations, scenes, locales, props – virtually any distinct entity one could identify in the text.’¹⁶⁰

I fully agree with this, but I would like to take it one step further. I contend that Ozu’s entire storytelling is based on this manoeuvring that through an endless number of paralleling elements he is creating a unified cinematic world, in which comparative individuality serves as the mechanism that the audience is led to engage in, in order to properly consume and understand these narratives. By giving us a rich variety of people for points of comparison, Ozu is constantly drawing us closer, until a point where we are almost members of this community and relate to the characters’ lives from this perspective. This is how he makes his characters so relatable, and mundane plotlines so compelling. Bordwell is clearly viewing the larger network of parallels as performing a similar function, by introducing a causal patterning that helps single events gain ‘an enormous narrative richness’.¹⁶¹ Yet he views the process from a more structural (if not mechanical) perspective, as a feature of Ozu’s art, whereas I am more interested in the discussion formed through the comparability of the individuals. For Bordwell, Ozu is the master builder, as for me he is the philosopher of the mundane, who chooses to disguise himself as the common tofu-maker.

Isolde Standish has argued that Ozu’s films guide the audience to view them as works that are not centred around a singular character:

‘By limiting the potential of spectator identification with one particular character through the narrative structure, camera position and editing techniques, Ozu, on the one hand, forces his spectator into an analytic mode of response and, on the other hand, to view the group as a whole.’¹⁶²

I agree with this estimate, though it needs to be noted that these groups are not homogenous, but instead consist of widely different individuals. The comparative individualism of the worldbuilding works through the audience’s assessment of the groups’ inner networks of acquaintance. Thus, it would be fair to claim that there exists such a thing as a wrong way to read an Ozu film, or at least that the traditional way of reading narratives lets us see the charm of the works only partially. One can choose to view *Late Autumn* as a film about a daughter facing the sadness of leaving her widowed mother because she is starting her own life in marriage. In such a case, it would be justifiable to claim that the long film has about forty minutes’ worth of unnecessary stuff that could have been cut in the editing room – much to the horror

¹⁶⁰ Bordwell 1988, 57.

¹⁶¹ Bordwell 1988, 61.

¹⁶² Standish (2005) 2012, 51.

of Ozu fans everywhere. The limitations of linear individualism would, in such case, let the viewer enjoy only a small percentage of what is conveyed through the film.

While the films by several other *shomin-geki* filmmakers like Naruse and Shimizu could be, and are, often called ‘slice of life’ dramas, Ozu’s work spreads out the total spectrum of contemporary existence in its world building. The reason for this can be nothing else than the choir of human voices and the variety of individual lives that we get to witness in these films. Richie suggests that both the frequent close-ups of people’s faces, and the cutting of the films that displays these faces to us, have only one object: the revelation of character.¹⁶³ Whether characters who only have one scene, or the protagonists of a picture, all of these people feel individualised through our understanding of their comparability. The curious ways in which the characters’ differences and similarities, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows affect the social intercourse, serve to strengthen the arguments made by the films, as they quietly build a sense of inner realism. This is perhaps best relayed in *Equinox Flower*, a film that shows us no less than five (!) families. The protagonist family (the Hirayamas) are going through a crisis where the father does not approve the daughter’s choice of husband. A family we meet early on (the Kawais) have dealt with a similar situation gracefully, whereas a family we meet later (the Mikamis) have been torn apart through a bad response to it. We also meet a family that has yet to face such a crisis (the Sasaki), and in the film’s conclusion through the marriage of the Hirayama daughter, a whole new family is born that will most likely have to deal with something similar, about twenty years later. Thus, the problems that one family faces, are ones that another faced yesterday, and yet another will face tomorrow.¹⁶⁴

Due to his interest in character types and the presentation of reality, I have also considered Ozu in the light of Jungian philosophy. In the philosophy of C.G. Jung, individuality is the core element of things that occur in reality.¹⁶⁵ According to Jung, it could be argued that the concept of reality is based solely on exceptions to the rules, and reality thus is irregular by its nature: this also means that statistical analysis can only give us one side of reality, the idea of the average, as it fails to take into consideration empiric reality.¹⁶⁶ Ozu’s films too show their reality consisting of irregularities, even if these individual-based irregularities occur in narratives that are comparable with one another. Yet making statistical observations about these films, such as ‘how many Ozu daughters choose their own husbands’, to me misses the mark when it comes to studying Ozu’s filmmaking. It simplifies the issues presented, whereas the focus point for comparative

¹⁶³ Richie 1974, 178.

¹⁶⁴ Timonen 2017, 20.

¹⁶⁵ Jung (1957) 1960, 10. It might be good to note that Jung is not discussing the constructed reality of cinema, but ‘reality’ in a more traditional sense of the word.

¹⁶⁶ Jung (1957) 1960, 10.

individualism should be the opposite: to analyse the richness in the production of these family roles. As Jung argues, we must be able to view human beings also as statistical units, in order to say something generalising about them, yet the understanding of an individual requires putting statistical science on the side.¹⁶⁷

While the narratives of the films feel common and repetitive, there is still a sense of randomness in Ozu's choice of subject: that being the choice of the central family from all other alternatives. These people are not important in the greater scope of things. The films are, in a sense, micro-histories dedicated to the inspection of ordinary people and the times they inhabit. As Jung explains, our way of valuing our loved ones and much-appreciated acquaintances expresses only the slightly humorous subjectivity of our emotions: the greater the mass of people that exists, the lesser the importance of an individual unit among the group.¹⁶⁸ Yet in Ozu's world-building, it is the individuality of the characters that gives them their importance, as it establishes the connection between them and the audience. 'The stakes of an Ozu picture' (if we want to use such a term) likewise amount to very little, from a bird's eye view. The impact of these films is created through the audience understanding the effect that things have on singular characters, the larger character networks they inhabit, and the connection of these choices to larger societal institutions, including the way the films correspond with reality.

The somewhat abundant number of speaking roles, whether ones important to the story or not, enables Ozu to play with the structure, to mess with the tempo, to bring forth elements that support or clash with the larger narrative, to balance the atmosphere, and to add humour to the whole. Film critic Ignaty Vishnevetsky has, for instance, argued that '*Floating Weeds* possesses a sophisticated, prankish structure', as the film takes several scenes before revealing the audience who the lead character is. Vishnevetsky also states that the number of perspectives gives the storyline 'the sweep of a thick novel'.¹⁶⁹ One could even speculate that films such as *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* and *A Hen in the Wind* are sometimes eliminated from the list of Ozu's great works due to their short length, which limits the number of characters and forces Ozu to focus on the inspection of the main narrative, instead of other correlating threads. The paralleling threads are usually treated in subtle ways, helping to create a sentiment that the films are carefully constructed yet relaxed in the presentation of their narrative ingredients.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Jung (1957) 1960, 10–11.

¹⁶⁸ Jung (1957) 1960, 16–17.

¹⁶⁹ Vishnevetsky 2012, 14–15.

¹⁷⁰ According to Richie (1974, 40): 'More often in an Ozu film, however, the parallels running side by side do not meet; they stretch into infinity, and if they do meet we are not shown the event. This is the position that best ensures their commenting upon each other without Ozu's having to overtly state they do'.

David Bordwell notes that Ozu's films 'presuppose a particular cycle of life' with different stages.¹⁷¹ This is true and again harkens back to the Jungian notion of having to understand the statistical, the regularity, in order to properly give attention to the singular, the irregularity. Lacking time-jumps, none of Ozu's films go through the entire journey of life from birth to death, but instead choose one of life's seasons as their setting. The cycle of life – which also happens to guide the disposition of this study – exists as a common understanding shared by the characters and the audience, which also dictates that all characters are comparable at least on some level, since the journey of life itself cannot be renegotiated, only the elements along the way. The comparability between Ozu's Japanese characters also allows the films to omit certain scenes, or to let them play out in the minds of the audience. Bordwell, for instance, gives the example of *Equinox Flower*, where we do not see the wedding ceremony at the end, because we have already witnessed parts of another ceremony near the film's beginning.¹⁷²

Ozu's characters love to gossip, which as an act relies on making comparisons between certain people and the norm. In *Good Morning*, the entire subplot about the women's organisation is moved forward by having members talk about each other behind their backs, giving birth to speculation and suspicion. In *Early Spring*, as the wife Masako (Awashima Chikage) is gradually starting to suspect that her husband has a mistress, the neighbour (Sugimura Haruko) drops in and relates a story about how she caught her own husband having an affair. The networks created by the films also include characters that are merely mentioned to exist, instead of shown to us, which, as an added realism, contributes to the forming of a larger cinematic world that goes far beyond the simplistic notion of a 'storyline'.

The increased number of characters is also what separates the post-war films from most of the director's previous works. However, this is not entirely a post-war development. Already in *What Did the Lady Forget?* (*Shukujo wa nani o wasureta ka*, 1937) and *The Brothers and Sisters of Toda Family* we see the casts of characters growing from the narrowed *Woman of Tokyo* (1933) or the aptly-named *The Only Son* (1936).¹⁷³ Yet it was not until the 1950s when we would see the democratisation of the plotline, the full blossoming of the worldbuilding. Ozu's supportive casts

¹⁷¹ Bordwell 1988, 59. Bordwell also shows us a graphic that visualises the normal life path, as presented by an Ozu film.

¹⁷² Bordwell 1988, 70.

¹⁷³ Donald Richie (1974, 237) sees the timeline here paralleling Ozu's fight against the pressure of having a narrative. Ozu's 1930s writings often deal with the difficulty of dramatisation, until 1937, when these kinds of entries suddenly cease. According to Richie, Ozu solved his problem not by untying the knot, but by cutting it. From this we can gather that increasing the number of characters allowed Ozu to create a new mode of storytelling that he personally felt more at home with.

started to breathe in a new way, as fleshed-out personalities that sometimes were on the brink of hijacking the narrative. Such a case was witnessed with the delightful trio of middle-aged men in *Late Autumn* (**Graphic 1.2**), a film pitched as a drama about a mother and daughter. In *Early Spring*, Masako's mother has a cat named Miko that expects kittens, highlighting the fact that Masako and her husband do not have children: thus, the narrative-building character-comparisons of Ozu's storytelling do not even limit themselves to just humans! The plurality of voices also makes it harder to find a key morale from a post-war film: if one character does a thing this way, another will do it that way. In the end, we probably walk out of the theatre liking both individuals. It is a clever move, because we do not tend to think how the number of possible alternative actions were initially limited in the screenplay by the writers. Noriko's dilemma in *Late Spring* can look like a binary choice, but it is only because the writers present it to the audience as such: she will either marry and leave her father, or she will not. In the end, it may even look like marriage was the only reasonable option in her situation, but here comparative individualism kicks in, and we see through Noriko's divorced friend Aya that people can also take different paths to better fit their personality and character.



Graphic 1.2. *Late Autumn* (1960). A marker of the comparative individualism of the storytelling in this particular film is the amount of attention that Ozu gives to the friendship between the three honorary uncles. (Screenshot by the author)

I view the thematic comparability of the films to exist on a level beyond the individual film. Yet we should also be careful not to assume false comparisons that stem from outside the films themselves. *Late Spring*, *Early Summer* and *Tokyo Story*,

three of the director's most well-known films in the West, are frequently referred to as 'the Noriko trilogy', as actress Hara Setsuko plays characters named Noriko in all three. I contest the notion of their trilogy-ness based on this alone, since all three would find better thematic counterparts in Ozu's other post-war films.¹⁷⁴ Also, Ozu and Noda were just as repetitious in their character names as they were in their choice of actors. Nearly all of Ozu's films include central characters whose surname is either Hirayama (*Tokyo Story*, *Equinox Flower*, *An Autumn Afternoon*) or Sugiyama (*Early Spring*, *Tokyo Twilight*), and many feature supportive characters named Shige or Koichi. The recycling of character names is yet another feature that serves to strengthen the inner realism of Ozu's worldbuilding, which is to say that *ozu-esque* characters should have *ozu-esque* names. In contrast to this, we should also consider the naming of the films themselves. Of Ozu's films, only *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family*, *The Munekata Sisters*, and *The End of Summer*¹⁷⁵ have the name of the central family in the title, and no film has the name of an individual character in its name. Instead, the way the films are named strives to establish a commonality between all Japanese families. This is done both by using seasons as a metaphoric element for the character's narratives and stages of life, as well as referring to Tokyo, Japanese food, or family roles in a broader sense.¹⁷⁶ Though the distinct individuality of the characters is a key factor that marks them as belonging to the Ozu canon, the films as marketable products have been titled to highlight the comparability of the issues depicted in them. The seasons are, after all, the same for all families.

Besides the people being comparable, so too are the places. Ozu's world looks unified and cohesive, which has to do with his use of similar spaces in these films. Good examples of this would be the workplace environments in films like *Equinox Flower* and *An Autumn Afternoon*, as well as the various bars that we frequent throughout his post-war filmography. Bordwell has noted that the 'uniformity of Japanese building practises' allows the audience to have a good 'cognitive map' of these spaces.¹⁷⁷ He elaborates on how Ozu's set designers always detailed the entire map for the houses in his films, even the rooms in which no scene took place.¹⁷⁸ As a result, Ozu's world feels whole, an environment in which you could actually move

¹⁷⁴ Robin Wood's 1998 essay (Wood 1998, 114–115) cites a multitude of reasons for them being a trilogy, but as our viewing of the Ozu filmography is so differently narrowed, it is most likely understandable that for myself the trio are less separable from the Ozu filmography.

¹⁷⁵ Originally titled *Kohayagawa-ke no aki*, Eng. *The Autumn of the Kohayagawa Family*.

¹⁷⁶ I also contest that the films with seasons in their titles would form a deliberately created series separated from the rest of the Ozu canon, though some earlier scholarship has viewed these films as a cycle (Geist 1989).

¹⁷⁷ Bordwell 1988, 99.

¹⁷⁸ Bordwell 1988, 99.

about, because you have a clear view of what is behind the walls and the closed doors.

According to Jennifer Coates, the repetitive tropes employed by cinema heighten the emotional effect that films can achieve with audiences, by allowing the viewers to get familiar with particular actors and scenarios, and therein being able to perceive the cinematic space as an extension of their own.¹⁷⁹ If the narrative cohesion of an Ozu film is internally established through the use of paralleling characters, it is externally supported by the steady recycling of the same actors in different roles. Through this, Ozu can both plant the notion of comparability between the kinds of characters played by an actor, as well as mess with the expectations of his audience. Ozu is, next to John Ford and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, one of the clearest cases of a director creating a stock company of actors, whose presence serves as a connecting tissue between the director's films. To a degree, the recycling would have happened even unintentionally, as actors, like directors, were studio staff with contracts: if you worked at Shochiku, you worked primarily with Shochiku actors. Yet the systematic way Ozu accomplishes this separates him from other directors. I argue that this practise creates a sentiment that the films are not merely about families, but also produced by a professional family unit.¹⁸⁰

Ozu was a demanding person, who would not allow any actor to stray from what was in the screenplay. Instead, he would dictate their every move to the smallest detail. But Ozu would also cast every single part before writing the screenplay: in order to understand what worked for a character, he needed to know who was going to play the character.¹⁸¹ The director's confidence inspired loyalty, and actors like Ryû Chishû have remarked how there was a feeling of an 'Ozu family' because of the strong bonds between them.¹⁸² The practise of relying on the same actors began early on. Ozu was promoted to director-hood in 1927 and first assigned to do a period film at Shochiku's Kamata studios, the now-lost *Sword of Penitence* (*Zange no yaiba*, 1927). By the time he got around to making his second feature, the period film unit at Kamata had been dissolved, and Ozu would spend the rest of his career focused on the present moment.¹⁸³ As he made the transition to *gendai-geki* in 1928, many of his most frequently used actors made their Ozu debuts, such as Sakamoto

¹⁷⁹ Coates 2016, 3.

¹⁸⁰ Timonen 2019, 15. Wada-Marciano Mitsuyo (2008, 56) also views Shochiku of the 1930s as creating a sense of neighbourhood and place for the middle-class genre by featuring ordinary-looking lead actors and recycling the same bit players.

¹⁸¹ Richie 1974, 28. This is also why Ozu found it difficult to adapt literature, as he did in *The Munekata Sisters*, because the part already exists, and you would have to find the right actor to match the nature of the existing role (Richie 1974, 236.)

¹⁸² Kometani 2021, 47.

¹⁸³ Bordwell 1988, 183.

Takeshi and Saitô Tatsuo. However, the post-war led Ozu to change the regular crew to a new collection of friendly faces that would pop up continuously in his films, from 1949 to 1962. This included actresses like Hara Setsuko and Sugimura Haruko, as well as former bit player Ryû Chishû, who now became the primary interpreter of generational sentiments, physical embodiment of the Ozu style. Bordwell has pointed out, how Ozu's late films featured the actresses Okada Mariko and Kuwano Miyuki, who both had parents, Okada Tokihiko and Kuwano Michiko, who had appeared in Ozu films of the 1930s, creating a sense of nostalgia.¹⁸⁴ Hara Setsuko, who started her Ozu collaborations playing daughters about to get married, later played the parent trying to arrange a marriage for her daughter, creating a similar sentiment. While Richie has quite famously stated that the dissolution of Japanese families is Ozu's only major theme,¹⁸⁵ I would argue that these kinds of casting choices prove that the films are not only about dissolution, but also about the renewal of the family culture. Even the casting of the films, let alone their narrative contents, shows the circle remaining unbroken and the younger generation maturing to resemble how their parents used to be. This in itself is one of the factors by which Ozu's cinema creates a sense of social dynamics and order, which is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁸⁴ Bordwell 1988, 362.

¹⁸⁵ Richie 1974, 1.

2 Cinema producing social order

This chapter focuses on cinema's ability to comment upon and shape society through presentation. Films are products of the societies in which they are made, and by presenting their surrounding society as the status quo, they re-enforce that society's concept of reality by adding voices to support it. This can often serve the interests of the ruling class or the political establishment. In these pages, I study Ozu's filmmaking from a more theoretical point of view, laying the groundwork for the following chapters, which tackle specific issues within the family depictions. I argue cinema to be a tool of power that Ozu uses for social commentary that can at times appear contradictory in its presentation of institutions, such as marriage and family roles. I suggest that Ozu as an individual artist is taking part on several socio-political discussions, but his work is also affected by the historical moment, Japanese tradition, policies of the studio system, and the existence of film censorship. While the first subchapter looks at Ozu's way of using power (his way of presenting Japan), the remaining subchapters also take into consideration how outside power (in this case, SCAP¹⁸⁶ censorship) could affect the finished films and their worldview.

2.1 A tool of power: cinema and the social conditions

At first glance, Ozu's films may appear deceptively tranquil. The director's representation of Japan does not seem to challenge the way things are, but merely to convey the feelings one faces while living in this cultural environment at this particular time. Furthermore, Ozu's humane way of depicting each character, even when their views are shown to contradict one another, offers a sense of relief that guides the viewer to focus on the narratives of the individuals, as opposed to the politics of the societal representation. However, the full extent of what is relayed by these films only comes into light when the individual level of the storytelling is viewed alongside the societal. According to political film scholar Mas'ud

¹⁸⁶ SCAP is short for the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers. The term refers to both Douglas MacArthur and the different branches within his staff.

Zavarzadeh, films reproduce ideological discourses that are needed to naturalise the existing social arrangements.¹⁸⁷ Ozu's attempt to cast out politics so as to view his surrounding society in its natural form would therefore make his works even more politically involved than those of Imai Tadashi or Kobayashi Masaki, directors with clear societal messages. Ozu's films show us a Japan where tradition seems to be living its twilight years, before new innovations change the cultural landscape that the director clearly holds very dear. A possible underlining question that can affect our viewing of the director's work is whether he is merely presenting tradition, or whether he is presenting it for preservation. In this line of thinking, Ozu could (depending on the judge) be viewed either as a stubborn traditionalist or a contemporary historian both fascinated and saddened by the changing face of Japan. However, I would like to suggest the possibility that the argumentative nature of Ozu's films is a more complex process that purposefully evokes clashing sentiments to direct the audience into a contemplative state over what is presented.

Again, we must consider Ozu not only as an individual artist, but also take into consideration the genre and the studio system. Arthur Nolletti, Jr. has noted how *shomin-geki* as a genre was ideologically a 'highly protean genre' that could 'serve traditional values by celebrating the strength, courage and resilience of common people in the face of pain and hardship'.¹⁸⁸ He also stresses that the *mono no aware* sentiment common for the genre and for Japanese art overall, 'urges acceptance rather than resistance'.¹⁸⁹ I concur and find that one of the purest examples of this sentiment can be found in the closing lines of Kawabata Yasunari's famous short story *The Dancing Girl of Izu* (*Izu no odoriko*, 1925), which was turned into a Shochiku film in 1933:

'In the darkness, warmed by the boy beside me, I let my tears flow unrestrained. My head had become clear water, dripping away drop by drop. It was a sweet, pleasant feeling, as though nothing would remain.'¹⁹⁰

Shochiku, as a studio, was a source of societal harmony, with softly spoken messages that shifted between conservatism and progressive commentary. As we have discussed, the initial plan for Kido's Kamata pictures was to depict everyday life as it was. Kido also wanted to keep the films secular, and to avoid political and ideological stances, in favour of a hopeful and cheerful view of humanity: Woojeong

¹⁸⁷ Zavarzadeh 1991, 3.

¹⁸⁸ Nolletti 2005, 14.

¹⁸⁹ Nolletti 2005, 14.

¹⁹⁰ Kawabata (1925) 1997, 33. The 1933 film adaptation, first adaptation of the oft-filmed story, was directed by Gosho Heinosuke.

Joo argues that this ironically turned the studio's brand of realism into a political one, as it refused to 'confront realities of everyday life that required a more critical perspective on humanity'.¹⁹¹ For some scholars such as myself, the tranquil surface of 'the Shochiku everyday life', is the very factor that makes the films more argumentative. You either accept this version of reality or not. The latter response forces us to consider the whole of the presentation, as well as question its purposes. Therefore, it is safe to suggest that Kido's apolitical ideals backfired on him.

From a very early point, Ozu's films started straying away from the path laid out by Kido: Joo uses films such as *Tokyo Chorus* and *I Was Born, But...* as examples of works that also capture the darker sides of everyday life for the middle class.¹⁹² Nolletti too acknowledges the progressive stance that the *shomin-geki* genre is able to take, for instance by focusing on the loosening role of the patriarch, by showing family dynamics in a state of change, by noticing the oppressed state of the women, and by showing the family in confrontation with the society.¹⁹³ The change was often not political or institutional by nature, but instead one that started with ordinary families. After the war, it was wise for directors not to identify too loudly with either the political right or the political left. At the far right there was nationalism, which led to trouble with the SCAP censors. Then again, after McCarthyism took hold of the American senate in 1947, there was a red purge of Japanese film industry (much like that of Hollywood), which led to directors like Yamamoto Satsuo and Imai Tadashi with known leftist tendencies to be fired from major studios.¹⁹⁴ Ozu's films are hardly ever discussed on the spectrum of left and right, as tradition versus modernity seems to be the agreed-upon contrast that defines them, while managing to keep up an apolitical front due to the family-centric presentation. Amidst Ozu's post-war filmography, *A Hen in the Film* stands as the 'odd film out', due to its heavy (and to some, heavy-handed) political messaging about the hardship for women in the immediate post-war era. After Ozu started writing with Noda, they attempted to evade such a head-on way of depicting societal injustice. The later post-war films rely more on the audience making their own deductions, instead of the filmmakers positioning the audience to feel a certain way. If you want to, you can find a 'lesson' in any of these narratives, but usually the audience is neither encouraged nor discouraged to do so.

Even though Ozu is not exactly a didactic influencer of the masses, a few of the films do seem to offer clear lessons or agendas, which are hard to dismiss. According to Kristin Thompson:

¹⁹¹ Joo 2017, 29.

¹⁹² Joo 2017, 36–7.

¹⁹³ Nolletti 2005, 14.

¹⁹⁴ Yomota 2019, 114.

‘The ideas in Ozu’s *Tokyo Story* boil down to one explicitly stated theme: ‘Be kind to your parents while they are alive’. This idea is hardly earthshaking in its originality, yet few people would deny that this film’s treatment of it is extremely affecting.’¹⁹⁵

A few years later, *Tokyo Twilight* offered a counter-morale, as Takako points out that a child needs to feel the love of both parents. Whether it was the filmmaker’s intention or not, the lesson of this cultural product not only discourages the divorces of dysfunctional couples, but also strengthens the notion of binary gender roles and heterosexual marriage. In the same vein, the wedding ceremony at the beginning of *Equinox Flower* includes an interesting visual detail. The bride and her family walk past a painting of Mt. Fuji (**Graphic 2.1**), which is famously the logo of Shochiku studio, as well as a symbol of Japanese tradition. It is left for us to interpret, but it could be seen as a visual presentation of the way (Shochiku) cinema guides people to follow tradition, as the mountain is guarding the preservation of traditional ways.



Graphic 2.1. *Equinox Flower* (1958). The wedding party passes a painting of Mt. Fuji, also the logo of Shochiku studio. (Screenshot by the author).

¹⁹⁵ Thompson 1988, 13. It should be noted that Robin Wood (1998, 130) has criticised readings of the film that make it out to be about ‘a dear old couple with ungrateful children’ as too narrow, as the scope of *Tokyo Story* is ‘enormous’, and features other central elements as well, especially the question of marriage dealt with through the character of Noriko.

Within the pantheon of Ozu scholars, Joan Mellen views Ozu as most one-sidedly conservative, giving special focus to the 'feudal' way Ozu presents women in society:

'In films that critics have praised as the least didactic of all Japanese movies, Ozu is, in fact, stridently prescriptive. He is imperious in conveying how the Japanese woman ought to behave. She neither has potential for ruling society, nor should she try. Nor can women better themselves through education, since their truest self-expression will be realized only through their facing the modern world with as much of the feudal ideal as can be sustained in a disintegrative age. Ozu would never use the term 'feudal' in defining himself, yet whenever, in his films, he accepts the right of characters to prefer freedom to the codes of the past, as sometimes happens, he and the film display discomfort.'¹⁹⁶

Mellen makes an interesting point but simplifies the matter too much. The films' sadness about the unavoidable nature of change is not Ozu's way of positioning them on the side of tradition and against the characters' right of choosing how to live their lives. What Mellen calls 'discomfort' is in my view acceptance, even if it contains a fair share of melancholia. The acceptance of the modern world, and the nostalgia for the Japan of the past, in no way shut out one another but exist as parallel sentiments in the post-war filmography. These sentiments ring loudly because of the rare level of acknowledgement that the characters have about the extent of change. Richie has framed Ozu as 'one of the very few artists whose characters are aware of the great immutable laws that govern their lives'.¹⁹⁷ This mode of existence contributes to the dramatic weight that mundane events possess within these films and guides the viewer to inspect them with this knowledge.

Most would argue that Ozu's films are nonconfrontational by nature, a mixture of views both old and new, assembled together to encapsulate the various discourses of a society. The films certainly value harmony, even if this is sometimes hard to achieve. In *Late Autumn*, the groom gets a monologue about how we should not quarrel with our loved ones, as he lost his mother at a young age, leading to a realisation that time is precious. The speech makes the argument that acting on a whim and losing composure can be very regrettable things. Then again, as these films get their form from the inclusion of multiple voices, one should always be careful not to identify any one character as speaking on behalf of the filmmaker. Previously in the film, another character Mamiya (Saburi Shin) has noted the exact opposite: a family that argues is a family that loves one another. Is the point then for the audience

¹⁹⁶ Mellen 1976, 40.

¹⁹⁷ Richie 1974, 70.

to nod at these opposing arguments and then make their own conclusions? I would argue that it is, as the films celebrate the difference in perspective between characters and draw their narrative appeal from the juxtaposition that need not be completely solved.

In media studies, a classic way to view an audience is the sequential model of the mass communication process, consisting of a source, channel, message, receiver, and effect.¹⁹⁸ The renegotiation of family roles in Ozu films does not follow this pattern, as Ozu is not simply sending messages that the audience receives before going about their ways. Instead, Ozu is constantly inviting his audience to consider; to take part in the larger discussion with their minds and ideas. According to Richie, Ozu only gives us the evidence, but the deductions are left for us to make. Yet Richie continues this by maintaining that the films are so skilfully made that the only possible way we can piece them together is the one that Ozu himself intended.¹⁹⁹ There is a huge leap between the two parts of this argument, only the first of which I agree with. If there indeed was one 'intended' reading for his films, Ozu's work would have hardly inspired the huge pile of scholarship that it has. I would argue this ambiguity also to be a key reason why he has managed to charm so many different demographics, as it allows the films to be read differently, depending on the viewer. The films defy the kind of definite readings that would not leave any room for interpretation in the next reading.

While viewing cinema as a tool of power, some consideration must also be given to Ozu's contemporary audience, to whom this power was initially applied. The Japanese audience is not, and has not been, a homogenous entity. According to Robin Wood, it would be 'the grossest of errors to suppose that all members of a foreign culture share the same perceptions'.²⁰⁰ Film preferences are also not solely guided by people's social background, but also by individual taste, thus making them harder to predict or to theorise.²⁰¹ Nevertheless, cultural products are made with certain audiences in mind, and women as a demographic occupied a central role among Shochiku's target groups. Though it is not openly expressed within it, the ways in which an individual film tries to appeal to an audience has a close and intended relation to the spectator's gender.²⁰² By covering certain societal issues, situations and phenomena, women's films take part in the shaping of female subjectivity in

¹⁹⁸ McQuail 1997, 1.

¹⁹⁹ Richie 1974, 24.

²⁰⁰ Wood 1998, 97. Furthermore, Murray Smith (1995, 64) has pointed out that the spectator and the filmmaker are both roles taken by individuals, the filmmaker is the first spectator of their work, and both spectator and filmmaker bring certain beliefs, desires and interests to the text.

²⁰¹ McQuail 1997, 79.

²⁰² de Lauretis (1987) 2004, 53.

society: women's films have also been criticised for serving male interests with ideological content that supports a male-dominant system.²⁰³ The fact that Ozu's films were clearly made to also appeal to feminine tastes allows us to see the post-war filmography in a more political light, as the films continuously address what it is like to be a woman. The audience of a film often influences the character framework of the product as classically, people are known to prefer films that feature characters who they can relate to, in terms of race, social status, and gender.²⁰⁴ Thus for example the gender divide of a film can give us information about the target demographic: films with fewer female characters give the women and the girls in the audiences fewer choices of characters with whom they can identify, unless they choose to relate to a character of the opposite sex.²⁰⁵ It is questionable whether Ozu really meant for his audiences to identify with any single character, as opposed to acknowledge the general relatability of the entire cast of characters.²⁰⁶

As films that try to reproduce normal society, the gender divide of Ozu's films is often closer to real life than that of many other directors' films, even if the female characters occupy fewer central roles in the narrative. For female audiences looking for a character of their own gender to identify with, there are always several options. For instance, in the director's most famous work, *Tokyo Story*, female audiences can choose from five central characters:

Hirayama Tomi, the traditional grandmother who wants to spend time with her offspring.

Hirayama Noriko, the young, beautiful widow, who opts not to marry a second time.

Kaneko Shige, the practical, if vain hairdresser, who is always fussing around.

Hirayama Fumiko, the typical, obedient housewife and mother, well-behaving, but lacking a personality.

Hirayama Kyôko, the youngest daughter who works as a teacher, presumably before getting married and dedicating herself to being a wife.

²⁰³ Joo 2017, 81.

²⁰⁴ According to Annette Kuhn, 'one of the defining generic features of the woman's picture as a textual system is its construction of narratives motivated by female desire and processes of spectator identification governed by female point-of-view.' Kuhn (1984) 1996, 62.

²⁰⁵ Hodge & Tripp 1986, 56. Though such an identification would, of course, be possible. Murray Smith (1995, 41) suggests that the spectator's relationship to a cultural text, as well as ideology in general, is mediated by their imaginative capacities. Smith argues that audiences are neither 'deceived with respect to the status of the representations, nor entirely caught within the cultural assumptions of the representations'.

²⁰⁶ Standish (2005) 2012, 51.

Even if the number of major female characters grows from *Record of a Tenement Gentleman's* two to *Equinox Flower's* six, the greater number of female characters also shows more clearly the limitations that the films' worldview sets for female individuals. Then again, as pointed out by Jennifer Coates, the repeated motifs in female imagery lured audiences into cinemas, allowed them to experience moving emotions, and through their repetition made sense of the rapidly changing, post-war societal landscape.²⁰⁷ Instead of identifying with one character, audiences can also piece together their identity from the various characters presented to them. The two Munekata sisters as characters are placed on opposite ends of the spectrum between traditional and modern, allowing contemporary female viewers to place themselves somewhere in the middle.

The fact that Japan's post-war film output discusses and questions the norms surrounding femininity so determinedly begs the question of who exactly went to see these films. Even though the studios turned out films with the goal of presenting female audiences new role models for a democratised era, they did not really keep an eye on the audience demographics during the occupation period.²⁰⁸ In the 1950s, an interest in the subject arose, and according to the studies made about the attendance at cinemas on Sundays, the post-war female audiences peaked in 1956 with 37.4% of the total viewership.²⁰⁹ Therefore, at all times, the majority of moviegoers were male, even though film taste was affected by gender. In Japan, as in other countries, moviegoing was an activity partially guided by gender norms. It was common for women to go to cinemas in groups, whereas men would find it also normal to attend a screening without company.²¹⁰ After television started to squeeze in on the media landscape, the female viewership dropped in the 1960s.

The way Ozu's work can be viewed has greatly changed in modern times, when the films are easily accessible to anyone with a DVD player or an internet connection. The later audience, who have full access to the entire Ozu filmography, can venture to make comparisons between characters in different films, and thus see a tapestry of social roles, similarities and variations. This greatly benefits the study of gender representation within Ozu's body of work: Richard Dyer argues that 'the analysis of images always needs to see how any given instance is embedded in a network of other instances'.²¹¹ However, we cannot assume that the initial audience was, or could have been as thorough. Moviegoing is a social activity, and people go

²⁰⁷ Coates 2016, 201.

²⁰⁸ Coates 2022, 127.

²⁰⁹ Coates 2022, 134. She cites a study by Uryū Tadao published in *Kinema Junpo* in 1967.

²¹⁰ Coates 2022, 10. The questionnaire survey issued by Coates to Japanese people who had moviegoing experiences within the timeframe of 1945 to 1968 also brought in more responses from male moviegoers. About 60% of the respondents were male.

²¹¹ Dyer (1993) 2002a, 2.

to cinemas just as much (if not more) for the experience, instead of seeing a particular film.²¹² Many of the initial Japanese viewers likely encountered Ozu by chance. We cannot assume their moviegoing experience to have been shaped by the knowledge of the entire Ozu filmography, as ours can be. Yet, even with singular films, Ozu creates enough characters to form a sense of fullness to his cinematic world, and the full Ozu experience adds layers and shows the consistency in this world-building.

2.2 Post-war censorship and the freedom of speech

The previous subchapter tackled cinema's ability to support the existing social conditions by presenting them as natural, while also suggesting that Ozu's cinema goes beyond this by being actively argumentative over what is presented. Yet it narrowed the view to the filmmaker and the studio system as the creators, who author the meanings incorporated within the works they produce. This neglects the existence of film censorship, which has a long history in Japan. The two clearest examples of this are the wartime (1939–1945) censorship by the Japanese state, and the post-war censorship (1945–1952) dictated by SCAP officials. The central feature of censorship is invisibility. If the people do not know about the existence of censorship, they assume that the films have turned out the way they have, because the filmmakers wanted that. Lars-Martin Sorensen highlights the difference between the military censorship and the SCAP censorship that followed, as during the wartime Japanese people had the 'acute awareness that the films they were watching had been censored', because there was not an attempt to hide this, and finished films were left with crude marks.²¹³ During the occupation, the Japanese people were not informed about the extent of the nation's media censorship and the SCAP personnel were better at concealing this.²¹⁴ Hirano Kyoko has pointed out the double standard in the country's democratisation process: the Americans attempted to turn Japan into a democratic nation with free speech by giving orders that limited the very concept of free speech.²¹⁵

The history of Japanese film censorship goes back almost as far as the history of Japanese film. Hirano has found examples of officials suppressing foreign films dating back to 1908, and in 1925 the government issued rules for Japanese

²¹² Kido Shiro stated that one reason why Shochiku should make films for women was that women did not go to cinemas alone, but instead with friends, relatives or boyfriends, and therefore films could gain large audiences without the studio spending huge amounts of money for advertising. Wada-Marciano 2008, 80.

²¹³ Sorensen 2009, 82.

²¹⁴ Hirano 1992, 45.

²¹⁵ Hirano 1992, 45.

filmmakers about what they were forbidden to depict: not only were sex and nudity on the list, but also kissing and holding hands.²¹⁶ In both cases, the customs were considered too Western, and in the wartime a similar denunciation of all things Western became a central mandate for the ultra-nationalistic film culture. Ozu's mischievous attitude caused problems with the censorship, and the opening sequence for the now-lost *College Is a Nice Place* (Daigaku yoitoko, 1936) was removed entirely, because it made fun of the army.²¹⁷ In 1939, Japan passed a strict film law, which gave the state officials full control over the country's cinematic output. Modelled after the example set by Nazi Germany, the subjects of the films, as well as the number of films that could be produced and the number of studios producing them, were re-defined.²¹⁸ According to Isolde Standish, as cinema 'had become symbolic both as a metaphor and motor of modernity', the law and its later amendments should be considered an end point.²¹⁹ The wartime regime used the medium of film as a propagandistic tool that strived to unite the audiences into a redefined national populace: the argumentative power of cinema was viewed to be formed from its mass appeal, inspirational power, and potential reach made possible by extensive distribution.²²⁰ Most histories of Japanese cinema view the years from 1939 to 1945 as a whole; a period that produced some films of note such as the debuts of Kurosawa and Kinoshita, as well as a few good films by the likes of Shimizu Hiroshi, but overall a time when the propagandistic qualities required from the filmmakers made it impossible for them to let their creative individualism flourish. However, later scholars like Standish have also criticised the treatment of wartime 'national policy films' (*kokusaku eiga*) as unlinked to the studio and genre system of the previous decade,²²¹ while others have dedicated individual articles to films that got lost in the shuffle. Yet others, like film historian Hori Hikari, have painted scholarly portraits of the era's film and visual culture that present it as more complex than traditional histories, especially concerning the depiction of gender roles in various media.²²²

²¹⁶ Hirano 1992, 13, 16.

²¹⁷ Yoshida 2018, 158.

²¹⁸ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 129.

²¹⁹ Standish (2005) 2012, 142.

²²⁰ Fujiki 2022, 153.

²²¹ Standish (2005) 2012, 149–150.

²²² Hori 2017, 2. Hori also finds the term 'national policy film' misleading and problematic, because it simplifies the era's film output. The term originated during wartime and later entered film histories in the 1980s to critically acknowledge Japan's wartime imperialism. During the new millennium, in much of the film criticism the term 'national policy film' came to misleadingly refer to any film made in Japan during the 1930s and 40s. Hori 2017, 6-8.

The occupation period in Japanese cinema has been a frequent subject for academic writing in recent decades. Scholars like Edward Fowler have posed the question of cultural agency of an occupied country,²²³ and films from the period are often viewed from a more socio-political angle than Japanese films in general. Though the Occupation Council officially included all the Allied countries, the United States quickly took control of the democratisation process for Japan: ‘encouragement of individual liberties and fundamental human rights’ was in the foreground of this massive operation.²²⁴ Part of the reason why MacArthur’s team of occupiers was confident in advance about the success of the democratisation effort was their country’s earlier success in the Philippines at the end of the nineteenth century, when they had spread democracy and other ‘American’ values during their rule.²²⁵ Adopting (and forcing) the relationship of a teacher and a pupil also relayed how the SCAP officials viewed their nation as the more progressed, superior society.

As it took several months for the Americans to establish what the new rule meant for cinema, Anderson and Richie have called the change from militaristic policy into democratic policy a ‘slow dissolve’ as opposed to a ‘sudden change’.²²⁶ The American censors saw that the central feature of Japan’s wartime propaganda was the theme of self-sacrifice.²²⁷ Kathe Geist theorises how transforming Japan into a democratic state was a different process from that of Germany’s post-war democratisation: when Germany was stripped of Nazism it was still a recognisable Western culture, while Japan’s militarism had stemmed from a number of domestic cultural traditions with long histories, such as anti-Westernisation, emperor worship, Shinto religion, and tolerance of suicide.²²⁸ Strict hierarchy and loyalty were central elements to Japanese culture that the Americans wanted to get rid of. Therefore, the core idea of the post-war film censorship was to promote individuality by showing characters who work hard in order to achieve happiness for themselves, and the occupation period thus brought a heightened individuality and an extendedly humanistic worldview to Japanese films. Yet this was not a completely new current. Hirano has shown, how the Americans first conceived of the role of film in the democratisation process when they witnessed the humanist themes in some of the

²²³ Fowler 2000, 273.

²²⁴ Hirano 1992, 3-4.

²²⁵ Koikari 2002, 23.

²²⁶ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 160. Jennifer Coates (2016, 33) has also noted that although there were many changes within the industry, the largest studios had roots in the pre-war era and wanted to maintain most of their filmmakers (both actors and directors) that the audiences had come to appreciate.

²²⁷ Hirano 1992, 26. Kitamura 2010, 34. Though the reasons that governed it were different, self-sacrifice as a theme was central for the war propaganda of other nations as well.

²²⁸ Geist 2022, 122.

wartime films, citing *Chocolate and Soldiers* (Chokoreto to heitai, 1938) as an example.²²⁹

In September 1945, the Americans issued a list of suggested themes that they hoped filmmakers would insert into their films. These included, for instance, showing all Japanese people building a peaceful nation, soldiers returning to everyday life, and the promotion of tolerance for all people, regardless of social class or race.²³⁰ In November, a list of prohibited subjects was released, and this time it was an order. The list included larger themes like militarism, nationalism, chauvinistic, anti-democratic and anti-foreign sentiments, feudal loyalty, distortion of Japan's history, as well as revenge narratives and approval of suicide.²³¹ Geist also points out, how many of the same rules that affected Hollywood filmmakers were to be followed in Japan as well, such as moral probity and later, anti-communism.²³² While undermining the democratisation process was unacceptable, pure escapism was not enough for the SCAP authorities: instead the films needed to find balance by studying the problems of everyday life.²³³ As many of the new themes were not spontaneous, the quality of the early occupation era films has often been criticised. Mellen, for instance, calls many of them 'poor films, half-hearted in the exposition of themes that were not part of the director's personal philosophy'.²³⁴ Though the new rules laid out by the SCAP officials seemed strict, one could assume they nevertheless worked better for a director like Ozu, than did the wartime censorship he had bumped heads with earlier. For instance, one regulation that had been made in 1940 by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, ruled that:

'Slice-of-life films, films describing individual happiness, films treating the lives of the rich, scenes of women smoking, drinking in cafes, etc., the use of foreign words, and films dealing with sexual frivolity are all prohibited.'²³⁵

It was fairly easy for a humanist like Ozu not to include characters committing suicide for the glory of the Empire. Restricting the colours of everyday life from the master painter, was a much harsher obligation.

All films had to be cleared by both civilian and military authorities until the establishment of the Film Ethics Regulation Control Committee in 1949: after this,

²²⁹ Hirano 1992, 26–27.

²³⁰ Hirano 1992, 38.

²³¹ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 160. Hirano 1992, 44–45. Kitamura 2010, 36. Geist 2022, 122.

²³² Geist 2022, 122.

²³³ Kitamura 2010, 49.

²³⁴ Mellen 1976, 168.

²³⁵ Hirano 1992, 16.

the preproduction censorship ceased, but the finished films needed to be cleared by authorities until the occupation came to an end.²³⁶ The occupation and the subsequent Americanisation of Japan created a sentiment that the Japanese culture was under attack, and that tradition should either be closely guarded or lost entirely. While Ozu had, in his early films, adopted a playful attitude towards Western elements being incorporated in the Japanese culture, the post-war period would no longer portray this quite so innocently or with neutral feelings.²³⁷ He was also vocal about the cultural change and famously declared in 1958: ‘We are Japanese so we should make Japanese things. If they don’t understand them, there’s nothing we can do about it.’²³⁸ In this *Kinema Jumbo* interview, Ozu offers harsh criticism about the commodification of Japanese culture for the sake of ‘damn foreigners’. Mellen has theorised that Ozu is critiquing the likes of Kurosawa for simplifying Japanese culture to reach greater popularity with foreign audiences. She also goes on to call Ozu’s angry statement about foreigners both xenophobic and ‘quite drastic in its stereotypic, racist approach’.²³⁹ Since his earliest surviving films, Ozu balanced Western and Japanese culture in his works, but as the post-war years went on and he himself grew older, Ozu grew more vocal about the melancholy sentiments created by the vanishing tradition. Yet even in his final films, his criticism did not spill over, and the way American culture made its way back into the heart of Japanese life was treated in ways that are far from black and white, and certainly not as rage filled as Mellen makes out.

While Ozu’s two wartime films re-enforced the patriarchal structures of the Japanese state, they left the topic of Americans unexplored. This is most likely due to Ozu being an admirer of American culture.²⁴⁰ He spent his Singapore days watching new American films and famously, after witnessing the technical achievements of Disney’s *Fantasia* (1940), was convinced that Japan was going to lose the war.²⁴¹ During the war, things associated with American culture, from wardrobe to music to baseball, were banned, which also took its toll on Ozu’s depiction of the modern. His two wartime films, while competently made, feel straightforward and somewhat joyless. When the war ended, many Japanese had

²³⁶ Saito 2014, 328.

²³⁷ Geist 2022, 96.

²³⁸ An interview with *Kinema Jumbo*, conducted by Iwasaki Akira and Iida Shinbi. Cited in: Mellen 1976, 153.

²³⁹ Mellen 1976, 153.

²⁴⁰ Though it should be noted that even proper Japanese war films often refrained from showing an actual, physical enemy, as the films placed greater emphasis on the purity of the self. Dower (1987) 1992, 39.

²⁴¹ Bordwell 1988, 8. However, he was most impressed by *Citizen Kane* (1941) directed by Orson Welles. Ozu remarked: ‘A total novice suddenly broke in and made something like this, so I thought I couldn’t be slacking off.’ Kometani 2021, 116. The quote is from 1946.

reservations about Americans, who had been portrayed as demon-like villains in the national propaganda. Yet they also were genuinely relieved that the Soviet Union did not become their main occupier, as communism was a general subject of fear.²⁴² Though the SCAP censors forbade showing American characters in the films, the American influence over the newly democratised nation was impossible to conceal. Cinematically, this makes the wartime seem a visual interim, as the *gendai-geki* films of the 1930s had also shown inescapable American influence in the form of fashion, cars and leisure activities – without anyone forcing Japan’s hand. Once American films began to be shown in Japan again, the SCAP officials also monitored the themes of these films – without the pre-censorship that characterised their approach to Japanese output – and considered carefully, which films could get released in Japan and have a positive effect on the people.²⁴³

On the surface, Ozu’s two first post-war films *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* and *A Hen in the Wind*, incorporated many SCAP-preferred themes in their narratives. The Americans wanted Japanese films to cover the problems of post-war Japan, but for the films to also show Japanese individuals showing initiative to solve them.²⁴⁴ In *Record* and *Hen* the answers do not come from above, or from tradition and culture, but instead stem from the individual protagonists. Otane in *Record* discovers what her life is missing, and in the end opts to fix this. Tokiko in *Hen* has to make a difficult decision, and in the latter half of the film, her husband too has to work out his feelings by finding the answers himself. The two films show a heightened individuality compared to Ozu’s other films, which focus more on the communal spirit. Both of them are also unusually female-driven narratives for Ozu, with *Record* altogether lacking a male protagonist that anyone could view as ‘a substitute Ozu’.²⁴⁵ At the time, there was a larger Shochiku trend of turning out films about strong female characters to suit the new age.²⁴⁶ It is difficult to know if Ozu knowingly participated in it, as neither film visibly strives to be empowering for women, and both present their female protagonists as balanced characters who also have faults and weaknesses.

After those two films, *Late Spring* and *The Munekata Sisters* offer a counter-reaction. While certainly not hostile to the idea of adapting Western innovations, the films also stress the importance of preserving the traditional alongside the modern. Lars-Martin Sorensen points out that even though *Late Spring* includes a Coca-Cola

²⁴² Totman 2008, 451.

²⁴³ For more information: Kitamura 2010, chapter 4.

²⁴⁴ Hirano 1992, 38.

²⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that in *Record* Ozu’s usual cinematic ‘alter-ego’ Ryû Chishû plays a sub-tenant, who tries to guide the main characters in a positive way but has little say-so because of his half-homeless situation. His presence in the film is therefore limited.

²⁴⁶ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 177.

sign (that is impossible to miss), coke is the one beverage nobody is shown to be drinking.²⁴⁷ Despite its cultural presence, the characters turn towards Japanese food and drink. The pro-tradition sentiment is most directly voiced by the father of the Munekata family (Ryû Chishû), who explains to his older daughter: ‘There’s real beauty in old Japan. But some people say that traditional things are bad. They’re ignorant people.’²⁴⁸ Ozu usually phrases his sentiments more ambiguously, though again the scene is not without a sarcastic edge that makes you question its sincerity. Immediately after this statement, the daughter asks: ‘Aren’t you drinking too much, Father?’. One problem of viewing Ozu as a socially conscious director is that his ever-present sense of humour somewhat opens up every scene to interpretation. In *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*, Ozu cast the same actor again to give similar advice: ‘It’s not a good thing to be trendy.’²⁴⁹ Again, alcohol and nostalgia were the uncredited supportive players.

While examining Ozu’s films from the occupation era, it should also be considered whether the motivation for his creative choices stemmed from the existence of a system of censorship, or personal vision. In Joo’s thinking, the films escape the imagery of war-torn Tokyo for the traditional landscapes of Kitakamakura and Kyoto, to voice an argument about Japanese modernity. According to Joo, Ozu wanted to stay away from violence and destitution, as they threatened the humanism of his cinematic worldview.²⁵⁰ This brings us to a situation where Ozu is, at least partly, co-operating with the desires of the occupiers, but he is doing so for personal reasons. His films are veering away from realism and the contemporary state of Japan, not in order to comply, but to create a more timeless space where the director is free to study the modern society in ways that are most agreeable and comfortable for him. Though Ozu’s films from the occupation period undoubtedly discuss Japan’s state as an occupied country, it does not mean that the majority of the societal criticism is directed at the Americans. *Record* and *Hen* both end with lengthy monologues that very directly address the Japanese people. Robin Wood has also pointed out the democratising effect of Ozu’s camera angles as ‘every character is filmed from the same angle, the same height, the same distance and the lighting is uniform for all’.²⁵¹ Yet fun as it might be, we cannot read it as a visual cue for depicting the democratized society of the post-war, as Ozu had cemented his ways early on in his career.

²⁴⁷ Sorensen 2009, 168. Sorensen (2009, 170) sees the sign as signalling a risk that Noriko might end up as a ‘Coca-Cola bride’ and views it in contrast to the tea ceremony that starts the film.

²⁴⁸ *The Munekata Sisters* (1950), timecode: 20.00 – 20.30.

²⁴⁹ *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* (1952), timecode: 43.00.

²⁵⁰ Joo 2017, 155.

²⁵¹ Wood 1998, 113.

2.3 Taboo subjects in post-war Ozu films

How, then, did a director like Ozu, both respectful of tradition as well as rebellious in spirit, cope with the post-war cultural landscape? Given the high value that Ozu films place on humane behaviour and harmony, one could think that the SCAP officials did not need to worry about Shochiku's 'old master'. Yet Ozu's cinematic vision was always guided by his gut feeling and sometimes that could lead him into trouble. Like Woojeong Joo, I maintain that Ozu's films include social criticism during all periods of his career, and he was not about to stop practising just because the country was occupied for seven years.²⁵² Though often subtle, Ozu's films from the period can puzzle one, both because of the content that passed the censors, as well as the objections that they issued after examining the screenplays. Things that were omitted, such as small lines of dialogue, often appear very trivial. Perhaps the censors were being overtly careful, or perhaps they felt they were dealing with a particularly tricky personality. In *Late Spring*, a line about Noriko having worked for the navy during the war got changed.²⁵³ The first half of the film includes a multitude of remarks about how Noriko has recently been sick and is now better.²⁵⁴ This has been analysed as an allegory of Japan's state in 1949, as Noriko's sickness was caused by the war; such an allegorical viewing then gives political meanings to the handling of the marriage narrative, the way Japanese tradition challenges Western romantic practice, or vice versa. The remark about Noriko's future husband looking like Gary Cooper also raised some eyebrows but was allowed in the end as being, after all, a positive remark.

The clever thing about Ozu's societal commentary in the occupation period is that it can always be read both ways. *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* and *A Hen in the Wind* are both tales about characters overcoming the hardship that befalls them in the immediate post-war period. The SCAP censors liked narratives such as this, with optimistic messages about the future of democratised Japan. Yet the films can also be viewed as depictions of hardship that is at least partly due to the Americans. *Record* begins on a dark night in a bombed-out tenement neighbourhood: the lack of electric light gives a notion of a country that has been sent back to the Dark Ages.²⁵⁵ Throughout the film we get to observe the poverty-stricken, beaten-down nation

²⁵² Joo 2017, 214.

²⁵³ Hirano 1992, 49.

²⁵⁴ For instance, when Noriko meets Professor Onodera on the street, he mentions how she is looking much better now. *Late Spring* (1949), timecode: 13.48–14.10. Later, her father asks her what her blood count was when she went to see a doctor. *Late Spring*, timecode: 18.20–19.00.

²⁵⁵ Fittingly, the Japanese have later begun to call the fifteen year period time before the end of the war 'the dark valley' (*kurai tanima*). Dower (1990) 1992, 9.

through various locations and the characters that inhabit them. For Edward Fowler, the physical backdrop of the film serves as a hidden second narrative that is meant to criticise the Americans but was not observed as such by the censors.²⁵⁶ Fowler proceeds to describe various details in the film that highlight it as taking place after the war and connect the poverty of the central characters to this socio-historical moment. I find his take on the film a fascinating one, but personally I do not think that these elements, whether relating to the dialogue or the setting, are hidden in plain sight as criticism. I do not think they are hidden at all, and even though they may be critical, they are merely relating images from the contemporary reality. Though there is slight criticism of the occupiers, I do not think Ozu was going out of his way to blame them for the country's sorry state of affairs. From the perspective of the censors, it would be hard to deny that the background scenery contributes to the contextualisation of the storyline in the first two post-war films. Ozu's initial intention was to also display war-damaged landscapes in several scenes in *Late Spring*, but as the censors questioned the necessity of this, he gave up on the idea.²⁵⁷

I would argue that there is a certain 'ends justify the means' -morality in the censor's approach to *Record* and *Hen*. Ozu is clearly breaking the rules laid out for the directors, but because the narratives conclude with messages in the proper SCAP spirit, things that have occurred before are consciously overlooked. The SCAP censors protested the cruel treatment of the boy in *Record*, but the scenes that they criticised remain in the film.²⁵⁸ In my view, this is because the final message of the film clearly states that we should be kind towards children, and the lesson learned through the journey of the film would not make sense, if these sequences had been removed. Furthermore, the film was so short that not much could be omitted without it being drastically shrunk into a short film. Other clear examples of rule breaking are the physical assault of Tokiko in *Hen* and the military song in *Record*, as both violence towards women and militaristic/nationalist songs were forbidden. According to Hirano, if the standards of the SCAP censorship had been applied in the strictest way, Ozu's narratives about arranged marriages could not have been filmed: Hirano points out how a line in *Late Spring* about the husband-candidate coming from an 'old and well-established family' was marked for deletion, but somehow reinstated for the final version.²⁵⁹ On this subject, it seems clear that Ozu was not depicting anything taboo or even risqué, but merely something that the Americans viewed as feudalistic. Mostly, Ozu seems to have either been so aware of

²⁵⁶ Fowler 2000, 279.

²⁵⁷ Geist 2022, 136–137.

²⁵⁸ Hirano 1992, 74, 282. Hirano has speculated that this could be a case, where the studio bribed the officials to give the green light for the screenplay.

²⁵⁹ Hirano 1992, 70.

the rules and regulations that he managed to practise sufficient pre-censorship of the screenplays, or he was just a lucky exception that passed under the radar. The latter case would seem more likely, as the films transgress many of the SCAP mandates. It is almost comical how the misdemeanours start from the very beginning: it was forbidden to depict Mt. Fuji, and Shochiku was the only studio that was allowed to do so, due to the mountain being its logo.²⁶⁰ Americans also hated bowing, as they associated it with the concept of feudal loyalty.²⁶¹ By having his characters bow to each other continuously, Ozu was doing the opposite: not bowing to his censors.

The risqué subject of prostitution in *Hen* is first introduced by a passing character who notes that there is an easier way for a pretty girl like Tokiko to make a living than by selling her kimonos. Interestingly enough, it is not a sleazy man voicing the idea, but another somewhat poor woman who says it to the friend Akiko (Murata Chieko). From this we can understand that solidarity between Japanese women had, during the economic distress, also made room for bitter sentiments. The flat of this bitter woman is decorated extensively with American film posters, which Ozu usually uses without political motivations, but here they may voice silent blame for the reasons for Japan's impoverished state. When Akiko reveals to Tokiko the nasty suggestion she heard, Tokiko laughs it off and says that the neighbour had also said it straight to her face. In the brothel – seen only briefly – Hawaiian-style music is playing, which incites further connotations to America and Pearl Harbour specifically, forming a sense of history as the backdrop of the individual drama. Tanaka Kinuyo, the star of *A Hen in the Wind*, later became Japan's second female director with her directorial debut *Love Letter* (Koibumi, 1953), which addresses many of the same themes as *Hen*, themes which were covered more directly because the occupation had ended. *Love Letter* also includes Japanese women who were forced into prostitution by their poverty, straightforwardly admits to Japanese guilt for the war, and also covers the romances between Japanese women and American soldiers.

This is not to say that Ozu would never hide criticism in plain sight. In *The Munekata Sisters*, the traditional father figure is shown reading a newspaper article with the English title 'The Atomic Bomb'. Joo notes that as Ozu's post-war films feature several educated male readers with linguistic skills, it would seem natural for this group to also develop an interest in the recent war.²⁶² *Late Spring* and *The Munekata Sisters* are the two films, in which Ozu seems to offer his most straightforward criticism about the effect that American culture, as well the wartime bombings, have had on his home country. The Ryû father figure in *The Munekata Sisters*, Ozu's most outspoken film about the clash of tradition and modernity, is

²⁶⁰ Hirano 1992, 52.

²⁶¹ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 162.

²⁶² Joo 2017, 162-163.

charmed by the beauty of old Kyoto, and makes a resolution to never return to Tokyo.²⁶³ This is not very different from the Ryû lines in *Late Spring* that were famously protested by the SCAP censors: ‘Kyoto is lovely. So relaxing. It’s nothing like Tokyo. Tokyo is full of burned sites.’²⁶⁴ Due to the censors, the remark about ‘burned sites’ was removed and the father merely remarked that Tokyo is ‘dusty’.²⁶⁵ The fact that the same actor voiced similar sentiments about the same issue in two back-to-back films is hard to view as anything but a personal grudge against the authorities. It is less about what he is saying and more about his right to say it, a rare case of Ozu being this politically charged.

In the post-war films, the Americans seem present through the cultural impact they are having on Japanese life, yet are also physically invisible and consciously marginalised in the depicted space. An exception can be found in Ozu’s penultimate film, *The End of Summer*, which cunningly comments on the current relations between Japan and United States. The family patriarch, Manbei, bums a cigarette from a worker, noting with slight annoyance that the ‘Peace brand’ is ‘very extravagant’.²⁶⁶ This comment later gets extra texture when we understand that Manbei’s daughter, Yuriko (Dan Reiko) is dating an American named George. The parents are shown concerned: seeing their daughter being charmed by strangers bearing exotic gifts also leads them to the usual discussion between Ozu’s older characters, about how people used to be different and now only care about themselves. However, Ozu again knows exactly how to soften the piece, by having the parents simultaneously enjoy shark eggs that were among the gifts received by Yuriko. Later, we get to see that Yuriko is also going out with another American businessman, Harry, and this likewise is a relationship she engages in to live more luxuriously. The date is portrayed as being in bad taste, both because we now know she has several men, and because Manbei has just died and she still goes on it. George and Harry are probably the only Caucasian characters in any Ozu film, both seen only briefly. The film does discuss how George is a businessman as opposed to a soldier, and Harry is likewise seen in business suit. This naturally harkens back to *A Hen in the Wind*, in which Ozu had to reassure his audience (and curious minds at the SCAP office) that the man whom Tokiko was forced to have sex with due to economic distress was not an American GI but instead just a random Japanese man, who also, through dialogue, expressed that Tokiko did not enjoy the sexual experience, thus further reassuring the audience of the character’s purity.

²⁶³ *The Munekata Sisters* (1950), timecode: 21.35 – 22.25.

²⁶⁴ *Late Spring* (1949), timecode: 1.24.15–1.24.32.

²⁶⁵ Hirano 1992, 54.

²⁶⁶ This Japanese brand of cigarettes was also the one that Ozu himself smoked, about sixty per day. Kometani 2021, 102.

Once the occupation ended, several Japanese filmmakers made films that examined it from a more critical angle. These included fellow Shochiku director Kinoshita Keisuke, whose famous film *A Japanese Tragedy* (*Nihon no higeki*, 1953) offered a brutal panorama of a broken society, and all the turmoil that the nation had faced since the end of the war. Next to the Kinoshita film, Ozu's depictions of the immediate post-war period appear almost as romantic idealism, though obviously such a film as *A Japanese Tragedy* could not have been produced earlier. Even though the hard times are referenced in later Ozu films, the director focused on the present and would not return to re-evaluate the past by setting a film there. After the occupation ended, Ozu's films continued their social criticism, though it often became more general in its expression. *Early Spring* and *Tokyo Twilight*, for instance, were films, for which the studio encouraged him to handle darker topics so as to generate greater audience revenues than did the traditional *gendai-geki* films, which to some viewers had grown stale.²⁶⁷ However, towards the end of his career it becomes abundantly clear that Ozu has such a strong vision about what he wants to present through his art that he becomes his own ultimate censor. The films issue social criticism, but they do so by showing the small cracks in the harmony of everyday life. Yet before we can examine the full extent of social roles and their presentation, we should take a moment to consider what has been omitted from this imaginary Japan.

2.4 Invisible people: the absence of minorities

The taboo subjects in society did not limit themselves to themes and topics, but also included groups of people, who for decades were left without depiction in Japanese film. Before the next chapters that discuss the Japan presented by Ozu, a quick thought should be given to what, or who, is left out of this depiction. Historically, many of the political discourses within Japanese society have presented a myth of a homogenous nation.²⁶⁸ This belief has been one of the core elements in the cohesion of Japanese national identity. There lies, of course, a danger in a group identity that is viewed as homogeneous, national and always in full consensus. Scholars have argued that a reason for the war was the way this collective identity was directed into militarism.²⁶⁹ Therefore, after the war, ethnic nationalism was something that the occupation forces wanted to get rid of. The 1947 Constitution outlawed

²⁶⁷ Japanese post-occupation cultural censorship in the fields of cinema and literature against topics that were viewed as obscene is excellently covered in Kirsten Cather's *The Art of Censorship in Postwar Japan* (2012).

²⁶⁸ Shimoji & Ogaya 2019, 118. Morris-Suzuki 1997, 88.

²⁶⁹ Eccleston 1989, 15.

discrimination ‘on the basis of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin’.²⁷⁰ Yet even contemporary Japan is characterised by the concepts of division and exclusionism.²⁷¹ Japanese cinema has likewise found it difficult to shake off the myth of the homogenous society.

Japan does in fact have minorities and there is internal variation in Japanese society, as in other industrial societies in the world.²⁷² A definition of ‘minority’ could be a group that is in a disadvantageous position in society and whose difference is stigmatised as abnormal in relation to the majority of that society.²⁷³ Notable ethnic minorities in Japan include the Chinese, the Koreans, and the Vietnamese, as it was common for people to move to Japan in search of employment. Other discriminated groups include the Ainu indigenous people and the segregated Burakumin minority. In the post-war decades, lots of work remained to be done to improve foreign people’s status in Japanese society and arguably, still does.²⁷⁴ For instance, people of Korean ethnicity living in Japan lacked proper legal status and citizen rights, and things would not begin to improve for them until the 1960s, when Japan and South Korea normalised their diplomatic relations.²⁷⁵ The lack of minority characters in Ozu’s films has not been of interest to scholars, probably since this same absence concerns the majority of Japanese films of the era. Japanese films portrayed Japanese society as ethnically fully-Japanese, monolingual, and heterosexual. For some of these, the reason had been stated clearly in censorship or in legislation. During the occupation, the SCAP officials had forbidden the depiction of people of other nationalities as well as interracial or international relationships. It is quite interesting to speculate why this is, as the Americans otherwise encouraged the Japanese to be more inclusive. It could be that America’s own segregationist politics influenced the decision, or that they viewed the recently imperialist nation as not yet ready to begin depicting the nationalities that had recently been subjected by them.

The lack of sexual minorities in Japanese cinema was also the result of the existing social conditions: while homosexuality was technically not illegal, gay people were the subject of various forms of discrimination. Ozu’s own possible bisexuality has been speculated about by some scholars, as he was expelled from

²⁷⁰ McLelland 2010, 517.

²⁷¹ Shiobara 2019, 3.

²⁷² Shimoji & Ogaya 2019, 118. According to the writers of this article, the ‘foreign’ population of Japan is 2,700,000 people, or 2% of the total population: one out of every fifty new-born babies is of mixed-race ethnicity.

²⁷³ Shiobara 2019, 10.

²⁷⁴ Matthews 2019, 54.

²⁷⁵ Bouissou (1992) 2002, 161. Joel Matthews (2019, 54) notes that (Zainichi) Koreans who live in Japan are still excluded from Japanese society through their complicated status of being ‘special permanent residents’ instead of normal citizens.

senior high school allegedly for writing a love letter to another boy, but there is no definite conclusion.²⁷⁶ Most Ozu scholars are careful not to lean too hard towards this (possible) aspect of his personality in their analyses of his films. It is also difficult to be certain about a filmmaker's gay/lesbian identity, especially when they have left it undiscussed.²⁷⁷ Ozu's films, like those by most directors working under a studio system in any country, take part in maintaining heterosexual society, where being straight is such an obvious part of every person's gender identity that it need not be stated. Due to the centrality of marriage as a theme in his films, he can even be seen as doing more than his share in this social construction. Isolde Standish has spotted a hint of sexual ambiguity in Tanaka Kinuyo's character from the pre-war *Dragnet Girl*.²⁷⁸ However, the most interesting and out-front curiosity in this regard can be found in a little scene from 1951's *Early Summer*.

In *Early Summer*, the boss, Satake, who tries to hook Noriko up with a marriage candidate, asks a friend of hers whether she is, in fact, interested in men (**Graphic 2.2**). When the friend Aya gives her expert opinion that she does not believe Noriko has ever been in love but knows that Noriko is a big fan of Katharine Hepburn whose pictures she collects, Satake asks extremely frankly, whether Noriko is 'queer'.²⁷⁹ The word he uses is *hentai*, which in the context means 'queer' or 'perverted'.²⁸⁰ This is the only open discussion that acknowledges the existence of sexual minorities in the Ozu filmography, and a rare curiosity in 1950s Japanese cinema overall. Even though the Ozu daughters are often hesitant to marry, other characters never pose similar questions about the reasons. If anything, their hesitance is credited to their lack of sexuality, as opposed to a different sexual orientation.²⁸¹ Even in *Early Summer*, Aya is quick to deny that Noriko could be into women, and they have a laugh about it. This reveals the audience that Satake himself has a considerably feminine, high-pitched laughing voice, which is a nice, understated way to evoke considerations of sexual ambiguity among the larger Japanese population – and also possibly the reason he thought of asking the question.

²⁷⁶ Wood 1998, 121. Kometani 2021, 122.

²⁷⁷ Dyer (1991) 2002b, 92.

²⁷⁸ Standish (2005) 2012, 57.

²⁷⁹ Robin Wood (1998, 123) finds similarities between the Noriko character and the modern women played by Hepburn in her 1930s filmography. Kanno Yuka (2011, 290) points out, that *Early Summer* 'is also the first Japanese film to suggest the possibility of a transnational circulation of the queer icon Hepburn beyond its American context'.

²⁸⁰ Kanno 2011, 294.

²⁸¹ Wood (1998, 124) also notes that while Noriko does not give any indication she would be a lesbian, she does not give indication about being straight either. The Noriko characters of *Late Spring* and *Early Summer* treat the men they like as friends.



Graphic 2.2. *Early Summer* (1951). A light-heartedly portrayed, if awkward, discussion about what Noriko being a fan of Katharine Hepburn could mean. (Screenshot by the author)

Kanno Yuka, a scholar of queer film studies, has analysed Hara Setsuko and queer spectatorship by ‘implication’, giving special focus to the moment in *Early Summer* and reading it from a modern perspective, reconstituting the queerness of past film text in the present moment. She points out that while Satake thinks collecting pictures of Hepburn might mean that a woman is a lesbian, Satake himself has collected and even carries around the pictures of the groom candidate Manabe and in multiple ways voices his admiration for his buddy.²⁸² Even if most of the audience will not pick up on this connection, the joke would be in line with Ozu’s comparison-based comedic storytelling. Kanno extends the queer elements found in this scene to characterise the whole of the Noriko trilogy as well as Hara’s star persona, criticising the earlier Ozu scholars for pre-assuming the heterosexuality of the characters played by the actress.²⁸³ She also addresses the problem within lesbian representability and the audience’s perception of it in general. According to Kanno:

‘Lesbianism requires absolute facts and evidence, while heterosexuality does not. Hara’s image in her Noriko characters is shaped precisely within the sexual-representational matrix in which the lesbian appears as negativity: one cannot be a lesbian unless there is evidence of such sexual desire or perhaps practice. As a naturalized institution as well as an official social reality,

²⁸² Kanno 2011, 298.

²⁸³ Kanno 2011, 290 & 294.

heterosexuality secures its public position through being everything and nothing at once.²⁸⁴

This realisation importantly captures an issue in modern scholars' re-investigation of older film texts and their character networks. It is hard, if not impossible, to gain certainty about the identity politics woven into a given character, if they have not been revealed either by the character's actions and dialogue, or by the filmmakers after the fact, in books or interviews. However, the fact that actresses like Hara and Hepburn have resonated with LGBTQ audiences testifies that the films do leave enough room for doubt, so that such readings can be made without them feeling out of place.

Due to the difficulty of ascertaining character details from non-action and unspoken dialogue, the moment in *Early Summer* remains an explicit exception amidst Ozu's otherwise implicit films. Other than the examples detailed before, there are hardly any people in Ozu's films that could be considered as members of minorities based on what the films show us. During the sequence at a police station in *Tokyo Twilight*, an officer is interrogating a man who frequently steals women's underwear.²⁸⁵ The suspect speaks with a feminine voice and might be a minority member. This moment has little to do with anything, and the man's high-pitched voice could have been intended as a joke for the audience. Another possibility is that this is just a way to establish the location for the audience, before the protagonist Akiko gets interviewed here, 'amidst these strange people'. In *Early Spring* there is a mention of a character named Tsu, who is said to gamble in horse races, and is, based on his name, Chinese.²⁸⁶ The reason for the absence of minority characters can also simply be credited to the filmmaker's wish to depict average Japanese characters. Minority members most often did not live as members of ordinary Japanese society, but instead faced heavy segregation. Thus, if Ozu or any other director had wanted to depict these people, they would have had to go out of their way to specifically build a film around the minority experience. One such film is *A Whistle in My Heart* (*Kotan no kuchibue*, 1959) by Naruse Mikio, where the focus point is the discrimination faced by the Ainu, indigenous people in Hokkaido. On the other hand, Ichikawa Kon's *The Outcast* (*Hakai*, 1962) was a pioneering work depicting the plight of the Burakumin people

²⁸⁴ Kanno 2011, 294.

²⁸⁵ *Tokyo Twilight* (1957), timecode: 52.00-52.50.

²⁸⁶ *Early Spring* (1956), timecode: 46.40.

in society.²⁸⁷ Imai Tadashi closed the 1950s with the noteworthy film *Kiku and Isamu* (Kiku to Isamu, 1959), where the two titular characters are children born to a Japanese mother and a Black American GI. The possibilities of brown-skinned children having a future of any kind in racist Japan are thought to be so non-existent that the custodian-grandmother considers sending them to America, where there at least would be other Black people.²⁸⁸ These three films are exceptions as mainstream films tackling minority narratives, since usually the Japanese films that would do so were either underground works or exploitation films.

The negative effects of war are also not visible in Ozu's characters and overall, it has been asked whether Japanese cinema has ever come to terms with the most traumatic effects of the war, such as the aftermath of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.²⁸⁹ Once the occupation ended, younger filmmakers did start to re-evaluate the wartime history with critical takes, in films that were tonally the opposite of what Ozu was producing. As we shall see later in the subchapter about masculine war-nostalgia, Ozu's men are hardly traumatized by the experience, and some actively miss it. Noriko's health is mentioned in the controversial *Late Spring* line, but for the most part that is as far as the films will go. The censorship would not have allowed for depictions of deeper psychological agony or bad health. Ozu's films also consist entirely of able-bodied individuals, and there are no characters with disabilities, war-related or otherwise. In 1961, Matsuyama Zenzô wrote and directed *Our Happiness Alone* (Namonaku mazushiku utsukushiku), which depicted the plight of a deaf couple through the post-war years and made the woman's deafness a result of the bombings. The film shows the couple trying to achieve the kind of mundane family happiness that many Ozu families seem to take for granted. Even the smaller joys in the lives of this couple feel like massive feats, only because their everyday life is made so much harder by their shared disability, and society's lack of assistance.

Another signifier of hegemony, one so obvious that it is easy to forget, is the Japanese language. Due to the linguistic homogeneity of Japan, the country's national cinema produces works solely in the *de facto* language. Thus, the Japan that is produced by Japanese films is a place where the Japanese-ness of people is marked, among other things, by their native language being Japanese. In the 1950s,

²⁸⁷ Burakumin people, while hard to define, are a group thought to be descended from a discriminated and segregated outcaste group from the Edo period, who worked in impure trades, such as slaughtering animals for food and leather. They face discrimination and segregation in Japan, though many Japanese do not have a clear definition of them. Ishikawa 2019, 166.

²⁸⁸ As a curious coincidence, the Imai film and the Naruse film premiered on the same day!

²⁸⁹ Broderick 1996, 1.

the majority of Japanese people could not speak a second language. In terms of both language and culture, Ozu's films depict a culture in transition. The children in Ozu's *Good Morning* are learning English but are at an early stage in these studies. Few of the adult characters are mentioned as working as translators or in other jobs that require skills in the English language. Though it is not often spoken in the films, the English language is visible in their worldview, as Ozu frequently targets American or Western elements, such as signs, ads, and movie posters with his camera. The tone of these discoveries varies, and many times the films can simultaneously express joy about the cultural innovations and sadness about the vanishing national tradition. Though Ozu's Japan is homogenous, partly because of his effort to portray a homogenous version of the nation, it is gradually transforming, and not unanimously against it, either.

From the examples presented in this chapter, we can understand that cinema is a terrain characterised by contested power relations. The machinery of censorship that exists behind the scenes and hidden from the viewers affects the ideological contents of the films, but throughout the fifteen post-war works Ozu also displays a personal philosophy of life that cannot be contributed to any outside party. Though usually harmonious and kind in the way they address issues, the films contain enormous power of persuasion. By showing the audience scenes of everyday life that are characterised as 'normal' or 'ordinary', the films address them as subjects and appeal to them to accept this vision of reality. Through its presentations, cinema addresses a woman as much as it does a man, and in Ozu's case the films offer strong conceptions about what is expected from people based on their gender. The following chapters will scrutinise how Ozu uses the power of his medium, whether his depiction of social roles and customs seeks out to limit, or to expand our understanding of these categories.

3 The contrast between arranged marriage and love matches

One of the classic points of discussion among Ozu scholars is the contrast of modernity and traditionality, and the form that it takes with Noriko's marriage in *Late Spring*. Western scholars have taken both sides in the argument, some seeing the 1949 film as a victory for tradition while others maintain that the film is a highly modern look at femininity in Japanese society.²⁹⁰ Nowadays, scholars have suggested that Ozu should not be read as neither one-sidedly traditionalist or modernist.²⁹¹ This chapter looks at how marriages come to be in Ozu's films, starting from the formula introduced in *Late Spring* and then analysing the variations and the elements that the marriage discussion gains through the subsequent filmography. I make the case that by showing us a multitude of brides from different families, and the way these families go about arranging these unions, the films display the loosening tradition while simultaneously dedicating themselves to following the individuality of the characters. The younger generation adopts new ways of viewing these customs, but cannot completely forsake them, as they also have a conservative side. Finally, this chapter concludes with an analysis of divorces and second marriages in Ozu's filmography, the presence of which suggests even more leeway for the implementation of marriages.

3.1 *Late Spring* as a prototype, a case study and a conversation-opener

Whereas many other Ozu films, like *The Munekata Sisters*, still invite scholarly discussion and offer new things to be discovered, analysing *Late Spring* is like walking on a minefield. It can feel like writing about *Citizen Kane* (1941), and indeed

²⁹⁰ Kristin Thomson (1988, 319) wrote her article to serve as a rebuttal of the alleged conservatism. She views *Late Spring* as featuring a 'very different, modern view of the family'. Robin Wood's (1998, 119) feminist reading of the film, on the other hand, views marriage as an opposing force against freedom and modernity.

²⁹¹ Joo 2015, 354; Joo 2017, 156.

an apt comparison for Charles Foster Kane's childhood sled is the famous shot of a vase during the Kyoto sequence: both have been interpreted to death.²⁹² Besides a masterwork of cinema, *Late Spring* is a narrative that invites interpretation and refuses to be categorised in black and white terms. To say that it offers different things for different audiences would be an understatement: it could be justifiable to say that the initial Japanese viewers were looking at a different narrative than the Americans and Europeans who viewed the work later.²⁹³ *Late Spring* is about fifty-six year-old professor Somiya (Ryû Chishû) who lives with his twenty-seven-year-old, unmarried daughter Noriko (Hara Setsuko) in the peacefulness of Kamakura. They have lived alone together since Noriko's mother died, and the father would like to see his daughter married, so that she would not be all alone after he dies. Noriko, however, does not want to marry. *Late Spring* was Ozu's first major film dealing with the arrangement of marriages, and a prototype²⁹⁴ for his later works on the subject.²⁹⁵ The later films enriched the conversation that *Late Spring* had ignited, by the colourful means of comparative individualism: adding more characters for points of comparison, as well as introducing different situations and solutions, as implemented by different families.

According to sociologist Kumagai Fumie, a central characteristic of Japanese family issues is the co-existence of modern and traditional values without either completely taking over.²⁹⁶ The two ways of forming marriages in twentieth century Japan, arranged unions (*miai-kekkon*) and romantic marriages (*ren-ai-kekkon*), gave visible form to the debate between old ways and new alternatives. However, the development was not as straightforward, as it can seem to a Western eye. Marriages had been formed based on individual choice in earlier centuries, and only after the Meiji Restoration (1868) did romantic unions come to be considered too Western for the Japanese, and were therefore thrown aside in favour of arranged marriages.²⁹⁷

²⁹² Abé Mark Nornes (2008, 88) even suggests that the discovery of a definite explanation for the vase would bring about the end of Ozu studies. Yoshida Kiju (2003, 78) suggests that the audience turning the vase into a mystery to be solved would have either amused or irritated Ozu.

²⁹³ Kristin Thompson (1988, 323–324) comes to a similar conclusion, noting how the film may feel conservative to Western viewers despite the 'modern' aspects her article has highlighted. She however maintains that for 1949 Japanese audiences the film 'would have been fairly progressive'.

²⁹⁴ Bordwell 1988, 311.

²⁹⁵ Woojeong Joo (2015, 337) has, however, given few examples of pre-war films where the subject already comes up, including the now lost *An Innocent Maid* (*Hakoiri musume*, 1935), in which the conflict between arranged marriage and romantic love becomes a more central issue.

²⁹⁶ Kumagai 2014, 2.

²⁹⁷ Geist 1992, 102.

When *Late Spring* was made, the majority of Japanese marriages were still arranged unions, though in the 1950s the majority of Japanese people told the polls they preferred the romantic way: by the end of the 1960s, romance would prevail over arrangement once again, though the custom still exists.²⁹⁸ I argue that as Ozu's post-war filmography dedicates several films to the inspection of the already somewhat old-fashioned institution of arranged unions, it forms a large body of evidence on the attitudes surrounding marriage, even if all of this material has been written by the same two screenwriters.²⁹⁹

Gently, *Late Spring* leads us to understand that the situation between the father and the daughter is enjoyable and beneficial for both, yet unsustainable. The conversations between the two show how Noriko has become the lady of the house, as one could easily imagine similar discussions occurring between married couples. Robin Wood is perhaps right in maintaining that *Late Spring* could never be remade in the West, because in a different cultural context the audience would be tempted by the notion of a possible incestuous aspect to this relationship.³⁰⁰ The consensus would seem to be that Noriko helps her father by performing a variety of household chores, whereas her presence there allows her to enjoy the perks of modern life, only partially available for married women. The early scenes establish Noriko as quite spontaneous with her free time and this spontaneity is something she would lose by becoming a housewife. As the post-war decades went on, young people delaying marriage became an increasingly popular phenomena, which continues to this very day.³⁰¹ In Ozu's films, the direction is visible in the way Noriko is twenty-seven and single, and by contrast, Tokiko in *A Hen in The Wind* is twenty-eight and a wife and a mother. This shows how the generation that was old enough to experience the wartime as adults matured into their expected adult-identities faster.

It is commonly agreed that Ozu's films leave a substantial amount of the narrative unshown, for the audience to piece things together instead of the filmmaker spelling it all out for them.³⁰² Bordwell has found the terms *syuzhet* and *fabula*, which originate from Russian formalism, as particularly useful in the analysis of Ozu.

²⁹⁸ Kumagai 2014, 49–50, Thompson 1988, 320, Tokuhiro 2009, 18. In contrast, out of the Japanese marriages formed between 1990 and 1994, only 13 % were arranged. Tokuhiro 2009, 93.

²⁹⁹ Timonen 2019, 64.

³⁰⁰ Wood 1998, 116. I would offer Charles Laughton from *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1934) as an example of how Western audiences view widowed father characters who form too strong attachments to their daughters.

³⁰¹ Tokuhiro 2009, 2. 'The postponement of a marriage' even has the Japanese term *bankonka*.

³⁰² According to Kathe Geist (1992, 94): 'His frequent uses of repetition and ellipsis do not 'impose their will' on Ozu's plots: they *are* his plots. By paying attention to what has been left out and to what is repeated, one arrives at Ozu's essential story.'

Syuzhet means the straight-forward narrative that is presented in the film, whereas *fabula* is the ‘total system of story events, explicit as well as implicit’.³⁰³ *A Hen in the Wind* is very careful with its brothel sequence showing just enough for the audience to pick up on what has transpired. Yet it would be from *Late Spring* onwards that Ozu would take the strategy to the next level. By not showing the husband-candidate at all, and only giving us limited details about him, the film spins the usual narrative of ‘girl getting married’ into something else, study of a father-daughter dynamics and a drama about separation. A point of comparison could be drawn from another Shochiku release of 1949, Kinoshita Keisuke’s musical drama-comedy *Here’s to the Lady* (*Ojôsan kanpai*), also starring Hara Setsuko. It is another narrative about a young couple getting married through a *miai* (matchmaker), who is a shared acquaintance played by pre-war Ozu regular Sakamoto Takeshi. As opposed to *Late Spring*, the film actually focuses on the couple getting to know each other and going on dates. The two films that deal with similar matters could not be further apart in terms of style and narrative.³⁰⁴

Whereas later Ozu films would become more ambiguous with their theses on life and happiness, *Late Spring* as an occupation-era work tackles the definition of happiness head on, through the central fatherly monologue, in which Somiya gives advise to Noriko:

‘Marriage may not mean happiness from the start. On the contrary, you’d be wrong to expect instant happiness. Don’t wait for happiness. You two must make your own. Happiness isn’t a wedding. Happiness comes from a new couple building a life together. It may take a year or two, or five or even ten. Happiness comes only through effort. Only then can you claim to be man and wife.’³⁰⁵

Somiya confesses that during the first years of their marriage, his wife was not happy, but through persistence they made their marriage a happy one. The idea that happiness is not spontaneous is a very Japanese notion that clashes with the American norm of instant romance and love at first sight. Then again, the motivations for the marriage presented in *Late Spring* are highly untypical for the Japanese, with personal happiness of the woman stressed as much as it is. In Japan as well as in most other countries, the primary reason for the formulation of

³⁰³ Bordwell 1988, 51.

³⁰⁴ The Kinoshita film premiered in March 1949, whereas *Late Spring* came out in September. However, since *Late Spring* is based on a novel, it is unlikely that Ozu’s more dramatic arrangement of a marriage was a commentary on Kinoshita’s film.

³⁰⁵ *Late Spring* (1949), timecode: 1.33.30–1.35.15.

marriages was continuing the family line.³⁰⁶ In *Late Spring*, Somiya does not once mention the possibility – or the need – for this continuation, and neither does he express a wish to have grandchildren.³⁰⁷ Ozu's later films, like *Early Summer* and *Equinox Flower*, would continue to express *Late Spring*'s thesis about love and happiness coming to exist through time and effort, further unifying the thematic within the director's filmography.

Most readings view *Late Spring* as a drama about two people. Noriko of *Late Spring* is one the most iconic characters of classic Japanese cinema, because she represents a generational sentiment and crystalises, through her journey, difficult questions that young women are made to struggle with. However, while Noriko's generation has to negotiate the implementation of Japanese tradition in modern society, Ozu links another actress more straight-forwardly to the institution of arranged marriage: Sugimura Haruko, who plays Noriko's aunt Masa. Having made her film debut in 1937, the actress came to play parts in nine Ozu films starting with *Late Spring*.³⁰⁸ Her presence in these films is instantly recognisable due to both her nasal voice and her movement. As opposed to walking, her characters are always running from one place to the next because of their anxiousness to get things done. The correct rhythm of movement was developed in *Late Spring*, where it took considerable time for the actress to get it right for Ozu's preference.³⁰⁹ Her characters are very social and diligently take part in communal functions. Yet the personalities of most of her characters are not warm and loving, but vain and over-polite. Her characters give the films comedic relief and push the plotlines forwards.

The fact that Sugimura is the matchmaker in *Late Spring*, and the character most strong-mindedly pushing for arranged marriage, gives the image that arranged marriage too is a social convention that the older generation is pushing for the younger one, and not a necessity or a trademark of Japanese culture that should be preserved at all costs. Her introductory scene in *Late Spring* already manages to have a healthy laugh at her proud and uncompromising brand of conservative ideas, and if the film was really campaigning for arranged marriages to remain as the norm, it is clear that the part would have been written differently, and a more normal actress would have been cast for it. Later, Masa becomes the primary arranger for Noriko's union, a task she is happy to perform, as she feels that Noriko should have been married long ago. In *Tokyo Twilight*, the Sugimura character is also certain that it is

³⁰⁶ Kumagai 2014, 49.

³⁰⁷ Timonen 2019, 61. Then again, one must also remember that through marriage, Noriko would actually be continuing her husband's family line.

³⁰⁸ Even the films like *Equinox Flower* that do not feature Sugimura can have a clear 'Sugimura character' as a member of the collective of characters.

³⁰⁹ *I Lived, But...* (1983), timecode: 59.00.

time to arrange a marriage for her niece, but as we later find out how troubled the niece is, Sugimura's typical presence serves as proof that the older generation has lost touch with the world of the young.

In *Late Spring*, Noriko tells her aunt that the reason she does not want to marry is that there would be nobody to take care of her father if she did.³¹⁰ This element has been particularly scrutinised. While some probably view 'the lone parent argument' as sincere, just as often it has been viewed to be, at least partly, an excuse so that Noriko can continue living the life she has become used to. Most heavy in his determination has been Robin Wood, who states that Noriko sacrificing her happiness because of her 'sense of filial obligation' is simply a wrong interpretation.³¹¹ I tend to fall in the middle. I argue that the strong bond between the father and daughter and Noriko's freely executed modernity are not opposites of one another. Noriko can feel sad about losing both: she does not feel she is obliged to stay with her father but would like to. Noriko gets a monologue about all the things that would go wrong in the house, if she were not there to take care of her father.³¹² Even though she might genuinely be worried about him, and the scene is presented to us as a very fragile moment, the contents of her argument are somewhat laughable, as she seems to consider her father a man-child unable to take care of himself, and unable to learn.³¹³ Somiya himself is ready to take his chances with good humour and optimism. The other side of the coin is finally shown moments before the wedding ceremony, when Noriko thanks her father for taking care of her.

Late Spring is a work of such importance and standing that it is too tempting not to make narrative comparisons between that film and Ozu's later stabs at the subject of girls getting married. For the loose retellings of *Late Autumn* and *An Autumn Afternoon*, as well as the more comedic *Equinox Flower*, this proves to be a mode of viewing that contributes to the experience and helps to see the subtle thematic differences in Ozu's marital representations. However, it can also be a negative weight that makes the director's body of work seem more unified than it actually is. The temptation is there to view Hara Setsuko's failed marriage in *Tokyo Twilight* as a possible 'what if' continuation of Noriko's storyline. Then again, you could go further and say the same about *Repast* (Meshi, 1951), Naruse Mikio's famous depiction of a marriage falling apart, in which Hara also starred. This again highlights the importance of recognizing that even though Ozu's films have a fairly limited number of big subjects, all of these films still consist of unique individuals,

³¹⁰ *Late Spring* (1949), timecode: 45.20–46.30.

³¹¹ Wood 1998, 116.

³¹² *Late Spring* (1949), timecode: 1.06.40–1.08.03.

³¹³ One could argue there is a certain 'absent-minded professor' aspect in the way the daughter views her father.

which makes narrative comparisons fruitful only on a thematical, ideological, and a representational level.

By *Late Autumn*, it becomes clear that ‘the lone parent argument’ is an excuse as opposed to a genuine dramatic plotline. While the separation of a parent and child does include an aura of sadness, it is never treated as a legitimate option that Ayako would choose mother over marriage. What is interesting of course is how the films present this as a question with binary options – and ‘a right answer’. However, Ayako’s persistence – the persistence of the younger generation in general – is not rebellion against the idea of marriage, altogether. In many ways it is a criticism of the norm, of the expected passage of life and the fact that a person cannot stay put in one moment. Marriage, in this context, is a wall that separates the phases of the passage. Complying to it means accepting that the essence of life cannot be altered by rebellion. For Ozu the bachelor, accepting marriage is one step on the road towards accepting death.

This is also the way in which I view the (world-famous) vase of *Late Spring* (**Graphic 3.1**).³¹⁴ In the sequence Noriko is already engaged and is visiting Kyoto with her father, their last trip together. As they are going to sleep, Noriko is chatting to Somiya very freely, like a child to a parent. When she does not get a response, she turns to him and sees he has fallen asleep. The shot of the father shows him perfectly still, silently reminding Noriko that he will someday be dead.³¹⁵ This shows how the direction in which life flows cannot be changed, how Noriko has come to the end of one happiness, and has yet to find happiness in the next stage. The vase shot hides the exact moment when Noriko goes through this thought process, but it is not a random object. A vase resembles an urn, something in which people’s ashes are often contained, which therefore gives the item a strong connotation to death. Kristin Thompson has challenged the importance given to this particular sequence, noting how it is ‘not the emotional highpoint of the Kyoto scenes’, as the vase comes before the quintessential father-daughter conversation.³¹⁶ Indeed, the scene does not mark Noriko’s final acceptance of her fate as a woman to be married – and as a human being – but it finally makes it crystal clear that she cannot dodge the issue any longer.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ *Late Spring* (1949), timecode: 1.27.00–1.28.50.

³¹⁵ For Kathe Geist (1992, 110), the marriage of the child, generally in Ozu films, is a reminder that their parents will someday be dead.

³¹⁶ Thompson 1988, 339–340. According to Thompson, the vase is a random item that could have been ‘a lantern in the garden, a tree branch, or whatever’. She argues that the function of the shot is to ‘block our complete concentration on Noriko in order to prevent our taking this as the emotional climax of the film’.

³¹⁷ I would also like to add that much like Robin Wood (1998, 110) I do not think Noriko herself is watching the vase (according to Wood it is clearly located behind her) but the audience is invited to contemplate upon it.



Graphic 3.1. *Late Spring* (1949). The vase that sparked a thousand questions. (Screenshot by the author).

3.2 Rebellion against the old ways and the democratisation of the marriage discussion

After *Late Spring*, the marriage of a daughter as a narrative subject would come up frequently during Ozu's remaining filmography.³¹⁸ This subchapter studies how these works broaden the depiction of the topic by introducing new families with similar problems and how Ozu plays with these narrative patterns and in so doing deepens his study of marriages being formed. Kathe Geist lays out the statistical, by noting how in most Ozu films the daughters choose their own husbands, and only *Late Spring* and *An Autumn Afternoon* 'resort to *miai* marriages'.³¹⁹ Indeed, the subsequent filmography introduced more colourful ways of people ending up together, though the notion of arranged marriage looms in the background even in the films that do not choose to implement it. The older generation seems to agree that one way or another their offspring will get married. Joo argues that by the late 1950s, the depiction of the daughter's marriage had 'lost some of the tense energy' that had existed within the films from the occupation period, due to marriage no longer having the same temporal conditions in contrast to in the past.³²⁰ There is truth in this, as *Late Spring*'s tense political context – as discussed in Chapter 2 – further

³¹⁸ In November 1951, a month after *Early Summer*, another film with a marriage theme had premiered, Ozu made a humorous note in his diary: 'Lately, the rumors about marriage with Setsuko Hara are rampant'. Kometani 2021, 80.

³¹⁹ Geist 1992, 102.

³²⁰ Joo 2017, 196.

intensified the arguments made for and against tradition in regard to the subject of marriage. Even if it does not get addressed through dialogue, part of the reason why finding a groom was a difficult task in *Late Spring*, was that so many young men of Noriko's generation had died in the war.³²¹ Then again, because this film was so tightly built around the marriage narrative, making another one just as focused on the subject would have felt repetitive. *Early Summer* already was a much broader, lush narrative, which did focus on Noriko's marriage, but also on a wider network of people and relationships: it is a symphony, as opposed to a duet.

By 1958's *Equinox Flower*, the marriage plot had become such a familiar tradition in the annual Ozu feast that looking at it from a distance, or sometimes trying to completely escape it, were the best narrative choices in order for the films not to feel stagnated. An interesting contrast forms between a film like *Late Spring*, where the daughter is clearly one of two central characters, and 1960's *Late Autumn*, where she is part of a larger ensemble, and absent from many of the scenes.³²² The latter can, at times, create the feeling of the daughter being a piece of merchandise that other characters are trying to get rid of before expiration date. Then again, by showing us the three drunken 'honorary uncles' conducting these procedures, while they simultaneously make comparisons between the looks of the mother and the daughter, Ozu softens the scenes with humour. There is a running gag that all of the uncles used to have a crush on Ayako's mother Akiko – played accordingly by Hara – and therefore will do their utmost, so that Ayako gets married to a guy who deserves her, as opposed to just some idiot.

The younger generation of characters of Ozu's post-war films falls between tradition and the progressive new way of doing things, and therefore has to figure out things for themselves. According to Iwao Sumiko, the women of the post-war generation were taught gender equality in schools, which led to them searching for an equal husband – even if 'equality' was never defined.³²³ Many girls of this generation also considered that 'a healthy individual was a well-rounded one in whom the strength and directness of the 'masculine' character was blended with the sensitivity, romanticism and imagination of the 'feminine' character.'³²⁴ Even if Ozu faced accusations of conservatism from the younger crowd, he is clearly putting a lot of effort into not rocking the boat too hard towards either direction while covering the generational sentiments towards the institution of marriage. Friendship was also

³²¹ Geist 2022, 132.

³²² After the notion of marriage has been brought up, Ayako is absent from the film for about eighteen minutes. However, most of this duration is spent with other characters making plans for her.

³²³ Iwao 1993, 21.

³²⁴ Bae 2008, 347–8. These views were voiced in a reader-response article of a popular girl's magazine *Shojo no tomo*.

considered important with a possible marital candidate, which Ozu films clearly stress with the importance carried by the meetings between the intended couples. Not showing the groom to the audience has a clear emotional impact in the way we imagine the future marriage in our minds, as opposed to having a likable ‘Sada Keiji-type’ introduced to the viewers as well.³²⁵ However, even with a case like *Late Spring*’s Noriko, it is made clear that nobody in Ozu’s films marries somebody they have never met.

Most of the films view arranged marriage initially as the assumed course of action: the norm. In *Tokyo Twilight* the family is looking at possible marriage candidates for Akiko, while unaware of the dark undercurrents of her life that ultimately prevent the usual marriage narrative. What in this film is a tragic occurrence, is turned into a comical one in *Equinox Flower*. The father Wataru expects that although he is willing to tolerate and even root for modern ways of forming marriages in other families, things will be done the traditional way in *his*. The film proceeds from a communication failure to a communication shutdown, once the arranging father finds out that the daughter has arranged things for herself. The comedy hits home biggest for those familiar with Ozu and his usual ways: for once, an Ozu daughter is warming up to marriage on her own without other people having to rush her, so now *this* becomes the problem. The parents keep telling Setsuko how she is still young and should consider this thoroughly so that she will not make a mistake. Due to these levels of self-deception, Richie has noted Wataru to be the Ozu character that must be observed with most irony: ‘perhaps no other Ozu character demands as much’.³²⁶ Whereas the usual father figures of Ozu’s films are guiding their daughters to take steps towards adulthood, Wataru tries grounding his adult daughter, who is a working woman engaged to be married. The brilliantly crafted double standard is an unusually clear example of a reversed tragedy looking like a comedy, while still feeling very tragic for the people involved.

Late Spring opens from a status quo that has existed since the death of the mother: a father and daughter as a family of two. The first scene of them together also features the father’s younger assistant Hattori (Usami Jun) who gets along fine with both, leading the audience to a false sense of security that Noriko already has

³²⁵ Sada Keiji (1926–1964) made the first of his four Ozu roles as the young groom Taniguchi in *Equinox Flower*. The director and the actor developed a close friendship, resembling that of a father and a son. Sada was by Ozu’s side as he died in 1963, and during his lifetime, Ozu had served as the *miai* for Sada’s marriage. Kometani 2021, 29.

³²⁶ Richie 1974, 49–50. ‘Yet Ozu’s irony is always one of character. There is nowhere in his work a scene of which the real, intended meaning is contrary to the one seemingly expressed. Rather, a character reveals his beliefs to be the contrary of those he expresses, or maintains a belief different from the one reality quite apparently imposes. In Ozu’s work, such self-deception is, as the father in *Equinox Flower* plainly states, proof of humanity.’

someone to marry.³²⁷ In *Late Autumn*, the notion of twenty-four-year-old Ayako's marriage is brought up by the three uncles after the anniversary memorial for her father. The film follows the example of *Late Spring* by introducing an (off-screen) marriage candidate, stated to be twenty-nine years old, before we discover that the person in question is already engaged. This implies silently but firmly that Ayako may be in a hurry.³²⁸ Later, when the prospect of an eligible candidate comes up, Ayako asks her mother to turn down the offer, as she wants to wait until she falls in love.

An Autumn Afternoon cuts to the chase the quickest, possibly since the narrative pattern had by 1962 become quite familiar. Kawai Shuzo (Nakamura Nobuo), a friend of this film's father character Hirayama, informs him that he has found a suitable candidate for Michiko (Iwashita Shima). The speed is unusual, as the premise has been laid out before we know almost anything about the family. The notion of a possible re-marriage for the father is likewise planted within the first ten minutes, after which the film has time to venture into other subjects. The film changes the *Late Spring* pattern by not having Michiko be an only child. This changes the dynamic, since the eldest son Koichi (Sada Keiji) serves the role of an advisor and a confidant for his father. Michiko also meets the first possible marriage candidate accidentally through her brother as opposed to the father. Like many of the later Ozu daughters, Michiko is not against marriage, but very much against people rushing her. She is also the first daughter to make the argument that the father's need to get her married is more concerned with *his* comfort, as the thought of an unmarried daughter is making him very uneasy. He wants to get it done so it will not bother him anymore, whereas Michiko thinks it better to worry about it when the time comes. Again, the thought process that must be overturned is the comfort that the daughter finds in the stable present, as people must make plans for the future, even when everything in the present moment works fine for now.

More than other Ozu films, *An Autumn Afternoon* establishes the rush for the daughter to marry by showing how eligible candidates slip away, due to the indecisiveness of the characters. Miura, the marriage candidate for Michiko, is a rare case of a person in an Ozu film who actually believes a woman who says she does not want to get married yet. He confesses to Koichi that he was initially interested but gave up once Michiko voiced her unwillingness to consider marriage. This also has an effect on Michiko's thinking once she finds out, as she had a crush on Miura,

³²⁷ According to Robin Wood, Hattori is almost a member of the family, and Noriko could have viewed him a 'solution to the marriage dilemma' that enables her to maintain her present freedom, as this friendly man 'would not want to dominate her'. Wood 1998, 118.

³²⁸ In 1960, the average age for a woman to enter first marriage was twenty-four years, which is how old Ayako is. Tokuhiko 2009, 4.

but did not make her feelings clear to anyone in time. Later, the friends of the father play a practical joke on him. They make him believe that due to Michiko taking her time to agree to a meeting, they have introduced their groom candidate to another girl, who snatched him. Hirayama is relieved when he finds out he has been had. The characters can also be quite spontaneous in their matchmaking, which places them somewhere between tradition and the opposite. In *The Munekata Sisters*, the father makes a casual remark about the visiting bachelor and his younger daughter Mariko: ‘Ask him to take you somewhere.’ Later, Mariko tries to pair her older sister Setsuko with the man, even though Setsuko is still married.

Setsuko in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* has an arranged meeting set up for her by her mother, though she does not like such meetings. While having a discussion about it with her aunt Taeko who urges her to go on with the meeting, Setsuko’s counterargument for this is to point out the unhappy, arranged alliance between Taeko and Mokichi. When it is time for the meeting, Setsuko literally escapes, pretending to go to the toilet. Her uncle cannot change her mind about the civility of arranged marriages, but simply presses her to go on with it, as the convention cannot be helped. Ozu’s films do not claim that romantic unions would have it easier, or that marriages formed in this manner would be more likely to last. In *Early Spring*, we are made aware that the marriage of the main couple that is now in crisis, was initially a romantic union. Reportedly, the couple chose each other, and Masako was so strong-minded about getting the husband of her choosing that she declared she would otherwise die. The father in *Tokyo Twilight* expresses regret that he forced his eldest daughter into an arranged marriage while she was in love with another man. This is clearly a moment when the film questions, whether old ways are still good, and whether father really knows best. Even films that are not centred around the marriage conversation can include related arguments in the subtext. In *The Munekata Sisters*, Setsuko explains that when she realised she was in love with Hiroshi (Uehara Ken), she was already engaged to Mimura. Thus, we see that a loveless marriage has turned into a bittersweet entity. The whole narrative seems to rely on the audience agreeing that she should have married the man she loved but this cannot be helped anymore.

From this body of evidence, we can gather that the division between arranged marriages and love matches is not a black and white issue. The younger generation, as depicted by the director, tends to hate being rushed. The older generation, aware of their own mortality, painfully acknowledges the passage of time and keeps pushing for their offspring to keep moving on life’s path. No character in Ozu’s filmography confesses to disliking romantic unions, but the relatives of young people keep introducing eligible candidates, because they view time to be precious. Meanwhile, the leisure time before marriage – which will be inspected in Chapter 5 – tends to show itself as a precious commodity for those about to be married. The

fact that characters take so much time making up their minds can have negative consequences, but then again, no course of action can guarantee things going smoothly. Instead of correct solutions, which do not seem to even exist, the director is interested in depicting the struggle. Indecisiveness and uncertainty are common amidst the Ozu protagonists, and these qualities deepen the characters as more relatable for the audience.

3.3 Dating is hard: meeting halfway by introducing arranged love matches

So far, we have explored the ideas pertaining to marriage that get bounced around within the Ozu filmography. What must be inspected next is the implementation of these ideas through character behaviour, which discloses how these individuals balance tradition and modernity on the issue. Dating as a cultural habit in Western countries was a product that evolved slowly. The Japanese had witnessed the American implementation of the dating culture in foreign films during the pre-war years, but tradition still ruled on the home soil.³²⁹ Post-war Japan adapted gradually to this new way of conducting romantic relationships. Learning to interact with the opposite gender in a previously homosocial society was part of the younger generation's process of adapting to the post-war democracy.³³⁰ Dating as a concept is based on the idea of meeting someone and possibly falling in love. Americans viewed it loosely, as not necessarily more than a pleasant way for men and women to spend an evening together.³³¹ The Japanese, however, tend to look at love from a longer time perspective. 'Love' and 'marriage' have been viewed as clearly separated, while an old-fashioned belief that love will eventually grow if a couple stays married long enough, still persisted during the twentieth century.³³² This is certainly a view held in Ozu's films, starting with *Late Spring's* famous fatherly monologue. Yet there are also more abrupt fallings in love presented within the post-war filmography.

According to cultural historian Mark McLelland, Japan's pre-war system of conducting sexual relations was laid out by the Meiji Civil Code of 1898, 'a fusion of Confucian-inspired *samurai* values, which stressed the superiority of men over women, and Victorian ideas about the importance of monogamy and chastity.'³³³

³²⁹ Kristin Thompson (1988, 318, 320) stresses the importance of Western culture and American films in the introduction of the ideal of romantic love for Japanese people in the 1920s and 30s.

³³⁰ Bae 2008, 342.

³³¹ McLelland 2010, 508.

³³² Iwao 1993, 61.

³³³ McLelland 2010, 510.

From the 1920s on, the morals loosened as the younger generation was eager to modernise the gender roles and sexual norms. The change was brought to a halt by the tightening of the national politics in the face of the war effort. Afterwards, during the occupation, the Japanese had to once again adjust themselves into a new kind of sexual ideology, when the stationed American servicemen re-introduced the concept of American dating customs to the Japanese. This occurred simultaneously with the new constitution that considerably improved women's rights. McLelland points out the hilarious example of columnist Ijichi Junsei, who presented the notions of 'free love and free marriage' for Japanese women as 'similar in nature to the problems that puzzled the emancipated slaves of the U.S. on the morrow of their new life'.³³⁴ Therefore we can gather that the post-war period was a time when the younger generation were offered two very different sets of norms, which they then had to balance in relation to their personality and their feeling of Japanese-ness.

In the area of dating, the Japanese up-bringing did not help them much. Iwao argues that there is a lack of communication between the sexes, as both men and women spend much more time with members of their own gender, which has resulted in men not knowing too much about women.³³⁵ According to McLelland:

'Although in the American context young men and women would gradually have learned the body language and emotional cues appropriate to dating and making out through trial and error starting in their early teens, in Japan in the early postwar period young men and women had to have practises such as dating, walking arm in arm, kissing, petting and other techniques of lovemaking explained to them in detail.'³³⁶

Eventually, these developed into a central expression of the self, with sexuality being a key component of self-representation. Of course, not succumbing to peer pressure and modern ways was also a mode of self-representation. A good example of this is Hara Setsuko, who maintained that she would not kiss her onscreen love interests until the custom became more natural among Japanese people.³³⁷

In *Late Spring*, Noriko goes bicycling with Hattori. The audience is led to assume, as some of the family members do, that this might be the possible romance narrative for the film. Yet Noriko is quick to debunk such notions by revealing that

³³⁴ McLelland 2010, 518. The passage is from Ijichi's book *When Two Cultures Meet: Sketches of Post-War Japan 1945–1955* (Tokyo, Kenkyusha 1955, 138).

³³⁵ Iwao 1993, 16-17.

³³⁶ McLelland 2010, 528. This interest led to a surge in sales of literature and magazines that tackled these points of interest.

³³⁷ Hirano 1992, 160.

Hattori is already engaged to a girl younger than her. This small arc serves two primary functions. Firstly, it finally makes it clear to the family that Noriko should have been married several years ago and that she is unlikely to pursue the matter herself, even now. Secondly it allows the audience to understand the extent of Noriko's modernity. She is perfectly comfortable having meetings with men, and she does not see that 'having dates' means she will have to give something of herself to them, or to narrow her freedom. However, she has her moral limits, and when Hattori asks her to accompany him to a violin recital, Noriko does not arrive. This shows how the cultural connotations associated with different forms of dating are still new, and no clear code of acceptable dating practise exists. Then again, through Noriko's choices, it also shows individual judgment as the key component of one's sexual agency. For those who view Ozu as a conservative on the issue of marriage, it needs to be pointed out that the concept of arranged marriage only really comes into play after the option of a romantic union with Hattori (the primary option) is no longer valid.

Confusion in the face of new things is a source of humour in these films, and not just with the older generation. *The Munekata Sisters*, a film centred around a melancholy romance, gets a comedic kick from the performance of Takamine Hideko as Mariko.³³⁸ In the scenes with Hiroshi, Mariko has the habit of slipping into character and narrating Hiroshi's past in third person, with a funny, masculine voice. In what is probably a parody of *jidai-geki* narration, also lie interesting, albeit hidden character traits about Mariko. Though Mariko is shown to be modern and confident, she possibly is not as confident as she would like to believe. Her gradual interest in Hiroshi is masked behind the comedy show where she is the performer and he the audience. It is interesting that she should choose such a nostalgic emotional shield in this otherwise modern get-together. Eventually, when Mariko realises that Hiroshi might end up marrying Yoriko (Takasugi Sane), a snobbish lady whom Mariko hates, Mariko serves the bombshell and proposes Hiroshi herself! Though a young woman casually proposing to an older man is certainly the most modernised attempt to arrange a marriage in any of Ozu's films, the end result of Mariko's hasty implementation is a polite refusal by a scared man. Clearly it is possible to discover a way of doing things that will appear un-Japanese for even the Westernized younger generation. The scene sticks out because of the volume of the emotional outburst, but it does fit in thematically. Setsuko, the older sister, blew her chances with Hiroshi because of her traditionality and politeness: she was already engaged to another man and was too bashful and proper to call off that marriage. As

³³⁸ Lars-Martin Sorensen (2009, 174) has criticised the way this performance bursts out and viewed it as a contributing factor to the artistic failure of the film, whereas I view it as the highlight of what is otherwise Ozu's least-remarkable post-war work.

Hiroshi is shown to be a nice guy, he probably would not hurt Setsuko by marrying her younger sister, but nevertheless we can see Mariko blowing her own chance with the same man by being too modern and wild, and not understanding how to properly conduct this modernity. Even here, Ozu is rooting for balance.

Films like *Early Spring* and *Tokyo Twilight* also express worry about the young people who conduct themselves too wildly. In the latter, after Akiko has become pregnant with Kenji (Taura Masami), a boy that seemed interested in her, the young man does not want to take the responsibility of raising a child with her. He even asks Akiko whether she is sure that the child is his, implying that girls who agree to have nonmarital sex are viewed as promiscuous and looked down upon, even by their sexual partners. Thus, the film cautions that even though morals that concern dating may be shifting to more permissive ones, some realities of life will not change, and young girls need to be careful. The old attitudes also continue to affect people's worldview even within the younger generation, as Akiko herself also feels guilt about her actions. According to Japanese film scholar Miyao Daisuke, the film 'draws attention to the contradictions of the post-war Japanese boom'.³³⁹ The inclusion of a pregnancy without marriage and an abortion may now seem quite ordinary, but at the time, in Japan, and in an Ozu film of all places, this narrative choice carried a sure-fire shock value.³⁴⁰

Ozu's films view Western-style dating as a youthful innovation, but clearly a custom that the Japanese have yet to master. In *Good Morning*, the characters played by Kuga Yoshiko and Sada Keiji are in love with each other, but constantly fail to bring up the idea of sharing their lives together in their conversations, instead exchanging meaningless pleasantries about the weather. Sometimes the existence of a matchmaker is a good thing, and a 'Sugimura Haruko -type' running around keeps things moving forward. The process of matchmaking is less black and white when it is not carried out by an 'outsider'. In *Equinox Flower*, Mrs. Sasaki is constantly setting her daughter up for meetings, but always eventually finds something wrong with (her own) candidates, because she does not want to lose the daughter in marriage. This is of course a turn so comical that it could never fly with a Ryû protagonist, but it adds interesting colour to the process and shows that human beings are not perfect. The reason for matchmaking may not always be the older generation's obsession with getting every young person into marriage. The three gentlemen of *Late Autumn* celebrate once they have got Ayako married, and Mamiya notes that now they will have to think of something else to bring the three of them

³³⁹ Miyao 2012, 23.

³⁴⁰ Out-of-wedlock pregnancies had been quite common in Japan during the early twentieth century. From 1910 onwards they started to decline, and the century's lowest numbers were recorded during the 1960s and 1970s (Fuess 2004, 53).

together.³⁴¹ This is a reminder that matchmaking itself – like dating – is fun. As the post-war decades went on, ‘the arrangement’ as a cultural institution grew more casual, to a point when it could simply refer to colleagues and friends introducing people to one another.³⁴²

When it comes to the formulation of a marriage, the films do not want to give up tradition, but they insist on love being a key element in the success of a marriage. Therefore, many of them feature discussion about an arranged union, which may be the factor that introduces the young couple to each other, though in the end, it is their own agency that seals the deal. Then again, a feminist reading of *Late Autumn* could look at it differently: once the prospect of Ayako marrying Mr. Goto has come up, she cannot shy away from this destiny, no matter how many times she refuses to take part in it. *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* finds a humorous compromise. Setsuko is trying to escape the custom of arranged unions, but in so doing, comes to meet Okada, her uncle’s young, unmarried friend. This relays, how even romantic unions come to be due to people meeting new people through shared acquaintances. Comedically, the first time Setsuko and Okada are shown to be together by themselves, the only things they discuss are views on marriage and culinary preferences. This shows how an arranged meeting can lead to the intended outcome very quickly, just as long as the meeting is not arranged and there is no intended outcome.

Even though pickiness is constantly pointed out as an obstacle for marriage, the characters are usually not unreasonable in their suggested candidates. When the brother in *Early Summer* tries to pair twenty-eight-year-old Noriko with a forty-two-year-old man, both the grandmother and the daughter-in-law say that he is too old for her. In the post-war years, the average age gap between partners decreased.³⁴³ Taniguchi from *Equinox Flower* actually falls very close to the idealistic Western norm of a groom who comes to ask a father for his daughter’s hand (**Graphic 3.2**). He does not even have the decency to use an intermediary to come ask for the blessing, but instead comes himself and without a warning in advance. Of course, in Ozu world, this means that the father-in-law is not too thrilled about the prospect, as he plans for an arranged union with a candidate already in mind. The father does not turn him down cold but is obviously hurt that this is the first time he hears about his daughter having a man in her life. According to Robin Wood, the central issue in *Equinox Flower* is not whether arranged marriages are better than love matches, but ‘whether or not women have the right to make their own decisions, and here the film is entirely unambiguous’.³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ *Late Autumn* (1960), timecode: 1.59.00–1.59.45.

³⁴² Tokuhiro 2009, 99.

³⁴³ The average age gap had been four years before the war, and by 1970, it was down to three. Tokuhiro 2009, 98.

³⁴⁴ Wood 1998, 137.



Graphic 3.2. *Equinox Flower* (1958). Taniguchi (Sada Keiji) comes to ask Hirayama's permission to marry his daughter. In any other movie he would be an ideal marriage candidate, but Ozu chooses to frame the narrative from the perspective of the stubborn patriarch. (Screenshot by the author)

In *Early Summer*, Noriko is shown to already be old friends with her groom-to-be Kenkichi (Nihon'yanagi Hiroshi), and they casually go to a café without it being a date. Noriko also has a close relationship with Kenkichi's mother Tami, played by Sugimura Haruko in a surprisingly tender turn compared to her usual Ozu roles. This time she gets to be a matchmaker almost by accident, as she reveals to Noriko that she had a secret wish that his son would remarry a girl like her. She is baffled, and then overjoyed, when Noriko chooses to accept the offer, as hypothetical as it might have been. When Kenkichi comes home and finds out he has a new bride, he looks a bit embarrassed by the sudden turn of events, but when asked, says he is happy about it. Noriko's family, primarily her brother, are not amused by the announcement, as they had been arranging plans of their own. The parents are also saddened by the fact that she made the decision without consulting them, though they do not show the full extent of this sentiment in front of her. Geist notes how *Early Summer* examines a variety of reasons, why someone could want to get married, such as sex, status, wealth, and social position, as well as love.³⁴⁵ Noriko later reveals to her friend Aya that her feelings grew gradually, and at first, she could never have imagined marrying Kenkichi. She also describes her feelings as not being in love, but instead being at a complete

³⁴⁵ Geist 2022, 145.

ease when she is with him. Aya rebuts by noting that what Noriko is describing is, in fact, being in love.³⁴⁶

These examples demonstrate the colourful ways marriages come to be formed in Ozu's films, and how the modern dating culture strives to compromise between Japanese and Western behaviour patterns. Ozu is clearly not presenting a system that functions perfectly, but the movement of this machinery is constantly interesting and most often, fun to watch. Even though the director disliked plots, there is an immense joy in watching how people end up together in his films, especially when we compare these narrative threads with one another. Through these often-humorous plotlines Ozu displays how the practising of traditional customs is more relaxed in the post-war society, but as the director is clearly highlighting the intriguing personalities of these characters, the development is not portrayed as purely negative. The younger generation takes time to find a modern, equal partner, but eventually these characters will do what is expected and settle down with somebody. If things do not work out, there is the option of divorce.

3.4 Divorces and second marriages

Globally, divorce has been viewed as symbolic of modern life and increased divorce rates a post-WWII development.³⁴⁷ Much like their formulation, the dissolution of marriages has varied in Japan throughout the centuries. In the early twentieth century, Japan had the dubious honour of the world's highest divorce rates.³⁴⁸ After the war, divorce was viewed in negative, even un-Japanese light. Divorce as a concept is not mentioned in either *A Hen in the Wind* or *Early Spring* when it comes to the main couples, even as their marriages hit the rocks. In Ozu's films, divorce exists, but only as an alternative for non-lead characters. *Late Spring* introduces the subject with the character Onodera, who has remarried a younger woman, and Noriko is blunt when telling him that she finds his behaviour distasteful. The subject comes up in a humorous manner, as the Ozu children are not usually dead set against

³⁴⁶ Joan Mellen (1976, 256) does not believe this is 'being in love' and maintains that the only reason why he is acceptable to her is that a family bond already exists to him through Noriko's brothers. Mellen also highlights the role of friendship: 'Passion between these two seems inconceivable; Noriko herself seems to choose this man precisely because she, disliking what she clearly recognises as the serfdom of marriage, will be more secure in an arrangement between friends rather than lovers.' While I do not view Noriko's future to be quite as dark as Mellen does, I do agree that Noriko's reasoning clearly places friendship and a sense of equality as the cornerstones of a successful union.

³⁴⁷ Fuess 2004, 1.

³⁴⁸ Fuess 2004, 2–4. The peak year for divorces was 1883. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the number of divorces steadily decreased. In 1940, the divorce rate was close to that of developed Christian societies like Sweden and France.

the idea of second marriages, simply finding them awkward and undesirable for one's own family. From the 1960s on, the Japanese divorce rate started to rise again, until it reached the level of most European countries in the late 1990s.³⁴⁹ In this subchapter, I inspect the views that Ozu's films express about divorces, the things that cause couples to struggle, and the concept of second marriages, which like divorces, often gets brought up but is rarely resorted to.

According to historian Harald Fuess, the scholarship on Japanese divorces has viewed divorce as both a positive and a negative thing in terms of gender equality:

'On one hand, high divorce rates are seen as a sign of the insecure position of the easily divorced wife, but on the other hand, they are interpreted as evidence of the independent position of the wife, who could likewise easily leave. A decrease in divorce rates could thus be interpreted in almost exactly opposite ways, as either strengthening or the deterioration of women's position in family and society.'

Late Spring does not condemn Aya (Tsukioka Yumeji), a young divorcee, who works as a stenographer and has no wish to marry again for the moment. She is portrayed as well-balanced and even happy, though she is also resentful of how things went down with her ex. The central monologue that Somiya gives Noriko would, however, silently suggest that people like Aya have not worked enough to keep their unions intact. Even then, Aya also gets to give Noriko advice. Her way of seeing things does not counter the father's opinions, but instead adds flexibility to the concept of marriage. Even in Aya's word-view, a woman who works and supports herself financially is enjoying only the second-best available option. If Noriko does not like being married, the option of divorce will always be available, but in order to know whether she will need a divorce, she should first get married. Aya does not present it as a sure way for finding happiness, but a likely one, nevertheless.³⁵⁰ Since her own marriage was based on romantic sentiments instead of being arranged, Aya thinks that Noriko faces better chances. The fact that Somiya and Aya are happily drinking together after Noriko's wedding shows that their views are complimentary to each other's, as the core motivator of both is individual happiness.

In Ozu's films, the reality of married life kicks in very fast once couples have settled down, and the filmography presents various reasons for separation. *Early*

³⁴⁹ Fuess 2004, 144–145.

³⁵⁰ Wood (1998, 121) argues that the 'practical alternative to marriage', represented by Aya in this film, is not really a viable alternative for Noriko, though both Ozu and Noriko clearly find this character very attractive.

Spring features a couple eventually considering a divorce, after the man is caught having an affair.³⁵¹ Both *A Hen in the Wind* and *Tokyo Twilight* feature husbands who are physically abusive. A different case is presented in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*, where the argument between Mokichi and Taeko is a passive one, and their marital crisis manifests itself as the absence of drama. As time has passed, both characters have accepted that their marriage is a dull marriage of convenience, without any intimacy or tenderness. They believe that other people's marriages are somehow different, and therefore do not view their situation as comparable, even if others seek to give them advice. They are also stubborn, and do not want to take the first step in the peace process. In both *Early Spring* and *Tokyo Twilight*, the wife leaves the husband, though both times this turns out to be temporary. In *Early Spring*, Masako's active stance to improve the quality of her marriage gets a generational framing, when we hear Masako's mother's tale about her own husband, who used to visit red light districts, which the wife did not interfere with, seeing it as the masculine norm.³⁵² In *Tokyo Twilight*, the failing marriage of Hara Setsuko's character Takako is kept as a subplot: Takako has moved back in with her father, and considers divorce, though in a secretive, 'less said the better' manner that fits the actress playing the role. Upon moving back, she initially steps right back into the role of the helpful daughter that Hara so famously played in *Late Spring*. This in itself can be seen as a criticism of divorces as a psychological step backwards.³⁵³ However, both films frame the women's plight in a supportive manner and present the separation as a wake-up call as opposed to a final break-up.

While Richie might have viewed the films to be about the dissolution³⁵⁴ of the Japanese family, when it comes to marital crises, we usually see a reconciliation, or at least assume one is going to happen in the near future. People meeting each other halfway becomes the solution in most of the arguments presented in Ozu's films. Often it is literally spelled out in such terms. In *A Hen in the Wind* and *Early Spring* the couples agree not to talk about what happened anymore. The change from the past may in some cases be very minimal. In *Early Spring*, the only difference in Sugiyama as a character is that he becomes a reader, and thus an implied home

³⁵¹ The beginning of the affair is shown comedically, when Sugiyama and Goldfish hitch a ride while the company workers are hiking, thus 'cheating', breaking the agreed-upon rules of hiking and bending the moral code for their own pleasure.

³⁵² Despite the frequency of divorces in the pre-war decades, the Japanese tend to associate the period with family stability. Fuess 2004, 6.

³⁵³ The divorce of the parents, on the other hand, is narrated by Takako to her younger sister, since Akiko was too young to remember it. The reason for it, at least in Takako's account, was that the mother fell in love with another man, while her husband was away at war. This has clearly left a huge trauma for the father, and Takako asks her sister not to mention it to him.

³⁵⁴ Richie 1974, 1.

person, because there is nothing else to do in Mitsuishi. This makes Masako happy. In *Tokyo Twilight*, Takako likewise returns to her husband and in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* we also see the cold war between Taeko and Mokichi come to an end.

Harald Fuess argues that opinions surrounding divorce constituted a bigger change during the early twentieth century than those relating to the arrangement of marriages:

‘The crucial change in Japanese marriage practises in the early twentieth century was not a shift from a marriage arranged by others to a marriage arranged by the spouses themselves, commonly referred to as transition from arranged (*miai*) to love marriages (*ren'ai*). Instead, the important transformation was the aggregate decrease in the frequency of separations and divorces among the population as a whole, resulting in an increase in the average length of the marriage. Japanese, then, valued economic and social stability in marriage above romance and affection.’³⁵⁵

This sentiment lingers on in the Ozu filmography, which tends to find the concept of divorce too alien, too un-Japanese, for the main characters. One of the most interesting family dynamics is presented in *The Munekata Sisters*, where Mariko feels that older sister Setsuko is wasting her life in the marriage with the brute husband. Mariko would like to see Setsuko together with her first love Hiroshi, but Setsuko will not consider divorce. She explains the nature of being married to Mariko:

‘Life as a couple is not like that. You can’t be happy always. Sometimes we have to learn to be patient. That’s the way marriage is.’³⁵⁶

In response, Mariko announces that if it is like that, ‘marriage is no good’. Even after the husband has died, Setsuko and Hiroshi do not get together, though the man promises to wait forever. This might be a case where ‘a happy ending’ would have appeared too un-Japanese for the filmmakers.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵ Fuess 2004, 140–141.

³⁵⁶ *The Munekata Sisters* (1950), timecode: 48.20. This line of thinking is very Japanese indeed. Yoko Tokuhira (2009, 19) gives a good example about the gender-related views on marriage. In 1998, the newspaper *Asahi Shinbun* asked Japanese people what their image of marriage was like. The most frequent keyword among women was ‘patience’, while the most frequent keyword for men was ‘responsibility’.

³⁵⁷ Naturally, the film having a literary source in a novel also affects the outcome.

Interestingly, Ozu tends to frame the concept of a second marriage similarly to that of divorce: an option that can make non-lead characters happy but seems a bit too un-Japanese for the protagonist families. More often than not, the films treat the prospect of a second marriage as a ploy. Both *Late Spring* and *Late Autumn* introduce the possibility of a parent's marriage as a means to drive their offspring out of the nest. What in *Late Spring* is a harmless trick initiated by the father receives more depth in *Late Autumn*, where we get to know Hirayama (Kita Ryûji), the intended groom for the mother. He initially has reservations about marrying her – the film establishes she is 'out of his league' – but later becomes very excited about the prospect. Hirayama has a discussion with his teenage son, who urges him to go through with it: their conversation must be the most straightforward exchange of words in any Ozu film. Unlike the usual protagonists of Ozu films, the son expresses that he has long harboured a wish that his father would re-marry, as this would be a relief for him when it is time for his own marriage. The son, who is fast to consider the situation from all points of view and speaks his mind without holding anything back, is something of a comedic poke against the usual code of conduct in an Ozu film: if all characters were as smart, uninhibited and honest, the Ozu filmography would look very different indeed. Unfortunately, the secondary characters in an Ozu film are allowed to have more liberal ideas than the main characters, and Akiko is against the idea of a second marriage.³⁵⁸ The film ends with a bittersweet tone, as Mamiya and Taguchi note to Hirayama that at least he got to enjoy happy daydreams as long as it lasted.

However, whether a rightfully used ploy or not, the idea of a second marriage for the parent does often have the desired effect of driving the young ones out of the nest. Both Noriko in *Late Spring* and Ayako in *Late Autumn* consider their parents' possible second marriage distasteful at first, but gradually come around. It is amusing that by having the older generation embrace 'progressive' ideas like second marriage, the films force the younger generation to acknowledge their more conservative side. The arguments made against second marriage in *Late Autumn* stem from the husband still being very much part of the family's life, despite being dead seven years. Akiko remembers him fondly and tells others that she is happy with his memory, whereas Ayako does not want that memory tarnished by her mother marrying a friend of the father. Then again, the film does not limit itself to be a case study of this one family alone, as other families express widely different and more tolerant views concerning the subject, from the friend Yuriko whose mother has already remarried to the Hirayama son who would like to see his father do so. The film lets these characters make the rational arguments and keeps Ayako

³⁵⁸ One could see this also working as humorous meta commentary: it is difficult enough to get Hara Setsuko married ONCE. To do it twice, would be a near-miracle.

as the central character, because she is not looking at it rationally, but emotionally – and hence contributing dramatic material for the narrative.

The standard is (of course) different for men and women, and Ozu's films are much more jovial towards the notion of a second marriage for men.³⁵⁹ In *Early Summer*, Noriko marries a widower with a child. Even though she is happy to do so, her family considers the fact that the man has a child as an argument against him. Noriko counters this by maintaining that in her opinion a man with a child is more trustworthy. This was actually the opinion of Hara Setsuko, which Ozu liked so much he workshopped it into the film.³⁶⁰ *Tokyo Story* shows both of the in-laws being worried about Noriko's solitary future, as their son died several years ago and she still has not taken a new man. They both encourage her to move forward and not to worry about them, and during the discussion with Shukichi, Noriko admits her own worries and uncertainty about her future. The film leaves it open, as to whether she will remarry or not, but the loneliness of the widowed father, which parallels Noriko's possible future, further recommends the idea of a second marriage to her.³⁶¹

For films that give such heavy focus on the formulation of marriages, Ozu's works are not idealistic about the institution. Throughout the continuum, we witness a number of things that shake marriages, from infidelity to domestic abuse, and also cases of simple stagnation. Ozu is rooting for harmony, and often allows his couples to make peace by the end of a film. Yet in most cases, little has changed, which leaves a trace of sadness for the audience and could be viewed as criticism of the unchanging institution. Ozu also seems to imply that as we only go through life once, we only get one true chance for marriage as well. Anything more would be cheating the natural progress of things, and therefore widowed characters often opt not to marry a second time, even if the reasons are left unvoiced. Therefore, there is a comical double standard about the older generation rushing their offspring towards marriage, as choices like this should not be conducted in haste due to the extent of the consequences. Marriage, in Ozu's films, forms a way of showing the audience all of life's imperfections and dividing the stages of human existence based on age and gender. It is thus logical to continue this inspection by looking at the gender-specific role expectations within Ozu's body of work.

³⁵⁹ Second marriages are also more common for men. Tokuhiko 2009, 5.

³⁶⁰ Kometani 2021, 183.

³⁶¹ It is fascinating that in her six Ozu roles, Hara Setsuko played a bride in two, and a widow in three. In their last collaboration, *The End of Summer*, the motivations behind the family pressuring Hara's character to remarry, are more hypocritical than the genuine worry that gets voiced by her character's in-laws in *Tokyo Story*.

4 The salaryman and the widower: the depiction of manhood

This chapter focuses on the male gender roles within the Ozu filmography. The societal space depicted in Ozu's films imitates that of post-war Japan with its binary division of masculine and feminine role expectations. Yet even within this space, it is considerably easier to focus a study on the portrayal of the women, as 'the masculine domain' is harder to narrow in on due to it being more loosely defined. Masculinity is shown as a wide category, an open space (albeit one determined by recurring patterns) whereas femininity is constructed through tightly regulated norms and limitations.³⁶² In this chapter, I am interested in the role of man as a provider for his family unit, as Japanese men dedicate most of their time to work and through it get assigned their place in society.³⁶³ After introducing Ozu's pre-war background with this subject, I give central focus to the 1956 film *Early Spring*, in which the director offers a thorough thesis about the plight of a Japanese worker and his boring existence, which is shown to form a repetitive loop with no escape. I then support this analysis by combing through the rest of the filmography in search of other ways men can make a living. The crisis of masculinity that Ozu frames in his post-war films is also affected by things other than working life, and in the remaining subchapters I consider the director's depiction of old-age loneliness, as well as the on-screen masculinity of his most frequent post-war collaborator, actor Ryû Chishû. I conclude the chapter by focusing on the director's muse, alcohol, which for his characters forms a way to cope with the changing times and voice their masculine uncertainties in the company of friends and loved ones.

³⁶² Jo Spence writes, that usually when scholars study representation of women in products of popular culture, 'woman is signified in relation to the male: there is a binary opposition within systems of signification in which what is present is definable only in relation to what is absent'. Spence (1978) 1996, 16.

³⁶³ Allison 1994, 91.

4.1 Salarymen as an institution

Ozu's films study the relationship between gender and identity foremost by inspecting the mundane behaviour of the characters. The way these characters go about their everyday life constitutes their identity on a daily basis, thus giving even the most mundane of actions deep significance. Gender theorist Judith Butler has stressed the performative nature of gender. According to Butler, the idea of 'being' a man or a woman, or 'being' a heterosexual is problematic, because it 'tends to subordinate the notion of gender under that of identity', while maintaining conservative binary notions relating to gender.³⁶⁴ The gender politics of the world constructed by Ozu are likewise created, maintained, and relayed to the audience by the performative behaviour of the characters. Butler's view is that 'gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed', and that this set of attributes associated with gender is not free-floating, but instead one that is 'produced and compelled by regulatory practises of gender coherence'.³⁶⁵ Ozu's world, at least to a modern eye, seems binary in its gender politics, possibly even pre-feminist due to the importance that is given to tradition. Yet this cinematic whole is also constantly questioning its borders and limitations, when it comes to characters' individual personalities, even though the change is more visible in Ozu's female characters, with the men more often symbolising the present order of things. Genders are culturally produced and reproduced forms of existing in a society, and thus also gender roles are not automatically accepted, but gradually learned and constantly renegotiated states of being. Cultural products like films offer a public platform through which these roles can be studied, which makes cultural representation a central element in the creation and the maintenance of a gender system.

A crucial part in the evaluation of post-war gender roles is the financial arrangements that enable the structures of the family system. Japanese working life is famous for the social class known as the salarymen. This term refers to white-collar workers, who spent their whole careers working for the services of (ideally) just one major company. The salaryman culture was a modern form of being middle-class that was first established during the first two decades of the century.³⁶⁶ In this system, the salaryman gives the company his absolute loyalty, and in turn, receives

³⁶⁴ Butler (1990) 2007, 30.

³⁶⁵ Butler (1990) 2007, 34.

³⁶⁶ Bordwell 1988, 34. However, the salaryman institution has been argued to have its roots going as far as the Tokugawa period, where the samurai code of bushido presented traits 'such as loyalty, diligence, dedication, self-sacrifice, and hard work' as idealistic. Dasgupta 2000, 193. Cited in Tokuhiko 2009, 56.

job security.³⁶⁷ This enables a gender division where a man gives his everything to the company, while the wife stays home and takes care of all issues related to children and house chores. The steadier the income, the better the lifestyle that is available for them. Larger Japanese companies feature clear hierarchies where people advance based on seniority.³⁶⁸ For women, it was popular to marry a man working for such a company, as this provided a secured future.³⁶⁹ According to cultural anthropologist Anne Allyson, post-war Japan is sometimes referred to as ‘Japan, Inc.’, due to the ‘corporatization of its social economy and the ‘marriage’ between the social factory at home and the postindustrial factory at work’, which holds the system together.³⁷⁰ Ozu’s goal being to depict average Japanese people, the heavy presence of the salarymen in his films is very understandable. How these films depict this institution is more debatable.

In order to historically contextualise Ozu’s view of the salaryman tradition, we must consider his personal career development. Alastair Phillips has pointed out that Ozu himself was an example of a salaryman, since he spent practically his whole career loyally working for the same studio, Shochiku.³⁷¹ Ozu made films about salarymen in the early 1930s, including *Tokyo Chorus* (1931), *I Was Born, But...* (1932), and *Where Now Are the Dreams of Youth* (*Seishun no yume ima izuko*, 1932). The war years put a break in Ozu’s depictions of white-collar workers, as the salarymen had largely become soldiers. After the war, Japanese society was in disarray and only gradually returning to order, which likewise explains the absence of the salarymen, a mark of static stability, in these films. Ozu’s return to this subject matter was his 1956 film *Early Spring*. Due to the long gap between films dealing with the subject, Ozu’s perspective on the matter cannot be viewed as unified or cohesive. *Early Spring* found Ozu looking at the subject as an older man, who by now had outgrown his ‘dreams of youth’. Kathe Geist sees Ozu’s early filmography arguing against the salarymen culture until the final works where the director sees such an arrangement inevitable, like death.³⁷² I argue that the early student-centred films look at it as an alternative, while the later works present it as the norm. Also, the introduction of marriage into the life of a man shifts the primary focus: the young (single) men of Ozu’s early films are concerned with their career opportunities,

³⁶⁷ Eccleston 1989, 2. In later scholarly conversation, the claim that most Japanese white-collar workers had the steady working conditions of the salaryman ideal has been criticised as a myth, and lifetime employment is only common for those working higher up in the ranks of the largest companies. See: Alexy 2019, 3. Imamura 1996, 2. Allison 1994, 92.

³⁶⁸ Koskiahho 1995, 66-67.

³⁶⁹ Imamura 1996, 2.

³⁷⁰ Allison 2013, 21.

³⁷¹ Phillips 2007, 26.

³⁷² Geist 2006, 117.

whereas the middle-aged men of the post-war filmography have families that become the element that the narratives focus on.

Ozu's pre-war salarymen depictions are bittersweet in tone, but also include a touch of optimism. The comfort of steady employment is given more appreciation in the face of other alternatives. *I Graduated, But...* (1929) follows Tetsuo (Takada Minoru), a university graduate who struggles to find a job matching his education and is too proud to accept anything of lesser importance.³⁷³ The lead character in 1931's *Tokyo Chorus* Shinji (Okada Tokihiko) is a man who defies his employer at the insurance company and gets fired for this. Shinji, too, holds a university diploma, and is thus overqualified for all the jobs available in recession-hit Tokyo. Both films deal with the social stigma of being unemployed, as the characters have difficulties communicating their problems to their loved ones. These themes would remain in Ozu's post-war films and also come up in the works of other directors.

It is considered important in Japan to start working for a company immediately after graduating from a university, since employers are keen to hire young people and similar job opportunities are not available in later stages of life.³⁷⁴ The difficulty of getting a new job is heavily present in the salaryman depiction in *Tokyo Chorus*, whereas *An Inn in Tokyo* details the plight of an unemployed, middle-aged, blue-collar worker. Then again, the early Ozu works also criticise the fast-lane production of salarymen. The group of friends in *I Flunked, But...* (1930) cannot find jobs after graduation: they come to the conclusion that they graduated too soon, and should have stayed at the university for a while longer, and enjoyed themselves. Again, it is noteworthy that it is not the life of a salaryman that gets highlighted as particularly negative, but instead the boredom of being without a job. *Where Now Are the Dreams of Youth* was a pivotal film in Ozu's development as a director, and one, where he gave more attention to the role of status and class in working life. Tetsuo (Egawa Ureo) is the son of a wealthy family, whereas his friends are middleclass. When Tetsuo becomes the president of his late father's company, he helps his old buddies cheat on the company entrance exam. By depicting this act of corruption on the part of Tetsuo, the film actually sides with promoting the seniority principle of the salaryman system. Tetsuo is placed as the company president before he is ready: he is starting from the top, without moving up the ranks. The corruption is meant to show that he has yet to grow into the part of a president, and thus the film campaigns for people advancing in working life based on their merits, instead of family wealth.

In the post-war years, the importance of societal status in working life decreased, while the importance of personal merits and failings, as indicated by success in

³⁷³ As the competition for salaryman positions is fierce, one's academic record has grown to be a crucially important factor for applicants. Allison 1994, 92.

³⁷⁴ Eccleston 1989, 163.

education, grew to be the producer of social division.³⁷⁵ The importance of university is highlighted in *Floating Weeds*, where Arashi sees it helping his son Kiyoshi have a better life than himself. Japanese people have traditionally viewed university education as not only very important, but as the basis for the shared middle-class mentality among people.³⁷⁶ Among the changes that SCAP officials made to the Japanese school system was their attempt to make higher education available to more people, this having been something that Japanese people had already pressed for before the war.³⁷⁷ The new egalitarian system made it easier for poorer people to receive education, but in turn the meritocratic competition also grew fiercer. The tense way university life is treated in post-war films like Masumura Yasuzō's *A False Student* (Nise daigakusei, 1960) is worlds apart from the slack student comedies with which Ozu started his career. Yet the idea is also viewed much more seriously in *Floating Weeds*, than in Ozu's early films. Kiyoshi falls in love with actress Kayo, but Kayo insists that he must seek university education instead of spending his life with a girl like her, even if he is not currently interested in studying. The woman who sacrifices her happiness for the man's well-being is a classic motif of Japanese films, melodramas in particular. In the Ozu filmography, it played a more central role in the 1930s, before his filmography started moving away from such narrative patterns.

4.2 Repetition and a lack of hope: the case of *Early Spring* (1956)

The previous details of Ozu's pre-war salaryman films have been discussed in order to understand the radical change that *Early Spring* brought about. In the 1956 film, Ozu wanted to depict the conflict between an individual and his surroundings: the tragic existence of a white-collar worker.³⁷⁸ The bleakness of the film differs from that of Ozu's previous film *Tokyo Story*. Instead of individual melodramatic scenes, in *Early Spring* Ozu wanted to portray the sadness by piling up scenes where absolutely nothing happens.³⁷⁹ It is also different from the salaryman depictions that followed, as Ozu is here giving central focus to the younger generation, whereas the salarymen of his later films tended to be middle-aged, management-level executives.³⁸⁰ The film deals with salaryman Sugiyama Shōji (Ikebe Ryō), and his wife Masako (Awashima Chikage), as they drift into a marital crisis over the working

³⁷⁵ Eccleston 1989, 164. Tokuhiko 2009, 60.

³⁷⁶ Sato 2005, 101.

³⁷⁷ Schoppa 2006, 43.

³⁷⁸ Richie 1974, 240.

³⁷⁹ Wrigley 2012, 15.

³⁸⁰ Joo 2017, 201.

husband's emotional and physical absence, as well as the affair he has with a co-worker. Although there is a small amount of narrative therein, the crushing effect of *Early Spring* stems from the way the film spreads out the dullness of the characters' lives, the absolute lack of joy and meaning. The dark tone of the film caused friction between Ozu and his co-writer Noda Kôgo, with the latter feeling that this film and the following year's *Tokyo Twilight* were too different from their earlier work. Tony Rayans has speculated that Ozu was not completely comfortable making these films either, as Shochiku was pushing the filmmaker to include more sensational plot elements to attract younger viewers.³⁸¹

In the reality of *Early Spring*, the salaryman lifepath is the only one available for Japanese men. Straying from this path is portrayed as failing in life. The film opens on an early morning landscape and shows the audience an entire social class of men waking up to a new workday. Even though the film is very grim, the opening sequence is near-comedic, as the line of similarly dressed salarymen marching to work starts to resemble a group of ants moving towards the anthill (**Graphic 4.1**).



Graphic 4.1. *Early Spring* (1956). A bird's eye view of a typical morning, with ant-like workers rushing to their offices. (A screenshot by the author).

Richie notes how the film gives us a multitude of scenes that take place on different mornings, with only small variance between them, to show the uneventful continuation of life for these men.³⁸² Before showing men in their work

³⁸¹ Rayans 2012, 1-3.

³⁸² Richie 1974, 42.

surroundings, Ozu films usually feature an establishing shot of the building. The mental images of large, grey buildings further establish our view of the characters' everyday tasks as functions of small parts within a huge machinery. For me, the most memorable incarnation of an office building establishing shot is in *The End of Summer*: in the foreground we see the faceless, grey wall of a modern office building, and in the background a gorgeous Osaka temple (**Graphic 4.2**). The pairing creates a downright nasty sentiment about the direction of history, or at least that of architecture. *Early Spring* also narrates statistics for the audience, with a character explaining that every morning 340, 000 salarymen pass through Tokyo Station.³⁸³ This further leads us to view the lead character as symbolic of the Japanese working men, insignificant in the grand scale of things.



Graphic 4.2. *The End of Summer* (1961). The beautiful traditional space vanishing into the background, while modern architecture fails to please the eye aesthetically. (Screenshot by the author)

In *Early Spring*'s opening, we already encounter the central problem that the film discovers in the life of a salaryman: the lack of individuality. The traditional view of cultural anthropology when comparing Western and Asian cultures, is that Western

³⁸³ *Early Spring* (1956), timecode: 08.40.

cultures stress individuality and Asian cultures stress community.³⁸⁴ A central feature of Ozu's work is his way of presenting the communal feeling as the very essence of Japan, while also portraying these communities as consisting of unique, individual characters. His way of balancing these aspects is one of the reasons why he stands out amidst Japanese filmmakers. *Early Spring*, on the other hand, stands out within the Ozu filmography because of the negative tone in its communal depiction. The absence of the usual humane feeling, so central to an Ozu film, is strikingly noticeable. The communal work culture is shown to rob people of their individuality.

The protagonist Sugiyama has a desk job at Toa fire-brick company, Ltd. He works in a room with several other men, many of whom belong to his free-time circle. According to Bernard Eccleston, association with other company workers after working hours could be taken as a sign of individual giving company matters top priority, but such activities can also be undertaken reluctantly.³⁸⁵ Though not depicted as ambitious in his work, Sugiyama's social circle is very work-related, and the time spent with them is constantly taking away from the time he could be spending with his wife. Anne Allison notes how salarymen venturing together into the nightlife after office hours carries important, communal meanings:

'During the day, work relations are structured by hierarchy and by the accompanying control of expectations and responsibilities. At night, men can obscure and displace this hierarchy by drinking together. At night, in other words, men can become buddies.'³⁸⁶

Allison has also pointed out the downside of this. As companies encourage employees to spend their after-hours together, the lines between work and pleasure, as well as private and public life, get blurred: after men get used to relaxation in these surroundings, it gets harder for them to wind down in the home sphere, which estranges them from their family and connects them more tightly with the work community.³⁸⁷ These ties that bind the workers to their workplace, even while absent

³⁸⁴ Although it should be noted that viewing Asian societies as fundamentally different, group-oriented cultures as opposed to Western, individual-oriented cultures has also been criticised in scholarly discussion of recent decades. According to the authors of *Modern Japanese Society* (2004), 'there is no such basic and unchangeable difference between group- and individual-oriented societies. In each culture, the respective role of groups and individuals is defined according to social and historical circumstances and may well change over time'. Kreiner, Möhwald & Ölschleger 2004, viii.

³⁸⁵ Eccleston 1989, 74.

³⁸⁶ Allison 1994, 35. Japanese men still consider this relaxation as part of their business, even though the surroundings are different.

³⁸⁷ Allison 1994, 199.

from there, are also shown to follow them on weekends. When the group goes hiking together on a Sunday, another character jokingly hints that he was supposed to go shopping with his wife, instead of spending the day with work people. In the film there is also talk about the rowing boat teams that companies have. Social free-time activities such as this are typical in all Confucian societies like Korea and China, where loyalty to one's work community is viewed as the way to success.³⁸⁸ Before the marital crisis erupts, there is casual kindness between the husband and wife, and the husband even invites her to come with them on the hike, although, wanting to save money, she chooses not to come. A rare exception of non-work-related acquaintances are the two old army-buddies that Sugiyama meets in the film, though military service could also be viewed as part of masculine work history.

The grey space of the office plays a central part in the creation of the male experience in the post-war films.³⁸⁹ I agree with Joo, who notes that Ozu's office spaces are visually one of the most 'tasteless and expressionless spaces he ever created', which is made ever the more noticeable by the fact that he used the same *mise-en-scène* from one film to the next.³⁹⁰ To be fair, he often also used similar recycling methods for the bar spaces in these films, which may be just as intended of a choice: as the offices are similar, so too are the sanctuaries, where the weary salarymen must seek solace, in order to cope with their monotonous existence.³⁹¹ The office and the bar are the two male spaces in Ozu's films, with home being a feminine space. The husband characters visit their homes between workdays, but it is not a space ruled by them. Joan Mellen also points the life of a salaried man to be so 'dehumanising' that a functioning family at home is a requirement for both the man and the wife.³⁹²

Early Spring presents the salaryman culture as an in-escapable rat race, where the objective for the individual is to keep pace with the treadmill. There is an aura of shame around failing, which the workers try to avoid. In the film, we meet characters who have succumbed to the pressure. Onodera (Ryû Chishû) was transferred away from Tokyo to Otsu for reasons unknown, and he calls this 'being in exile'. Since Tokyo is Japan's industrial centrum, it is depicted as the place to be for those who

³⁸⁸ French 2005, 39-40.

³⁸⁹ Mellen (1976, 321) has viewed these images, along with smokestacks and busy Tokyo streets, as Ozu's way of expressing distress about the cultural corruption in the post-war films.

³⁹⁰ Joo 2017, 201.

³⁹¹ While Allison (1994, 202) views the process of subjectivisation as an agenda used by major corporations to make their employees more dedicated, *Early Spring* does not seem to consider it as though-out plan, but instead just the coping mechanism so common that it is viewed normative. It should be noted that Allison focuses on hostess clubs, while Ozu is happy just finding the nearest bar.

³⁹² Mellen 1976, 322.

want to have flourishing careers. Joan Mellen has viewed this fear of being transferred without a say-so to be governing the characters' lives and the discontent born from it to be epitomised in the problematic marriage of the lead couple.³⁹³ Sugiyama and Onodera visit a café called Blue Mountain, owned by former salaryman Kawai (Yamamura Sô). Onodera congratulates Kawai for being smart enough to get out of the racket, as he himself is currently greatly stressed by his workload. He also advises Sugiyama that if he is planning on leaving the company, he should do it now, before there are kids to take care of. It is also mentioned in the film that Masako has a brother, who has not managed to find employment after graduating from the university, a narrative throwback to Ozu's student films. Already in 1956 there are signs that salaryman's 'job of a lifetime' is a vanishing way of life.

The saddest fate is that of Miura (Masuda Junji), who has been bedridden for over three months because of lung disease. Anne Allison argues that in Japanese society, worker becomes synonymous with a certain definition of 'human' (which only included men) and that the role expectations for this category are:

'a male human who, by the constructions of maleness, works hard, doesn't leave the office before his boss, rises in rank, brings a good paycheck home to his family and wife, goes out to drink with men he works with, plays golf on weekends with coworkers and clients, minimizes family vacations and doesn't take all the vacation time allocated him, doesn't spend much time home or with his children, leaves the management of the family to his wife, and considers himself first and foremost a worker whose commitments are first and foremost to his job.'³⁹⁴

Yet *Early Spring* shows that when the health of such an ideal worker deteriorates, preventing them from executing what is expected of them, the system is ready to disregard them almost instantly. For several days, Sugiyama is portrayed to be (or pretending to be) too busy to visit Miura. Through this, the film relays that the loyalty and the solidarity among workers, which the companies like to encourage, are only limited. They only really apply to functioning components of the work machinery. Once the usefulness of a working unit has been fully consumed, the social benefits also fade away. Miura is portrayed as lonely, sad, bored, and envious of healthy people. He misses the boring life of a salaryman, the commuting, the workplace, and the other workers. The company is just a way to make a living for other characters, but Miura views it with passion, as a place of belonging, as well as a gorgeous

³⁹³ Mellen 1976, 322.

³⁹⁴ Allison 1994, 200–201.

building (!). Not being able to work anymore, Miura eventually commits suicide offscreen, by an overdose of sleeping pills. In a not-so-subtle way, Ozu relays that those who only live to serve their companies, live for nothing. In the comparative individualism, Miura serves as a parallel to Sugiyama, as the two of them are mentioned to have taken the company entrance exams together.

Though *Early Spring* depicts the life of a salaryman as sad and monotonous, even the characters who follow different career paths are not contented. Kawai notes that he too has a salary to earn. As an owner of a small business, he does not have the job security that the company workers enjoy, which limits his experience of freedom. Sugiyama's army buddies are blue-collar workers without university education, who openly admit being jealous of his for having regular work hours accompanied by a reliable paycheque, biannual bonuses, and a chance to advance in the company ranks. Sakamoto (Katô Daisuke) makes pots and pans in a shop, whereas Hirayama (Mitsui Kôji) assembles radios and televisions. Sugiyama points out that these are actual skills, whereas salarymen are dependent on their companies, as losing their job would leave them with nothing. The film also heavily criticises the notion of steady promotions and career advancement as pure fantasy. Sugiyama notes that only one in 10, 000 salarymen end up as company directors. Later, there is talk about former Minister of Finance Ikeda Seihin (1867–1950), who once was called 'Japan's no. 1 salaryman' because of his great success in the Mitsui Company, but who still eventually faced financial ruin, with no one taking care of the trees on his grounds.³⁹⁵ This shows how even the most successful individual imaginable could not find sustainable happiness in this society. A barfly named Hattori, also a salaryman, notes that: 'Disillusion and loneliness is all that awaits us', and a bit later, Kawai notes how 'life is just an empty dream'.³⁹⁶ The challenge of *Early Spring* as a film is that you can never be sure, how serious the film is with the things depicted. Even this dark scene is framed comedically, with the source of the humour being the depth of the masculine pessimism witnessed here. While it would be questionable to generalise the messages of *Early Spring* to cover the entirety of Ozu's post-war films, it does present a focused study of the work culture, which is shown to be a crucial factor in the overall crisis of masculinity that gets presented and interpreted in the post-war films. In this film, Ozu issues some of his deepest social criticism, but he does not seem able to present any valid alternatives, which extends the crushing effect of the film. His remaining films would explore additional ways of making an income and in so doing establish a wider presentation of Japan's contemporary working life.

³⁹⁵ *Early Spring* (1956), timecode: 2.05.40.

³⁹⁶ *Early Spring* (1956), timecode: 2.05.20, 2.06.55.

4.3 The travelling actor: other ways of being the provider

When it comes to depictions of work in Ozu's post-war filmography, *Early Spring* presents 'the norm'. Throughout the films we also get individual exceptions with characters, who have either by choice or by necessity organised their life and their source of income otherwise. Among these films, 1959's *Floating Weeds* is the work depiction that most determinedly presents 'the other'. Fittingly, Ozu the salaryman made it away from his usual Shochiku surroundings, loaned to the rival studio of Daiei.³⁹⁷ Even though the film is a re-working of an earlier Ozu success (from 1934), it is also an oddity among the post-war works. Its island location is far removed from Tokyo, and even though the film takes place in contemporary times – and comments them – Ozu considered it close to a period film, as the mood of the work evoked the Meiji period for him.³⁹⁸

In Ozu's films overall, the tasks that the characters' jobs include or their employing companies are rarely discussed. With a film like *Early Spring*, it can be seen as an effort to portray Sugiyama's work as grey, dreary and meaningless: for the audience, he does nothing at a company that makes nothing. However, most likely this is done to highlight the films' central focus on the family life of these individuals. Donald Richie sees the school and the office as the two main extensions of the Japanese family, which work almost as foster homes for the characters while they are absent from the actual home sphere.³⁹⁹ One could argue that the army is the third one, though it exists merely on a referential level in the post-war filmography. School, work, and military service create bonds between men that continue to exist even as they exit these spheres into their private lives, but the jobs are purposefully not an interesting part of the narrative in Ozu films. For example, the lead character in *Equinox Flower* (Saburi Shin) is portrayed as a man who has lived solely for his work, but comedically the film does not really detail what it is that he does. The fact that he is presented in this manner to the audience robs his source of self-importance and turns him into a comedic target. As the films rarely discuss job details, we as an audience are directed to view them as the structure that supports the family system, yet an emotionally empty one. *Floating Weeds* is an exception, as the work of kabuki actor Arashi has clearly been an obstacle that prevents him having a normal family life.⁴⁰⁰ Instead, he has opted to live for his work, which is probably a passion for him

³⁹⁷ This was allowed because Ozu had already filled his Shochiku contract for that year with the release of *Good Morning*.

³⁹⁸ Richie 1974, 245.

³⁹⁹ Richie 1974, 1.

⁴⁰⁰ A similar fate is shown with the father in *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*, who is a travelling carpenter who has to leave his family to go seek employment.

– or at least used to be. Only in old age, in the face of audiences with questionable tastes, and upon meeting his son, does he question his earlier choice. Being a stage actor is shown to be an unsteady way to earn an income, and the constant travelling means that people cannot form permanent attachments to any one place or people therein. Instead, the lasting relationships are forged among the troupe. Unfortunately, even the troupe itself is shown to be interchangeable: there is talk of previous actor-friends who have passed away and even during the film the cast changes.

Arashi explains to his son that they only stay at one place as long as they can draw an audience. This again, due to the lack of general interest, makes them constant drifters, the ‘floating weeds’ of the title. Though they are shown to have their happy moments as well, it is clear that the lifestyle separates them from those living more stable lives. Arashi is also bashful about the quality of his show. When his son expresses a desire to come see it, the father notes that it is ‘nothing very sophisticated’⁴⁰¹, further implying that he does not view the current incarnation of the show as a dignified way to make a living. While discussing the *Tora-san* franchise (Otoko wa tsurai yo, 1969–2019), Tokuhiro Yoko states that the drifter culture depicted by *Tora-san* (a travelling peddler) offers escapism for the salarymen sitting in the audience, but the two institutions also help define one another in terms of masculine identity:

‘While on the one hand the films challenge the mainstream masculinities of salarymen who sacrifice everything for work, they also reinforce mainstream masculinities by showing how the general public places social stigmas upon people who do not conform to these hegemonic masculinities.’⁴⁰²

The same could be said about *Floating Weeds*, though the sad thing is, Arashi is also sacrificing close to everything for his work.

Even the more conventional films show how not having a steady income can be an obstacle for settling down. In *Good Morning*, Fukui Heiichiro (Sada Keiji) is romantically interested in Setsuko (Kuga Yoshiko), though not determinedly chasing her. The film points at shyness and overt Japanese politeness as the reasons, but the man’s financial situation is a possible deterrent as well. Fukui’s company went bankrupt, and he now makes a meagre living as a translator and a home tutor in English. He also considers himself unemployed. This is a big indicator about how society’s shared values relating to labour affect individuals’ self-images: even though a character works, there is a need to also prove one’s diligence to the community. In the same film, we meet a character who is a travelling salesman.

⁴⁰¹ *Floating Weeds* (1959), timecode: 22.52.

⁴⁰² Tokuhiro 2009, 63.

People shun him because of his ragged looks, and the film shows how selling pencils door to door is an even harsher way to make a living. Then again, the salarymen characters in *Good Morning* are drunks driven to a point of despair. The tragedy of this wonderfully comedic tale is that even the two young boys will eventually grow into manhood, which is viewed as destined for failure, no matter the implementation. As a film, *Good Morning* looks at a democratised country and finds great democracy in failure.

Even if most of the Ozu men are company workers, the late filmography gives the occasional exception. In *Tokyo Twilight*, Takako's husband Numata is also a translator, who has difficulty finding employment. The film strongly hints that this has caused him to develop a drinking problem, which now threatens to ruin his marriage. There is also entrepreneurship of various sorts in the films. *Tokyo Twilight* features a man who runs a noodle shop (and chooses a rather ill time to advertise it). In *The Munekata Sisters*, the much-desired bachelor Hiroshi is shown as owning a furniture store, whereas a possible marital candidate from *The End of Summer* operates a steel mill. Professor Somiya of *Late Spring* works at a university, but based on his house and lifestyle, is relatively wealthy. Then again this is another case where Ozu is so determinedly interested in the characters' family life that the economic structures supporting this existence were probably not that important for him while designing the film.

Looking at the whole of masculine work opportunities as depicted in the post-war Ozu films, one could get the idea that Ozu was normally not interested in people's jobs, and when he was, it was in order to prove a point about the meaningless nature of these tasks. He might seem particularly harsh, but then again, he gives all these people his sympathy, and attempts to assess the good with the bad in their lives. It should also be noted that people working in arts often do not have romantic notions about white-collar or blue-collar jobs, as many artists escape these kinds of fates by becoming filmmakers or other entertainers. While his own work was of utmost importance⁴⁰³ to him, the director seems to pity the ones who work without such a calling. In the case of Arashi the travelling actor, Ozu pities how this calling fails to resonate with his contemporaries. Ozu's personal history of his one year as a teacher can be viewed as an influence; elderly teachers are given a warm treatment in his films, and the same can also be said about the depiction of former soldiers. Then again, characters shown to be doctors are treated much more coldly: both *Early Summer* and *Tokyo Story* maintain that medical practitioners have little time for their families. By not focusing on the specific work-related details, Ozu can best find those aspects of his characters' lives that resonate with the largest number

⁴⁰³ Kometani 2021, 49.

of audience members. Work is shown as a massive contributor to the wider crisis of masculinity, but even as characters grow old and possibly retire, many problems persist.

4.4 The lonesome elderly

We have now viewed masculinity in relation to working life both in terms of the norm and the other. The next thing to consider is what is left after an individual retires from work in old age. In most developed countries, the creation of a retirement pension system has decreased the importance of parents needing several children to financially take care of them in their twilight years.⁴⁰⁴ In Japan, a system was issued in 1953, though the initial implementation left a third of the population without coverage.⁴⁰⁵ The economic well-being of the Japanese elderly is visible in Ozu films, where the old people are never concerned about their financial survival, but instead depend upon their children for emotional caretaking. Other directors, like Naruse Mikio, depicted also the economic struggles, in films such as *Daughters, Wives and a Mother* (Musume tsuma haha, 1960). In the film, the financial failures of the grown-up children of the Sakanishi family cause their elderly mother to lose her home, a situation from which she is only saved when she decides to get a job. In Ozu's thematically similar film *Tokyo Story*, a film that Naruse references several times, the problem is that none of the grown-up children will house their aging parents upon their visit to Tokyo. Yet the sadness of *Tokyo Story* does not stem from the offspring not having enough money or enough space in their apartments, but from the fact that they cannot emotionally support their parents, that they do not have time to be there for them.⁴⁰⁶ Darkly, the film relays that even having several children will not necessarily guarantee a person's final years to be pleasant.

Bordwell has noted that Ozu usually refuses to relate much about his characters' lives before the beginning of the film: for instance, how did the wives of all these widowed men die?⁴⁰⁷ The number of widowers is indeed noticeable. The easy reasoning for this points to the dramatical effect in the 'Late Spring pattern': the daughter leaving the father has more dramatic weight when this leaves him all alone.

⁴⁰⁴ Quale 1988, 25.

⁴⁰⁵ Bouissou (1992) 2002, 96. There were other faults in the system as well. The amount of the pensions was only 15% of the average wage, and it became available when one reached the age of 65, while many company workers tended to retire much younger.

⁴⁰⁶ Arthur Nolletti, Jr. (1997) has studied the connections between *Tokyo Story* and Leo McCarey's thematically similar *Make Way for Tomorrow* (1937). Nolletti (1997, 30) makes the distinction that the problems faced by the old couple in the American film are also economical, while Ozu's characters face emotional and personal losses.

⁴⁰⁷ Bordwell 1988, 54.

The films likewise do not relate too much about what will happen after their ending, but they leave us with a clear enough picture. The loneliness of old age is something that is mostly left to our imagination, as the films wrap up relatively soon after the weddings. Yoshida Kiju has analysed that the ending of *Late Autumn* discovers that the mother, who has married off her daughter, has ‘completed her life as a worldly-minded person’.⁴⁰⁸ The sadness of this existence gets highlighted by friends of the bride, who assure the parent that they will often come visit, so that he/she will not feel lonely. This of course hints that the married child herself will not be visiting that often, which as a notion is a bit odd, but works for the atmosphere. In *Late Spring*, it is Noriko’s friend Aya who assures Somiya he will not be lonely.⁴⁰⁹ In *Late Autumn*, Yuriko similarly pays a visit to the solitary Akiko, to inform her that she will now start visiting her.⁴¹⁰ The fact that the old age loneliness of the father in *Late Spring* can so easily be modified to also fit the mother in *Late Autumn* shows loneliness as a phenomenon that affects both genders equally on an emotional level, even if there are gender-specific differences economically.

The marriage narratives of the Ozu filmography treat old age loneliness as a parental self-sacrifice: the cross that good parents will have to bear. *Tokyo Story* gets its mean spirit from the fact that the adult children, who will not make even small sacrifices for their elderly parents, seem utterly ungrateful. In *An Autumn Afternoon*, the old teacher known as ‘The Gourd’ (Tôno Ejirô) is introduced as a warning for the protagonist Hirayama. The Gourd is a widower, a heavy drinker, and carries with him the sad knowledge that he is part of the reason why his daughter Tomoko (Sugimura Haruko) has not married. The casting shows the level of cohesion that the Ozu filmography has managed to create up to the final film. Tôno’s appearances have often been as these sad, ‘what if’ -cases in the comparative individualism of Ozu’s films, whereas Sugimura was heavily associated with women driven by social expectations and housewives who were realists to a point of being cynical. Whereas ‘The Gourd’ is a scary vision of the future for Hirayama if he cannot manage to get his daughter married, Sugimura is playing an unmarried daughter from an alternate timeline, crushed by her sad fate. It is the most unashamedly Dickensian bit in Ozu’s entire filmography, and as a moment, gets its full emotional bite from the audience being familiar with earlier Ozu films – and watching this one with those comparisons in mind. The character of The Gourd also includes an economic observation, as the old teacher has not afforded to retire, but instead runs a noodle shop with Tomoko.

⁴⁰⁸ Yoshida (1998) 2003, 135.

⁴⁰⁹ Robin Wood dismisses the gesture as empty rhetoric: ‘We don’t take her promise of frequent visits seriously.’ Wood 1998, 122.

⁴¹⁰ Also, in *Tokyo Twilight*, the father reassures Takako that he will not be lonely living alone, as he can invite a friend over.

This makes his former students, who are financially better off, feel awkward, and they put together a gift envelope, which The Gourd cannot bring himself to accept.⁴¹¹

An opposite case of old age masculinity is displayed in *The End of Summer*, which is about a large, wealthy family. The patriarch Manbei (Nakamura Ganjirô), referred to as ‘The Old Master’, is still somewhat active in the operation of the beer company he owns. He leads an interesting life, balancing between his family, and a secret second family he has on the side. He is portrayed as happy and surrounded by people who seem to like him. It is once again an interesting case of Ozu finding an actor and figuring out what kind of roles he should occupy in the Ozu-verse: Nakamura Ganjirô (1902–1983) had a contract with Daiei studio, so Ozu was only able to hire him for *Floating Weeds*, and loan him out to *The End of Summer*, a Toho release. Perhaps partly because he is not a native Shochiku player, his roles are also clearly different from the masculine protagonists played by Ryû Chishû or Saburi Shin. Both Arashi the travelling actor and Manbei the old master are men who actively try to make the best of what they got. They are often seen smiling, seem quite eager-natured by character, and both have ‘secret’ family members they are trying to either get closer to, or to maintain as part of their lives. *The End of Summer* presents the situation as a comedic mystery, when two workers of Manbei’s start to gossip, where it is that the old master often disappears, leading one of them to follow him around town in a brilliant, comical spy game.

When we compare the two Nakamura characters to the Ryû widowers covered in the following subchapter, the contrast is interesting. Everybody seems to lament, how the widowers in *Late Spring* and *Tokyo Story* will face old-age loneliness, but Nakamura plays characters who are actively trying to shake off the chains of solitary old age through active agency. This, on the other hand, causes embarrassment and discomfort in the younger relatives, who thusly reveal a more conservative side within. Loneliness seems to be more politically correct, more acceptable behaviour for old people, than does free-spirited socialisation, as was also noticed with the depiction of second marriages (in *Chapter 3*). This points out a moral flaw, a double standard in Japanese behavioural etiquette, but does so in a way that makes the audience smile a little. It shows how even in *his* old age, Ozu invented new ways of broadening the comparative individualism of his life’s work, as new people like Nakamura could be fitted in to add further texture to the already wide scope of humanity witnessed in the Ozu filmography. Evidently Ozu’s own advanced age helped him craft such elderly figures, as both of the Nakamura characters carry a sense of directorial self-portrait. Similarly to *Tokyo Story*, *The End of Summer* becomes tragic all of a sudden when The Old Master suffers a stroke. The film ends

⁴¹¹ Hirano Kyoko (2011, 3) observes that this story thread relays, how hierarchical relationships are reversed as people become old.

in a lengthy funeral sequence, which is made darker by the heavy usage of hauntingly sinister music and the presence of ravens in the cemetery landscape.⁴¹² Things are left without closure in this, the most open ending Ozu ever evoked. Even if one lives a long, wealthy, happy life, the ending can be strikingly tragic for the community.

4.5 Ryû Chishû: the voice of reason?

A study of the men in Ozu's filmography would not be complete without dedicating some thought to his most frequently used actor, Ryû Chishû (1904–1993), through whom Ozu would balance the ideal post-war masculinity and reveal many of its inner fragilities. Ryû was only a year younger than Ozu, but during their early films, considered himself a clumsy pupil and Ozu an encouraging father figure.⁴¹³ Ironically, Ozu would end up seeing his cinematic father figure in the actor: for their most famous collaborations Ryû would be made to look older than his actual age (**Graphic 4.3**). There is a certain ambiguity about the beginnings of the Ozu-Ryû collaborations. Ryû remembered in 1964 having appeared in all Ozu films except for two, and since then, many publications have run with this estimate.⁴¹⁴ Though the number of collaborations is noteworthy, it is most likely not fifty-two out of fifty-four: it is impossible to know the exact number, as so much of the early Ozu filmography has been lost, and Ryû's parts in Ozu films dating before 1936, were often little more than walk-ons.⁴¹⁵ Ryû made his first Ozu appearance in Ozu's second film *Dreams of Youth* (*Wakôdo no yume*, 1928) and got his first noticeable roles in some of the student comedies, though never as the protagonist. His gradual advancement to more important duties began with Ozu's first sound film *The Only Son*. Yet even Ozu's first two post-war films, *Record* and *Hen*, use the actor as a supportive cast member. *Late Spring* would seal his position as Ozu's primary post-war lead.

⁴¹² Kometani Shinnosuke (2021, 217) maintains that Ozu did not like to establish the mood of a scene with music, and the way this particular ending doubles up the emotions by pairing a sad scene with sad music, is unlike Ozu.

⁴¹³ Ryû (1964) 2011, 14.

⁴¹⁴ Ryû (1964) 2011, 13. The only two exceptions being the now-lost *Beauty's Sorrows* (*Bijin to aishû*, 1931) and *What Did the Lady Forget?*.

⁴¹⁵ Ryû was apparently not in Ozu's period film debut, nor is he in the surviving footage of *Fighting Friends Japanese Style* (*Wasei kenka tomodachi*, 1929) or *I Graduated, But...* (*Daigaku wa detakeredo*, 1929). He is also not in the short-film *A Straight-Forward Boy* (*Tokkan kozô*, 1929), nor in the surviving feature films *The Lady and the Beard* (*Shukujo to hige*, 1931) and *Tokyo Chorus* (1931).



Graphic 4.3. *Tokyo Story* (1953). Ryû Chishû, age forty-nine, playing the grandfather of the Hirayama family. (Screenshot by the author).

The role of Ryû in Ozu films is related to the general role of actors in his works: because of Ozu's perfectionism, acting has become an oft-discussed element of Ozu's art. There are a few common focus points in this discussion that come up repeatedly. For the initial Japanese audiences and critics, the question to consider seems to have been whether the acting in Ozu films was at all realistic.⁴¹⁶ The director's technical obsession forced the actors into a mode, which (at least to Ozu's taste) best contributed to the overall establishment of style and atmosphere of the larger work. This meant that their presence was not regulated by the realism of their contemporary Japan, but by the inner realism of Ozu's worldbuilding. For critics not looking at the bigger picture, a singular Ozu work – or a singular performance – could easily have rubbed their personal notions of realism the wrong way. Besides the realism, the quality of the acting has also been debated. Due to the director's personal cult of admiration and his perfectionist methods, the contribution by the actors to the artwork has often been neglected. Instead, they are frequently referred to as the colours used by Ozu the painter – even by themselves!⁴¹⁷ While praising Hara Setsuko's performances in Ozu's films, Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro acknowledges:

'Ozu in general prevents his actors from showing off their acting skills, and he tries to get rid of any unnecessary expressions and movements from their

⁴¹⁶ Sato Tadao (cited in Richie 1974, 153–154) has viewed the actors as acting like guests, stiffly and ceremoniously.

⁴¹⁷ Richie 1974, 141. Ryû (1964) 2011, 14.

performances in order to distill their own natural qualities as actors. In his relationship with actors, restraint becomes a dominant mode of direction, so that sometimes it looks as if Ozu prohibited actors from acting at all.⁴¹⁸

Indeed, in the predetermined system, good acting is often that which does not call for attention to itself. By knowing, what came naturally for an actor, Ozu was able to cast them to parts that fit well, or – in the rare case he wanted to – jumped out as going against type.

Ryû played both starring and supportive roles for Ozu. Ozu was of the opinion that here was a sincere guy with great character, and that great character ‘will emerge in acting’.⁴¹⁹ Though he is most heavily associated with the fathers who try to marry off their daughters, the row of fifteen post-war Ozu roles includes a variety of walking morale compasses, as well as few casting decisions that at first raise an eyebrow. During the post-war decades, the actor continued as a Shochiku contract player. Due to him not being a leading man but a character actor, Ryû was able to garner a prolific output, which according to IMDb amounts to a whopping 279 credits over a period of sixty-four years.⁴²⁰ Due to the strong association with Ozu, other Japanese directors often used the actor in their films to comment upon the types of roles he played in the Ozu catalogue, as well as Ozu’s depiction of Japanese-ness. The scene that introduces Ryû in *Late Spring* finds him studying Western culture with a colleague, as they are checking how to spell the name of German economist Friedrich List.⁴²¹ We are immediately informed that the man is well-read and open to foreign ideas, though also clearly Japanese based on his clothing – and the fact that he is comfortably sitting on the floor. Though he orders his daughter around the house, the audience is also led to understand that he is not a dominating patriarchal figure and that their relationship is based on mutual benefit and kind humour. It is not enough for the father to get Noriko to agree to marry, as he also wants Noriko to come around in her thinking to see that marriage is the best alternative for her. He is not campaigning marriage for the sake of tradition, as Aunt Masa is, but for the sake of Noriko’s happiness. The masculinity witnessed here has less to do with tradition and expectations, and more with consideration and understanding.

Bordwell, who sees *Late Spring* as a very liberal film, argues that it is principally this character who redefines Japanese tradition for the film.⁴²² However, things are not quite so black and white. *Late Spring* may have introduced Ryû in the post-war

⁴¹⁸ Yoshimoto 2001, 192.

⁴¹⁹ Kometani 2021, 58. The quote is from a 1952 magazine interview.

⁴²⁰ IMDb: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0753479/?ref=tt_ov_st_sm.

⁴²¹ *Late Spring* (1949), timecode: 6.30–7.26.

⁴²² Bordwell 1988, 308.

function Ozu used him most often, but he had already been presented as the ideal father in 1942's *There Was a Father*, a film that relayed opposite messages with its family depiction. In the film, Ryû's character is likable and wise just as he is in the post-war works, but this humane persona is used to convince the audience of the ultra-conservative wartime ideology and the patriarchal role of the father.⁴²³ Woojeong Joo has noted that Ryû also played similar characters with similar functions in the films of other directors.⁴²⁴ According to Isolde Standish, *There Was a Father* is concerned about 'patriarchal authority and responsibility in a transitional age when the extended family is increasingly being superseded by the nuclear family'.⁴²⁵ Standish also paints the connection between Ozu's two wartime films, as *Toda Family* likewise deals with this matter, but by showing what happens in the absence of a father figure.⁴²⁶ A key difference in the behavioural patterns of the characters is the motivation behind them in different times. In films made during the war, characters behave in a certain way, foremost because they are Japanese and thus bound by patriotic duty. Ozu's post-war characters are distinctly Japanese, but foremost human, the latter being the motivation for most of their actions.

It is intriguing to consider the self-awareness of Ozu's post-war casting policy. Saburi Shin, who in the wartime played the strong-minded and morally sound Toda brother, later received parts from Ozu that questioned the flexibility of the family ideology, if not the downright relevance of tradition. Ozu's post-war films made both Saburi and Ryû more human, by sometimes having fun at their expense, and at other times laying them open for sadder character traits. As an actor, Ryû is brilliant at relaying the kind of fragility that possibly led Ozu to cast him as the widower-fathers of his post-war films. In contrast, Saburi plays two lead characters, both married, but both also more work-oriented whereas the Ryû leads are more concerned with their families. Through Saburi's leads in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* and *Equinox Flower*, Ozu shows that successfully being the provider for a family does not guarantee their respect since the emotional needs of the family unit must also be taken into account. Bordwell has well established the treatment Ozu gives to paternal authority in his late films:

'In his 1950's films, Ozu's comic-pathetic theme of the decline of paternal authority takes on a new historical dimension; and *Equinox Flower* manages to

⁴²³ Kathe Geist (2022, 134) views the fathers in *There Was a Father* and *Late Spring* to be more alike than do most scholars, noting how neither of them are overbearing and both clearly cherish their offspring.

⁴²⁴ Joo 2017, 132.

⁴²⁵ Standish (2005) 2012, 109.

⁴²⁶ Standish (2005) 2012, 115. Fittingly, Ryû does not play the father figure in *Toda Family*, but has a brief supportive role as a family friend, closer to his own age.

expose that historicity, treat it sympathetically, and yet keep it framed in irony.⁴²⁷

Robin Wood, on the other hand, has called *Equinox Flower* Ozu's 'most overtly feminist film' (italics by Wood), as well as 'a feminist film made from the viewpoint of the traditional patriarch'.⁴²⁸ Ryû is used in parts that demand vulnerability from the actor, while Saburi is a perfect fit as the protagonist of a comedy – or even as the butt of a joke – with his stoicism, reminiscent of Buster Keaton. Side-lining the usual lead Ryû can have a great comedic function. In *Equinox Flower*, the problems of the Saburi protagonist are made to seem bigger, by having Ryû play his friend, who failed to find a working solution to similar issues. If the humane Ryû could not figure them out, what chance does this serious businessman have of succeeding?

Even in films where Ryû does not have a central role, Ozu uses him as a kind of spokesperson for the film's message and morale.⁴²⁹ Several times he is featured briefly near the beginning, and then again near the ending, as a framing device for the storyline. In *Early Spring*, he is absent from the film for over ninety minutes, but near the end, the protagonist Sugiyama gets counselling from him. Speaking to such a trustworthy man, Sugiyama is for the first time able to admit that the marital crisis was his fault, and he should not have had an affair. Ryû encourages him to be good to his wife and to make amends. His character even sends the wife Masako a letter, informing her about what she should do. In *Late Autumn*, Ryû appears near the beginning as a relative from the countryside, and in the end, he comes to give his blessing for the union. *The End of Summer* squeezes him in near the ending, as an outside commentator by the riverside who gets to relay central existential sentiments about death, without being an actual character in the family drama. After Ozu died, Kurosawa Akira brought Ryû to the wedding sequence that closes *Red Beard* (Akahige, 1965), possibly because it would not be a wedding without him around.

Tokyo Twilight is an exception to the actor's Ozu image. The family structure shows that Ozu is clearly playing with the viewer's expectations. As Ryû is cast as the father of two grown-up girls, we expect the family's initial status quo to be better, and for the father to be able to solve any possible problems that will occur. Viewers may even expect a wedding, as this is hinted by the aunt, the usual Sugimura character. Gradually Ozu lets us know that even though the character of the banker-father may see himself similar to the actor's previous ones, he is not up to date about what is going on with either of his daughters. Akiko asks her aunt, instead of the

⁴²⁷ Bordwell 1988, 347.

⁴²⁸ Wood 1998, 135.

⁴²⁹ Robin Wood (1986, 552) has also called him Ozu's mouthpiece, whose presence constitutes a 'directorial trademark'.

father, for money, forcing the aunt to run to her brother and gossip. Takako is on the brink of a divorce, and even though the father tries to talk to the husband, he struggles to find the right words and cannot help their situation either. The grim narrative of *Tokyo Twilight* paints a dark society, where even the father figure that the audience has come to trust cannot save his daughter from committing suicide. *Early Summer* and *Good Morning* serve as more comedic exceptions to Ryû's screen persona. In *Early Summer*, he plays the businessman brother of the protagonist Noriko, who wants to marry his sister off, mostly for the sake of appearances.⁴³⁰ In *Good Morning*, the father figure he plays cannot get his sons to follow his orders, and overall is not viewed as a particularly sympathetic dad for them. In both films the difference from his usual characters is highlighted by the actor playing characters closer to his own age. In what seems like a clear choice, Ozu's filmography might be implying that wisdom comes with age. Then again, there might be a comical meaning that breaks the fourth wall even more. By having an actor play wise characters only, when he is masked to look different than he does in reality, the films suggest that characters this harmonious and perfect are only found in fiction.

Equinox Flower jokingly theorises that couples where the husband is stronger get sons: in so doing, the film quietly points out that all the important male characters in the film have daughters. The logic should naturally not be taken too seriously, or applied to all Ozu films, but *Early Summer* and *Good Morning* feature families with a strict, traditional husband, who has two sons in both films, while fathers with daughters are usually portrayed as more nuanced, sensitive individuals. As Ozu's post-war films depicted modern, considerably free-spirited modes of existence for young women in society, they also balanced this by centrally including the perspective of the older generation, the more acceptive side of which gets manifested through Ryû's presence in films like *Late Spring*. His roles are most often negotiating how the traditional ways and the wishes of the younger generation could meet. Ozu would also use the actor to voice his complaints about the state of things and to express a generational nostalgia. In these instances, another key player with steady appearances was alcohol, the drinking of which formed a central area within Ozu's depictions of male behaviour and allowed the characters to confront the human condition more vocally than during office hours.

⁴³⁰ You could also make the argument that the Mamiya family has quite a large number of people living under the same roof, as the brother is already married and has two kids. The unmarried sister is something of a seventh wheel, as she is not supposed to live in this arrangement indefinitely.

4.6 Masculine coping through alcohol

Alcohol is a contested cultural issue that societies view in different ways. In a 2017 poll that asked the inhabitants of forty countries whether they found alcohol morally unacceptable, Japan had the least people finding it to be so, only six per cent.⁴³¹ Especially for the Japanese man, drinking is viewed as normative behaviour. Ozu's depictions of everyday life would be almost unrecognisable without the inclusion of alcohol. The importance of it cannot be understated. Ozu saw alcohol as the source of his creative strength.⁴³² Drinking was a crucial part of the writing process of each film for Ozu and Noda, and Ozu believed that the amount of alcohol consumed during this time was directly linked to the quality of the film. In a rare case of self-praise, Ozu noted that the strength of *Floating Weeds* was evident from the number of empty bottles on the kitchen floor.⁴³³ The writing of *Tokyo Story* took 103 days and forty-three bottles of sake.⁴³⁴ On the other hand, Ozu also understood that his excessive drinking was a gradual suicide and that his days were numbered because of it.⁴³⁵ This subchapter looks at the ways alcohol allows foremost Ozu's male characters to cope with their existential crises and the anxiety brought about by the changing fabric of society. I do not mean to detail every single drinking sequence of the post-war films – that would be its own book – but instead the functions that Ozu allows alcohol to play, both positive and negative. This will itself touch upon several key themes that get examined in further chapters.

Ozu loved the little things in life, such as taking a nap, watching baseball, or eating, but drinking occupied a special place in his existence, and the depiction of it is one of the key aspects that distinguishes him from other directors of home dramas. *The Munekata Sisters* often shows us a sign in a bar which quotes *Don Quixote* (1605–1615): 'I drink upon occasion. Sometimes upon no occasion.' Though a somewhat tired aphorism, it is a good way to describe the incorporation of the director's muse into his films. There is rarely an overtly dramatic element in the drinking. Instead, Ozu shows that alcohol frees the individuals from the usual Japanese restraint. Mark D. West, who has studied Japanese alcohol consumption, notes that the Japanese use alcohol as an excuse for slightly inappropriate behaviour and can appear drunk after just one drink, as drinking gives them a justification to 'let go'.⁴³⁶ For Ozu, it allows his characters to speak their minds on a number of

⁴³¹ West 2020, 18. The major religions of Japan do not significantly discourage alcohol consumption.

⁴³² Richie 1974, 26.

⁴³³ Cited in: Richie 1974, 27.

⁴³⁴ Cited in: Richie 1974, 26.

⁴³⁵ Kometani 2021, 94–95.

⁴³⁶ West 2020, 48.

subjects. Yet, because they are drunk, and there is usually a sober character to point this out, we as the audience cannot be entirely certain as to what degree they mean the things they say.⁴³⁷ Alcohol makes life easier to endure, but also adds shades of grey to the experience, and enforces the comical ambiguity of the films.

Anne Allison has viewed the afterhours drinking of Japanese salarymen through the lens of a ritual, as the comfortable, repetitive format encourages a heightened sense of masculinity that helps link the individuals together.⁴³⁸ In Ozu's world, instead of a clearly definable pattern, there is greater variation in both the situations and the motivations, though usually alcohol is an ingredient that supports the bonding of the characters. Either they drink because they have met – or they meet in order to drink. In Japan, not wanting to drink with one's colleagues and other men, is considered odd, non-masculine and almost un-Japanese.⁴³⁹ Ozu often shows alcohol used in situations and conversations that would otherwise be socially awkward. In *Floating Weeds*, the first dialogue between Arashi and Oyoshi, his former lady-friend, is a situation where the presence of sake makes things less flammable. The three most common reasons for drinking reported by the Japanese whose consumption is light, are to cope, to enhance one's feelings, and to feel sociable: especially workplace-related socializing can increase consumption.⁴⁴⁰ *An Autumn Afternoon* features one of the most escapist functions for alcohol, as Hirayama frequents a bar where the hostess looks like his dead wife. In Japan, singing is a common part of alcohol-fuelled socialisation between men, and declining to sing, especially if one's friends have already done so, is considered rude.⁴⁴¹ According to Joan Mellen, Ozu's men can only truly be themselves in the company of men, and the singing is a manifestation of this relaxation.⁴⁴² Singing can work as a defence mechanism, something to keep people's spirits up. When the atmosphere at the army reunion of *Early Spring* is turning sad, the group end the conversation and resume singing, which again affects the mood in a positive way.⁴⁴³ This also shows how group singing most likely was used to keep up the fighting spirit in the grim reality of war.

⁴³⁷ Anne Allison (1994, 45–46) argues that people are viewed differently when they are under the influence, and Japanese people believe drunken behaviour should not be judged by the usual standards.

⁴³⁸ Allison 1994, 153.

⁴³⁹ Allison 1994, 45.

⁴⁴⁰ West 2020, 42. West bases this information on a number of surveys.

⁴⁴¹ Allison 1994, 55. Allison writes that singing is 'inevitable' and points out the popularity of karaoke with Japan's drunken salarymen.

⁴⁴² Mellen 1976, 276.

⁴⁴³ *Early Spring* (1956), timecode: 59.00.

Alcohol can seem like a small addition to the everyday tapestry, but the drinking moments can often be the highlight of the day, as they find the characters enjoying themselves in good company. The meeting between Somiya and Onodera in *Late Spring* is such a get-together, and *Late Autumn* has an abundance of similar scenes between the three honorary uncles. In the latter case, it is quite easy to view the trio as Ozu's middle-aged schoolboys and alcohol as the adults' playtime. Drinking is often viewed as normative behaviour because the alternative to it is boredom. In *Floating Weeds*, the younger male actors spend the majority of their time drinking in a geisha house, as they have nothing else to do. Yet while *Floating Weeds* shows drinking as a cure for boredom to be a funny narrative element, it can also be treated dramatically. The husband in *The Munekata Sisters* is unemployed and having nothing to do is certainly shown to be part of the reason why he has turned into an alcoholic.⁴⁴⁴

The bar in Ozu's films is a transitional place between work and home. *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* argues that women only know one side of a man's personality, the home persona. Yet as the husbands in films like *Flavor*, *Early Spring* and *Equinox Flower* spend little time there, they are often alienated from their families. In these instances, Ozu is clearly criticising tradition as much as he is enforcing it. According to Iwao Sumiko, in modern times (the 1990s) husbands have come to be pitied, because due to their work, they spend much time away from their home, which results in their power and presence there diminishing, making the husbands less confident and self-assured upon returning home.⁴⁴⁵ While describing this condition, which is called 'involuntary incapacity to go home' (*kitaku kyohi*), she could just as well have been thinking about the gloomy face of Saburi Shin in his two post-war Ozu leads: the shoe fits perfectly. The Ozu husbands, as a rule, have to, or at least want to, stop for a pint of beer and a highball before daring to face the home environment. Whether young men, as in *Early Spring*, or patriarchs like the Ryû and Saburi figures, it is necessary to go through the rite of transition, which in Ozu world means the nearest pub.⁴⁴⁶ It clearly serves a therapeutic function as a safe haven. At work, the men are subjects of their boss. At home, the women rule. In a bar, the customer is always right.

⁴⁴⁴ According to Mark D. West (2020, 18), Japan has a higher percentage of 'heavy episodic' and 'binge' male drinkers than the United States, even though the US reports more cases of diagnosed health consequences and alcohol dependence.

⁴⁴⁵ Iwao 1993, 7-8.

⁴⁴⁶ Pubs, bars, and hostess clubs are usually considered a superior alternative for social gatherings as opposed to the homes of the individuals. Some reasons for this are the fact that most people live far away from the Tokyo centrum and the fact that businessmen relax more easily when they are apart from their spouses and family. Allison 1994, 36-37.

Use of alcohol is classically a highly gendered issue, with men's drinking being more acceptable in most cultures than that of women. In Ozu's films, women often make remarks about the amount they can or cannot drink, and thus demonstrate that they wish to stay in control. An example of this is Aya of *Late Spring*, for whom the limit is five shots of sake. For men, getting hammered is not a shameful thing, and most films sport a 'boys will be boys' attitude about the schoolboys pushing sixty. Then again, the taboos associated with female drinking are also shown to make it more appealing: the group of women in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* has to sneak out in order to have a wild girls' night and the forbidden nature of this is clearly part of the fun for them. Always loving the comedic nature of life's realities, Ozu also gets humour out of Setsuko's hangover the next morning. Ayako and Akiko of *Late Autumn* drink moderate amounts of beer during mealtimes, but the fact that we witness the middle-aged uncles drinking almost constantly serves to define the gender-related norms pertaining to alcohol. If women get really drunk, it is usually a sign of deeper problems, such as Akiko's suicidal behaviour in *Tokyo Twilight*.

Gender is not the only category that affects the way drinking is viewed. In Japan, alcohol consumption often increases with advanced age. Mark D. West reports how in a nationwide 2018 survey, thirty-five per cent of Japanese people admitted that they drank alcohol everyday while at home, whereas the figure was more than fifty per cent for men who are in their fifties and sixties.⁴⁴⁷ Woojeong Joo suggests that since the late Ozu films increasingly view the bar as a space for reflecting on the passage of time, the younger generation is not fully allowed into this space: even if they are there physically, they do not have the same emotional experience.⁴⁴⁸ The members of the work group in *Early Spring* are shown drinking together several times, among other activities. The lead character Sugiyama is portrayed as someone drinking because of his sad family life. Yet his drinking differs from that of older characters in other films in terms of tone and amounts. Age and generation are certainly important factors in the drinking depiction, but exceptions are also possible. Hirayama of *Equinox Flower* is not shown to be as wild a drinker as most Ozu protagonists. Instead, it is the younger salaryman Mr. Kondo from his company that is revealed to be the reliable barfly.

Ozu's arguably most famous drinking sequence is in *Tokyo Story*, when the protagonist Hirayama Shukichi does not have a place to stay overnight and goes drinking with two old acquaintances, who are similarly frustrated with the way their offspring turned out to be. Amidst a dark narrative, this segment works as a comedic highlight, but also serves other purposes. Joo calls Hirayama's drinking 'a process

⁴⁴⁷ West 2020, 27. Most home-drinkers reported beer as their choice of beverage.

⁴⁴⁸ Joo 2017, 196–197.

of mourning the death of his own generation' that points out the disappearing memory of the pre-war and the wartime.⁴⁴⁹ It shows how alcohol breaks down the barriers of political correctness and liberates the older generation to finally speak their minds about the younger one, as opposed to being courteous. While the friend Numata, played by Ozu's regular drunk-in-despair Tôno Eijirô, is saddened by his son's lack of career success, the humane protagonist recognises a similar sorrow, but argues that their expectations also play a part in their discomfort. The consensus still remains that no matter how you raise your children, they will be a disappointment in some way. The film is different from the usual Ozu film in the depiction of alcohol. Drinking is not depicted as particularly fun, but as a last resort when there is no other place to go except a bar. Various passages of dialogue between the family members establish that Hirayama is a recovering alcoholic, whose drinking used to be a cause of great sadness to his family, but who has been sober since the birth of his youngest child, only to fall off the wagon when faced with emotional negligence from his family. It thus contributes to the central argument about the children being ungrateful and the parental care being unreciprocated.

The growing role of alcohol in the lives of the men is also shown to be connected to the improved social status of the women. According to Bordwell, the role of the woman in Ozu's films 'is defined in relation to the failure of masculine identity'.⁴⁵⁰ Alcohol consumption among the Ozu men grows with the passing of years and possibly the most alcoholic character in the post-war filmography is The Gourd from *An Autumn Afternoon*, who manages to drink an entire bottle of whisky during a taxi ride. The protagonist Hirayama also gets very drunk during the final scenes of the film, making it a fitting closing chapter for the Ozu filmography. One of the final lines spoken is by the younger son Kazuo, who tells his dad that he should not drink so much. Hirayama shrugs him off and starts singing an old military song: the generations cannot communicate with each other, but everybody seems to be okay with it. Ozu's final shot sees Hirayama stumbling to the kitchen to get a glass of water, then sitting down to contemplate things, and possibly to pass out again (**Graphic 4.4**). Ryû himself was not a drinker, but he managed to copy the drinking style of Ozu for his performances: Kometani Shinnosuke highlights how the ending of *An Autumn Afternoon* feels richer with this knowledge.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ Joo 2017, 181.

⁴⁵⁰ Bordwell 1988, 44.

⁴⁵¹ Kometani 2021, 97.



Graphic 4.4. *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962) concludes the Ozu filmography with a moment of drunken solitude. (Screenshot by the author).

Despite the films including some negative instances related to drinking, alcohol mostly contributes to memorable moments in a positive way. In *Tokyo Story*, Noriko relates a charming anecdote about her dead husband Shoji coming home drunk. Robin Wood argues that because this particular narrative is the first to spring to her mind, the marriage could not have been that happy. I disagree, for, as we have witnessed, the little things in life are the great motivators of human existence for Ozu. Drinking is the thing considered most holy among ‘the little things’, and the fact that *this* is the memory we get to hear – out of several different memories, one would assume – is for me perfect proof that great love existed between the two. Had Noriko been unhappy with Shoji, she could have been polite to his parents by telling them something nice about him. She could have said something about their wedding ceremony, which could have been a cold, sober, and rather impersonal anecdote. Instead, she chose a moment when her husband made a fool of himself, to tell his parents. This indicates that there is an understanding among them that everybody loved the late Shoji dearly.

The multitude of functions given to alcohol consumption in Ozu’s filmography is highly unique. Most importantly the presence of alcohol allows characters to stop what they are doing, look around, and reveal their feelings. For this purpose, the bar space becomes almost like a church or a temple, where middle-aged men confess

and share their innermost sentiments, both happy and sad. Alcohol and the bar environment give them permission to speak about the things bothering them and to admit their failures, while the home and the office space are characterised by responsibility. While the next chapter will study how women are shown to balance traditional role expectations and new opportunities pertaining to both work and leisure, it is important to note that Ozu does not see the traditional role of the husband-provider as anything to envy. The men are not depicted as free, but instead chained to the obligations they carry towards their companies and their families. The director finds a comforting element in the comradery between men, supported firmly by their mutual love of drinking, which helps men live with the wider crisis of masculinity that they can never fully overcome.

5 Beyond good wives and wise mothers: the depiction of womanhood

While the previous chapter focused on the male gender and social expectations, this chapter does the same for Ozu's female characters. I begin by analysing the traditional views of Japanese womanhood and how Japanese cinema has both preserved and questioned them. I explore the issue further in subchapters about women in the working life, the effect of marriage on one's personal freedom and the role of married women in the home sphere. Japanese gender roles are defined both through ideological structures as well as economic and social ones.⁴⁵² Richard Dyer views cultural representation as a central aspect of oppressing different social groups that also affects the way these groups view themselves and what is possible for them in society.⁴⁵³ Yet Dyer also stresses that works of culture do not come with a single definitive reading and 'people do not necessarily read negative images of themselves as negative'.⁴⁵⁴ Even if a modern viewer chooses to consider Ozu's depiction of Japanese womanhood as a patriarchal, restricting, or even downright negative, it is likely that the women who paid money to see these films did not view them as attacks on their freedom and sovereignty.

5.1 Burden of tradition

In terms of gender roles, Japan has traditionally been viewed as a conservative country, where women are raised to get married, stay home, and have children. The term 'good wife, wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo*), that originated from the Meiji period, was the ideal pre-war gender role which delegated women into the role of 'educators

⁴⁵² Tokuhiko 2009, 88.

⁴⁵³ Dyer (1993) 2002a, 1. According to Dyer: 'How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation.'

⁴⁵⁴ Dyer (1993) 2002a, 2.

who manage domestic affairs within the family'.⁴⁵⁵ One of the main goals of the SCAP officials in terms of legislature was to improve women's rights in Japan. This agenda has evoked a great amount of interest from subsequent historians and scholars. It has been noted that in some areas, the reforms pushed forward by the occupation forces were more progressive, and the freedoms campaigned for the Japanese more extensive, than those of American women at the time.⁴⁵⁶ According to Hirano Kyoko, the fact that the Americans could issue reforms without them directly affecting their own country or the opinion of their voters gave many SCAP officials the vision that their goal was to revolutionise Japan.⁴⁵⁷ The attempt to liberate Japanese women has later been criticised by Japanese scholars such as gender historian Koikari Mire, who presents it as part of the imperialist game of politics played by the US in East-Asian countries.⁴⁵⁸ Tokuhiko Yoko suggests that even though the occupation period changed the position of women in society considerably, the focus on this period neglects the work done by Japanese suffragists and feminists in the pre-war decades.⁴⁵⁹ On the other hand, Iwao Sumiko theorises that the gender equality of the post-war society was established 'largely without the fanfare of an organised women's movement or overt feminism', but instead 'pragmatism, nonconfrontation and a long time perspective are the rules that govern this change'.⁴⁶⁰ At first glance, Ozu's female characters seem to align with Iwao's comment, but applying the comparative viewing strategy to these films reveals wider social arguments pertaining to Japanese gender politics.

Cultural representation can often touch upon stereotypical role expectations. For example, traditional role expectations require dualistic character traits for married partners: in these conventional stereotypes, masculinity is associated with 'nonemotionality, self-confidence, logic, and competitiveness' as its inbuilt trademarks, whereas femininity shines in 'traits such as sensitivity to the needs of

⁴⁵⁵ Tokuhiko 2009, 77. Hori Hikari (2017, 81) also refers to the typical depiction of motherhood as a nostalgic location without much character development, a fixture of the household rather than a dynamic actor. However, Hori's scholarly work also displays different forms of motherhood witnessed in Japanese film.

⁴⁵⁶ Mellen 1976, 167. Pharr 1987, 219. Sometimes, the SCAP officials would let their inner conservatism show. When the Japanese parliament elected its first thirty-nine female members in 1946, MacArthur expressed that these new roles should be viewed as an extension of their old roles, 'without sacrifice of the important position of women at home'. Koikari 2002, 29.

⁴⁵⁷ Hirano 1992, 4.

⁴⁵⁸ Koikari 2002, 25. Her article also highlights the significant and questionable role of American female occupiers in the larger process.

⁴⁵⁹ Tokuhiko 2009, 32.

⁴⁶⁰ Iwao 1993, 2.

others, warmth, and the ability to express tender feelings'.⁴⁶¹ Ozu's films heavily feature these kinds of expectations, yet they are often commented upon and criticised as well, as we witnessed with the presentation of masculine work ethics in Chapter 4. Jo Spence has also noted how visual representations dealing with womanhood have the tendency to act as implicit narrative patterns: they feature a beginning and a middle (being born, being a child, getting married, raising a family), but there is only little representation of an end (getting old and dying).⁴⁶² With the famous exception of Tomi from *Tokyo Story*, Ozu's films feature very few elderly women as central characters. I would argue that the sentiments of the elderly that Ozu wished to deal with through his filmography, were increasingly coloured by his own views, making it more comfortable for Ozu to delegate them to the gentle masculinity of Ryû Chishû. It is likely that had Ozu aged past sixty, both the men and the women of his filmography would have aged with him to explore their golden years, as the shared aging process had been the case throughout the director's entire career.

The concept of patriarchy is often present in the scholarly writing about Japan and Japanese cinema, even if 'traditional family system' is sometimes used as a synonym for it. To an extent, this is very much warranted. Joan Mellen argues that out of all Japanese filmmakers, 'no one laments the disintegration of the old family system more than Yasujiro Ozu, and no one chronicles its demise with more deeply felt pain and bewilderment'.⁴⁶³ Imai Tadashi, a younger and much more societal director than Ozu, stated that to him 'the most important thing for women to overcome is the old definition of who they are'.⁴⁶⁴ Yet the concept of 'patriarchy' is also a problematic one. As Judith Butler has explained about the usage of the word in feminist discussion, it 'has threatened to become a universalizing concept that overrides or reduces distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts'.⁴⁶⁵ I agree with this estimate and believe that the extent of a society's masculine dominance should be viewed in relation to that society's socio-historical development. For example, although the spectrum of female roles visible in pre-war Japanese cinema may at first glance seem repetitious and conservatively limited, it should be kept in mind what a recent development this was. The very presence of actresses was a manifestation of the modern age, as women were only allowed to act in films from 1919.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶¹ Tokuhiro 2009, 55.

⁴⁶² Spence 1980. Cited in: Dyer (1979) 2002a, 15.

⁴⁶³ Mellen 1976, 315.

⁴⁶⁴ Joan Mellen's interview with Imai. Cited in: Mellen 1976, 290.

⁴⁶⁵ Butler (1990) 2007, 48.

⁴⁶⁶ Deguchi 1991, 116. Cited in: Standish (2005) 2012, 53. According to Fujiki Hideaki (2013, 2), only a handful of female actresses had appeared on screen before 1919.

Ozu and his contemporary Mizoguchi both made films which questioned the traditional role of women in society, but thematically and stylistically the two are so far apart that they are rarely compared. Mizoguchi was more political, focusing on the double standard both in the past and in the present, showing women as victims of the patriarchal society, and overall featuring a more pessimistic outlook for the future. Ozu's films are rarely angry, and instead of stating how things should change, they settle on documenting how things gradually *do* change, for better or for worse. These artistic choices often give Mizoguchi's films clear theses and Ozu's works artistic ambiguity. Then again, Joan Mellen presents Ozu as a man very much certain of his conservative convictions in the post-war years:

'To some extent, new freedoms entered the culture with an educational system that no longer inculcated doctrines of absolute submission to authority. It became possible, at least in theory, for women to engage in politics, business, and aspects of social life that had hitherto been closed to them. These were uncertain times, when people were not sure how far these new freedoms should be extended. Many, like director Yasujiro Ozu, mourned their presence altogether.'⁴⁶⁷

Though her estimate about the extent of Ozu's conservatism seems to conveniently dismiss the fascinated and championing manner in which Ozu treats the modern women of the 1950s, it should be noted that when it comes to depictions of womanhood, Mellen gives the harshest review to Japanese cinema in general:

'In keeping with her real-life position in the society, rarely is a woman, whether as wife or lover, portrayed in the Japanese film as an independent human being. Almost never does she command respect as a person separate from a man. The very concept of a relationship between two equally valuable human beings seems foreign to her universe.'⁴⁶⁸

A view like this can only be explained if the person expressing it was comparing the most conservative female characters of Japanese cinema to the most progressive female characters of American films: to Ozu's women, it seems to hardly apply at all.

Stereotypes have been viewed as a way for societies to make sense of themselves and to reproduce the existing conditions.⁴⁶⁹ According to Richard Dyer, a stereotype includes a common, shared understanding of a social group's rights, possibilities and

⁴⁶⁷ Mellen 1976, 215.

⁴⁶⁸ Mellen 1976, 247.

⁴⁶⁹ Dyer (1979) 2002a, 12. In this article, Dyer is discussing earlier representational theory by Walter Lippmann (1956).

limitations and the effectiveness of these culturally produced concepts ‘resides in the way they invoke a consensus’.⁴⁷⁰ Dyer also entertains the notion of a division between stereotypical characters defined by easily recognisable traits, and novelistic characters, with unique personalities and a multitude of character traits.⁴⁷¹ While I do not think that most fictional characters can with certainty be labelled as one or the other, I do believe Ozu’s filmography includes both of these types. The more attention a character gets, the more consideration and depth the depiction has: a better understanding of a person includes knowledge about the various interlapping categories that define their existence. Barbara Sato makes the case that Ozu’s vivid depictions of multidimensional women, which include a ‘mix of the old and the new, Western and Japanese, rational and emotional, independent and self-effacing’, direct the audience to focus on the contradictions within Japanese womanhood.⁴⁷²

For Ozu, the direction of the societal development is delightfully captured in a scene from *Early Summer*. Noriko is eating in a restaurant with her older brother Koichi (Ryû Chishû) and his wife Fumiko (Miyake Kuniko). Koichi is an old-fashioned man who does not like his wife drinking. The fact that he is stoic while the women are laughing allows the audience to make further deductions about his feelings towards women having fun, and indeed, he starts to elaborate on his views about the state of gender roles in post-war society: ‘It’s been deplorable since the war. Women have become so forward, taking advantage of etiquette.’ Noriko offers a quick rebuttal: ‘That’s not true. We’ve just taken our natural place. Men have been too forward till now.’ The two women then toast in agreement. The scene, while a comical clash of competing ideologies, is well placed in the first half of the film. Though most viewers will be siding with Noriko instead of the frowning brother, the conversation establishes how more than ever, this generation of Japanese people have to live by balancing traditional expectations and modern freedom. Koichi represents a black and white reading that sees the post-war period in a purely negative light. Noriko is the quintessential modern woman who shows us the other end of the spectrum. The brother makes a quick mention of the sister’s possibility of getting married with this mindset – the first hint of marriage in the entire film – and plants the seed that will eventually grow to a size at which it can no longer be ignored, presenting the central dilemma of the film.

Early Summer beautifully captures the problem of combining modern individual happiness with the traditional institution of Japanese marriage that has historically offered a different view of what constitutes happiness. Iwao points out that ‘Japanese women consider their own happiness to be closely tied to that of their families’.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷⁰ Dyer (1979) 2002a, 13–14.

⁴⁷¹ Dyer (1979) 2002a, 13.

⁴⁷² Sato 2003, 2. She is, in particular, discussing *Tokyo Story*.

⁴⁷³ Iwao 1993, 10.

This makes it common to put aside one's personal goals and interests, and to think of what benefits the family as a whole. Though certainly implemented as a more absolute version of the idea in Japan, these ideals connected to being a wife/mother are a common phenomenon in most cultures. Iwao writes that despite the changes that have occurred in Japanese womanhood in the latter half of the century: 'even today, what it means to be a good mother in Japan is measured by how much a mother does for the sake of the child'.⁴⁷⁴ Ozu's *A Hen in the Wind* is a good example of these ideals: the close relationship and the mother's willingness to self-sacrifice for her child is heightened by showing Tokiko carrying Hiro around, physically tying them together. It has also been noted that bad communication with stoic husbands is a contributing factor that leads women to bond with their children to express tender feelings that they cannot share with their husbands.⁴⁷⁵ This is visible in several post-war Ozu films, such as *Equinox Flower*.

Ozu's view of Japanese women and their lot in life is a complex one that includes admiration for both the carefree happiness of the youth, and the family-tied happiness of later life. While the films do assume an implicit narrative of what a woman's life should be like (as they do with men), no matter what stage in life they are depicting, they give deep consideration to what might bring these people happiness and view their happiness as the essential element. Therefore, the films cannot completely disregard either the traditional or the modern, as the characters cannot either. For the following subchapters, it is logical to cover these different stages, starting from women's participation in the working life, which Ozu films view as a source of happiness for young women, yet a passing phase in the larger texture of life.

5.2 Women in the workforce

The post-war decades brought many changes to the working life of Japan, which previously had been a male domain. As SCAP officials valued gender equality, women's opportunities for paid work improved, but often the changes were slow and superficial. The new constitution included anti-discrimination laws, which ruled that nobody should be discriminated on the grounds of sex.⁴⁷⁶ The new education reform tried to bring equality to the school system. Decades later, the Diet passed 'the Equal Employment Opportunity Law' (1985) after pressure from women's groups: it made equal opportunity and treatment in working life for both sexes mandated, even if the

⁴⁷⁴ Iwao 1993, 138.

⁴⁷⁵ Tokuhiko 2009, 79.

⁴⁷⁶ Bailey 1996, 43.

change brought by it was not as big as had been hoped.⁴⁷⁷ However, while seemingly moving in a better direction, the implementation of these fine ideas of equality has been more questionable, and modern scholars argue that the ‘good wife, wise mother’ ideal did not die away with the arrival of the occupiers, but continued to affect further generations.⁴⁷⁸ According to Judith Williamson, society divides values to those relating to private family life and others pertaining to public life: by associating the first set of values (such as caring and sharing) to women, society turns women into ‘guardians of personal life’, and therefore rationalizes the exclusion of women from public life where such values and traits are viewed as inappropriate.⁴⁷⁹ To this day, the gender divide in Japan’s job market is highly uneven for a developed country, as is the number of women in elected office.⁴⁸⁰ Kaye Broadbent, who has widely studied Japanese working life, criticises the way ‘women are consistently defined as unable to become workers the same way as men because they are responsible for domestic services’.⁴⁸¹ This subchapter looks at Ozu’s representation of female characters, who are shown to be working for a living. Possibly for the sake of being realistic, Ozu’s films include a limited number of women who earn their own wages. Yet the plurality of different economic life paths presented, forms a more nuanced tapestry.

In the 1920s, both the number of working women and consumerist products targeted to this group increased, as women now had an income to spend.⁴⁸² It became fashionable for young women to work, even if they were frowned upon by older generations. Barbara Sato argues that both consumerism and the new kind of womanhood ‘lashed out’ against the ‘good wife and wise mother’ ideology, by questioning women’s dependence on men.⁴⁸³ Since then, it has been customary for young Japanese women to work a while before getting married: in Ozu’s time, it was expected that they would quit working with the birth of their first child. There is a popular, if debated belief in Japan that a mother should not work for the first three

⁴⁷⁷ Tokuhiko 2009, 35. ‘The law, however, merely encouraged firms to ‘make efforts’ to treat women and men equally in the main areas of differential treatment such as in recruitment, job assignment, and promotion. This illustrated a powerful desire on the part of Japanese firms to maintain the existing male-centred personnel management system.’ Revisions were made to the law during the late 90s.

⁴⁷⁸ Ogasawara 2019, 85. Broadbent 2003, 5.

⁴⁷⁹ Williamson (1986) 1996, 28.

⁴⁸⁰ Steel 2019, 1–2. Yet Gill Steel maintains that conventional means of measuring equality do not always tell the full truth about gender equality in Japan and the way their society is changing.

⁴⁸¹ Broadbent 2003, 12.

⁴⁸² Sato 2003, 13. Although Sato’s book also explains how the development had already begun in earlier decades.

⁴⁸³ Sato 2003, 15.

years of her child's life, as loving parental presence is essential for the infant.⁴⁸⁴ This of course hurts the chances of progressing up the workplace ladder, especially if families decide to have more than one child.⁴⁸⁵ The women who do return to paid work after their maternity leave, often do so on a part-time basis, and they are thus treated differently than the men who are assumed to remain there for their entire working careers.⁴⁸⁶ Along with economic necessity, self-cultivation was a big reason why it became popular for young women to work: however, even this self-cultivation was tied to the notion of a future in marriage as opposed to a workplace.⁴⁸⁷ According to sociologist Ogasawara Yuko, Japanese people follow stereotypical gender roles (men at work and women at home) less because they cannot accept new roles, and more because they find it difficult to let go of the old ones.⁴⁸⁸ This is clearly witnessed in Ozu's view of working women.

Wartime was overall special in terms of women's active role in the workforce, and not just in Japan.⁴⁸⁹ *A Hen in the Wind* mentions how Tokiko and Akiko used to work in a dance hall before their marriages. As a married woman, Tokiko became a housewife, and in her husband's absence she sells her *kimonos* to get by. To pay for her son's hospital bill, Tokiko has to resort to a night of prostitution, and when she finds out, Akiko is saddened that she could not save Tokiko from this dark fate, as Tokiko had talked her out of a bad decision when they were young. Later in the film we meet Fusako, who works in a brothel because she has to support her family and cannot find other employment. She is also concerned about the social stigma that would follow her, if she were ever to quit. Her fate evokes sympathy and pity in Shuichi the male protagonist, who then gets a proper job for her. This is shown to be a singular case of good luck that concerns the plight of one woman, and the film relays the sentiment that a lot remains to be done when it comes to women's opportunities in working life. The difficulties faced by women in *Hen* also display that a society built around the idea of man as the sole breadwinner is in turmoil, when the men are largely absent. You could even interpret the film as suggesting that the

⁴⁸⁴ Tokuhiko 2009, 80–81. The belief was popularised by the writings of John Bowlby, director of the Child Guidance Department of the Tavistock Clinic in London. Anne E. Imamura (1987, 19) argues that Japanese people view a child's cry as a sign that the mother should not leave the child alone, while it is acceptable for men to be absent from home even for years, if their career calls upon them to do so.

⁴⁸⁵ Steel 2019, 31. The temporary nature of women's presence in the working life was also speculated as a reason why an efficient labour movement had not developed in pre-war Japan. Faison 2007, 3.

⁴⁸⁶ Broadbent 2003, 2.

⁴⁸⁷ Sato 2003, 141. Sato is discussing the working women of the 1920s and '30s, but it is clear that similar sentiments persisted in the post-war.

⁴⁸⁸ Ogasawara 2019, 83.

⁴⁸⁹ Spence (1978) 1995, 19.

old system lacked a back-up plan, which now causes pain and suffering for the Japanese, who face a situation they could not have predicted.

Ozu's post-war films show women either in low-ranking positions at companies or as independent entrepreneurs.⁴⁹⁰ While many former soldiers struggled to find employment in the immediate post-war, the occupiers required female workers as secretaries, cleaners and domestic helpers.⁴⁹¹ Therefore the dissolve from wartime to post-war peace was again a transitional dissolve, that saw women explore new forms of employment outside the household. In the post-war decades, Japan issued policies to encourage women to progress in the workplace hierarchy, but their effect has been limited.⁴⁹² Bernard Eccleston states that in 1989, twenty-five per cent of women in the workforce worked for larger companies: amongst them, seventy per cent were under twenty-five.⁴⁹³ This paints a dark view of the gender division in larger Japanese companies. In Ozu's post-war filmography, *Early Spring* is a work dealing with this setting. The film features two very important female characters, Sugiyama Masako (Awashima Chikage) and Kaneko Chiyo (Kishi Keiko), the latter of whom is throughout the film referred to as 'Goldfish'. Through them, *Early Spring* presents a heavily dualistic view of the expectations for young women in society. Masako, the wife of the protagonist Shôji, is presented as a balanced and dutiful Japanese housewife. She is married to a salaryman and does not contribute to the family's earnings. Goldfish, on the other hand, is the only central female character among the film's core group of young salarymen. Though a working character, she is mostly represented as fun-loving, and other characters judge her loose morality. The actress Kishi (1932–) was twenty-three during filming, which places her in the older spectrum of women in the 1950s working life. Instead of searching for an available husband-candidate, she spends the film chasing the married protagonist, which leads to her being viewed as a wicked woman. The actress playing Masako, Awashima (1924–2012), was thirty-one during filming. Her staying at home is shown to be the proper thing to do, but she and her husband do not have a child, which conveys to the audience that her life is lacking as well.

Just as with the men, Ozu's films do not discuss the job details of the working women, nor the income inequality between genders. We see Goldfish mostly in the free-time activities that the group of salarymen have together. She is presented as playful and modern, drinking alcohol and smoking. While on duty, we see that her

⁴⁹⁰ As the post-war films are centred around urban life, rural factory workers are not depicted, even though this was a very common working option for Japanese women. While simultaneously supporting the idea of woman's place in the home, the Japanese industry had in the pre-war decades (since the Meiji period) relied on the cheap labour of rural women weaving silk and cotton in factories. Faison 2007, 12.

⁴⁹¹ Coates 2016, 102.

⁴⁹² Steel 2019, 2.

⁴⁹³ Eccleston 1989, 171.

job involves typing, although her mind is on other things even while working. She lives with her married sister, which further suggests that for her, career is a passing phase before marriage. Noriko of *Early Summer* is a similar character in the sense that she also lives under the same roof as her brother and parents, and although working, it is her marital future that the narrative sets out to explore. Noriko, who has a casual friendship with her boss, is either a stenographer or secretary. Even though *Early Summer* is a marriage narrative, the film does not seem to frown upon Noriko thrusting herself into the male space of the working life, but quite the opposite. The film clearly finds this modern way of life appealing, celebrates Noriko's confidence for the first half and quietly mourns the changes brought to her lifestyle by marriage in the second half. From Noriko and Goldfish, we can therefore gather that work alone does not define a woman's morality, but instead actions, behaviour, and personality do.

Besides office work, films like *Tokyo Story*, *Good Morning*, and *Late Autumn* depict women in teaching positions: in *Tokyo Story*, the youngest daughter is yet unmarried and works as a teacher, in *Late Autumn* the widowed mother is briefly shown teaching sewing to a class. If women work outside the school/office environment, it is usually in a form of entrepreneurship. In *The Munekata Sisters*, the two sisters own and operate a European-style bar. In the reality of the film, this can be seen as a result of the failure of Setsuko's husband, who is an unemployed alcoholic. Setsuko does not complain – or does not dare to complain – but clearly wishes that her husband would get up on his feet again. Whether there is an economical subtext here is up to interpretation. In *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*, Aya (Awashima Chikage) manages a fashion shop in Ginza. She seems to be the breadwinner of their household, as her husband (Toake Hisao) is shown coming to ask for money from the wife at her workplace. In *The End of Summer*, Akiko operates an art gallery and in *Early Spring*, Masako's mother has a restaurant. While the first (another Hara character) may be a case of a woman following a calling, the latter is most likely a situation where a woman has to earn her living as nobody else will provide for her.

5.3 Being provided for and helping

While Ozu's filmography does not exclude working women from its societal depiction, the unvoiced consensus between characters relays that work is not the central goal for women, and greater happiness can be found by starting a family. Therefore, the films view women, who do not have an income but are instead provided for by their husbands, as perfectly normal. Since the Meiji period, the development of the State and the economy relied on the gender-segregated roles, with men working for the companies and women tending the affairs of the

household.⁴⁹⁴ The family system that had existed before the war (*ie seido*) was hierarchical by definition, and the role of a member was regulated based on gender, age, and birth.⁴⁹⁵ While this system was formally abolished by the 1947 civil code, it continued to affect the conception of the Japanese home sphere. This subchapter looks at the roles of the married women in Ozu's films, from the lack of financial independence to the chores expected off them in the traditional arrangement of homelife.

It is customary for the Japanese wife to control the family's financial matters. The classic expectation is that the husband earns the paycheck, and then hands it over to the wife.⁴⁹⁶ Many of the wives in Ozu's films confirm these notions. Masako in *Early Spring* is constantly thinking about the financial survival of her family, and frowns upon her husband's way of wasting money on free-time activities with co-workers. Meanwhile, since she has no income of her own, Masako has to put up with an old steaming iron that does not work properly. The way Ozu presents her situation confirms conservative notions surrounding wifedom, but also offers sympathy for her plight. Economic independence contributes to the possibilities of free-time actions, which is well documented in the later Ozu films. Ayako of *Late Autumn* is half-independent. She has an income, but still lives with her mother, and while visiting a restaurant with her, both offer to pay. *Tokyo Story* features an interesting family dynamic between Shige and her husband Kurazo (Nakamura Nobuo). While Shige is forceful, confident, and a somewhat mean-spirited working woman, the husband is shown to be more considerate and kinder, which also means that the wife gets to boss her husband around. This leads one to wonder whether it is the earning of income that switches the roles around.

Iwao Sumiko argues that Japanese women view equality in different ways than their American counterparts: they do not wish to be treated exactly like men and they view themselves as equal to their husbands even if they are not working.⁴⁹⁷ The majority of Japanese women do not feel discriminated or find themselves 'struggling': studies have instead found the women to be happier and enjoying their lives more than men.⁴⁹⁸ Ozu's oeuvre seems less certain about the issue: while women do appear more harmonious, it might also be a front, as culturally they are not expected to express agony as openly as the men are allowed to. *Early Summer*

⁴⁹⁴ Steel 2019, 4. Elyssa Faison has also noted that the idea of a worker that was created by the state, went hand in hand with being a 'gendered imperial subject'. Faison 2007, 1.

⁴⁹⁵ Tokuhiko 2009, 17.

⁴⁹⁶ Imamura 1987, 65, 81. However, Imamura makes the distinction that the husband does not always 'hand over his pay envelope', but instead many families put aside a certain budget for the wife to manage.

⁴⁹⁷ Iwao 1993, 3.

⁴⁹⁸ Steel 2019, 1.

shows us the classic image of Japanese marital hierarchy through the brother Koichi's marriage with Fumiko, where he is the provider and a somewhat stern figure, and she the empathetic housewife who at times gets bossed around by the husband, but keeps on smiling nevertheless. In the comparative realism, the character of Fumiko is there to stress what the future might have in store for Noriko, if she chooses to marry. Compared to Noriko, her mobility is more limited to the home sphere, and she is less confident in making economic decisions – such as buying cake for pleasure – because her earnings are not her own. Then again if Noriko does not marry, and hangs onto her modern freedom and economic independence, she will become a spinster and an outsider who lives in her brother's house, therefore still having limitations on her state of independence. The ending is quite beautiful for these two women, as Fumiko confesses admiring Noriko's wisdom, and they announce a competition in economising between their two households.

Fumiko is played by Miyake Kuniko, who plays almost the same character in *Tokyo Story*: another home-bound housewife named Fumiko who also has two boys.⁴⁹⁹ Even though Miyake can be viewed as playing average Japanese women in these roles, the tone of the representation warrants attention. She is by no means a June Allyson type⁵⁰⁰, as the screenplays seem very uninterested about these characters and do not present their lot in life as anything to be desired. Although Japanese gender roles are best analysed by viewing them as their own historical entities, looking at the American films produced simultaneously with Ozu's post-war works reveals that Ozu is very sceptical about the institution of marriage. The films do not paint a propagandistic picture of married life for women, and even though characters get persuaded to give marriage a try, you could argue that the audience is simultaneously being warned about the boring reality that will follow a wedding. The difference between Miyake's two characters in *Early Summer* and *Tokyo Story* is the difference between the films, with the latter film being devoid of hope and humane sentiments.⁵⁰¹ In this film, when the husband (again named) Koichi is called to work, Fumiko offers to take his parents on the sightseeing tour, but the husband vetoes the matter by noting that she cannot leave the house unoccupied. It is a darkly humorous way of highlighting that male characters view a woman's place to be home, even when nobody else is there. I view this as Ozu very much criticising the gender norms by presenting them as ridiculously strict. Thus, we see that Ozu's

⁴⁹⁹ Ozu was very fond of the actress, and noted that he liked her, because she was big-hearted and genteel, had great character without being fussy, 'sort of like a female Saburi'. Kometani 2021, 64. (From a 1952 magazine interview)

⁵⁰⁰ June Allyson (1917–2006) was an American actress who specialised in playing housewives, who happily stay at home to support their husbands.

⁵⁰¹ Kometani Shinnosuke (2021, 193) makes the distinction that *Early Summer* depicts a family in the process of disintegration, and in *Tokyo Story* the disintegration has already taken place.

films can express themselves very differently, but the underlining sentiment remains the same: *Early Summer* presents the criticism through endearing humour and *Tokyo Story* through emotional neglect.

As the films focus on the home sphere of the characters, an abundance of different house chores can be witnessed in Ozu's films. For instance, in *Early Spring* we see Masako preparing a bed for a visitor, ironing clothes, serving drinks, and buying food. Whether they earn income outside the home or not, Japanese women usually do practically all the housework.⁵⁰² In contemporary times, most Japanese men still look for a wife who will not force them to participate in housework, while many Japanese women look for a man who will.⁵⁰³ Ozu's men tend to be helpless around the house. They do not know where they have left various clothes and are completely dependent on their spouses. The films draw intentional comedy from the way the men abuse the services of their wives. *Early Spring* shows the husband expecting food to be ready when(ever) he returns from work and dropping his work-shirt on the floor for his displeased wife to then pick it up. A similar scene gets played in *Late Autumn*, as Mr. Taguchi carelessly drops his coat on the floor because his wife is not quite fast enough in bringing him a hanger (**Graphic 5.1**).



Graphic 5.1. *Late Autumn* (1960). Mr. Taguchi (Nakamura Nobuo) arrives home from a bar and drops his coat on the floor. As usual, the wife who has to pick it up is played by Miayke Kuniko.

⁵⁰² Steel 2019, 38. Kaye Broadbent (2003, 5) also argues that in modern times the women who return to working life (or part-time work) after their children are born still have to take care of the home as well: this means that women's role gets more strenuous, and men's remains unchanged.

⁵⁰³ Nemoto 2019, 70.

Most scholarly focus has been given to the father-daughter arrangement of *Late Spring*. There is almost a sense of automatization for their everyday routines and house chores, and the film carefully takes time to establish the state of things, so that the ending resonates more emotionally.⁵⁰⁴ Noriko serves a multitude of functions for her father, who gently orders her around. However, Somiya is also willing to do things for her, and the condition is displayed as mutually agreeable. Another rare case of a man comfortable with house chores is Koichi from *An Autumn Afternoon*, who we get to see in an apron, in the kitchen, making ham and eggs. Though not exactly a difficult dish to prepare, this is a clear democratisation of the kitchen space – up to the moment Akiko comes home and takes over these duties.

Due to the masculine mistreatment of the hierarchical home space, Ozu's women often resort to nagging to get their point across. The nagging can be viewed as a half-comedic way to issue social commentary about the gender-specific role expectations and the faults in their implementation. The narratives use nagging as a way to point out an approaching storm on the horizon: for instance, before the eruption of the marital crisis in *Early Spring*, the first thing Masako complains about to her husband is his habit of playing mah-jong until late in the evening, then coming home and emptying their food stores. Most often, however, the nagging of cranky wives is used as an endless source of comedy. Especially the darker films like *Tokyo Story* and *Early Spring* ease the atmosphere by adding comedic reaction-shots of characters who have been established as critical of others. When Masako of *Early Spring* is really getting angry, she sits on the floor stone-faced, completely still, except for the fan in her hand, which is moving restlessly. Nagging itself is viewed as a feminine trait. In *Good Morning*, the strict father (Ryû Chishû) gets angry at his sons for talking back to him in the argument over the purchase of a television, stating: 'Creating a fuss over such a small thing, you sound like a woman!'⁵⁰⁵ It is amusingly logical for a patriarchal society to view criticism of the patriarch as a negative attribute of femininity. Of course, men too issue complaints to their spouses, but this is more often portrayed as uncertainty in their masculinity. Ozu frequently makes fun of men viewing themselves as heads of the household, though the male discomfort is often more general in tone and cannot be pinpointed to singular issues – and therefore cannot properly be nagged about.

Even though Ozu is not as cynical as Naruse or Mizoguchi, his films clearly relay that Japanese marriage has its issues. In the ending of *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*, Taeko changes course in her advice to Setsuko, and tells her to think carefully before making her mind up about the man she is going to marry. She elaborates, how trivial things and matters of taste should not be the defining reason, but more-so the

⁵⁰⁴ Timonen 2019, 59.

⁵⁰⁵ *Good Morning* (1959), timecode: 39.52.

true character of the man. The near obsessive need for Ozu characters to get young women into marriage is often reasoned with the argument that nobody wants to grow old alone, least of all women. This has to do both with economic and emotional factors, often depending on the character who is doing the insisting. The few examples of lonely older women include Otane in *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* and Masako's mother Shige (Urabe Kumeko) in *Early Spring*. Shige is a widow who has clearly developed a pessimistic view of life. She is constantly smoking, occasionally gambles, and has to run a restaurant to make a living. Both of these characters show how there is greater freedom for women who live alone, although loneliness certainly affects their worldview.

Married women have less independence and less say-so about their lives, but also the comfort of a family. Yet even their position in the household is far from powerless. Robin Wood beautifully captures the essence of Tanaka Kinuyo's performance as the wife in *Equinox Flower*:

'a woman saved from the misery of a life of hatred and resentment purely by her innate and irreducible good humor, too old-fashioned not to be sub-servient (to the letter rather than the spirit), and too aware not to view her own situation (and her lord-and-master) with quiet irony; losing the little battles (whether or not she is allowed to listen to "pop" music on the radio) while she gently and surreptitiously wins the war.'⁵⁰⁶

Whether married or single, a man or a woman, life will never be perfect for anyone in an Ozu film. Yet the choices have immense consequences. This is what gives the idea of forming marriages the narrative weight that it has in an Ozu picture: whatever the characters decide, their decision will likely define the rest of their life.

5.4 If modern freedom ends in marriage, why marry?

The title of this subchapter is a question that pops up throughout Ozu's post-war works but is most determinedly inspected in *Early Summer*. Both parents of the film's Noriko are alive, and it is shown throughout the film that Noriko's unwillingness to get married stems from her enjoying her current freedom. The father and the elderly uncle may laugh at the notion of girls who do not want to get married, but for Noriko it appears as a worthwhile option. A married friend claims that unmarried women have a twisted notion of marriage, but the film lets Noriko stick

⁵⁰⁶ Wood 1998, 136.

to her guns for a considerable while, and when she finally does get engaged, it comes as a sudden surprise for her and the audience. This chapter concludes with an analysis about the necessity of marriage, arguments made for and against it, and women's leisure time in relation to their marital duties. With this, I argue that Ozu is not actively pressuring young women to give up their liberty, but instead arguing that for the institution of traditional marriage to seem more appealing to them, more liberty has to be included in it.

For decades, the Japanese marriage rates have declined and the age of getting married for the first time has risen.⁵⁰⁷ Reasons for women postponing marriage are gender inequality and cultural norms of femininity, which force women to be subservient to men.⁵⁰⁸ While marriage had been viewed as a necessary aspect of life before the war, the attitudes surrounding this began to loosen up in the following decades, which is already present in Ozu's view of Japanese life. Ozu Kiyoko, the elder daughter of the director's older brother Shinichi, later recalled her uncle in his final years reflecting the changing status of women to her father:

'From now on, there will be many women who will work hard and determine their own paths in life, to achieve what only she can do and to become one thing that makes her the best in Japan. That should be the way forward or else. Wouldn't it be okay even as it is, even if she doesn't get married? It may be a bit lonely for parents, though.'⁵⁰⁹

From this quote we can gather that the director had a strong understanding about the way gender roles were changing, and he even welcomed it, but could not entirely view the progress as a triumph because of the way it altered the traditional fabric of society. As Ozu himself was unmarried by choice, he could hardly judge others for following his lead.⁵¹⁰ He gives foremost importance to the happiness of the individual, and then proceeds to consider the feelings of others. The same approach is visible in the films he directed.

For women, the time of young adulthood before marriage is characterised by liberty and time for leisure activities. Leisure is defined as 'a wide variety of activities in pursuit of pleasure, joy, fun, fulfilment and happiness': whatever pleases

⁵⁰⁷ In 1970, forty-seven per cent of the men and eighteen per cent of the women aged twenty-five to twenty-nine were unmarried. By 2010, it was seventy-two per cent of the men and sixty per cent of the women. Nemoto 2019, 67.

⁵⁰⁸ Nemoto 2019, 78.

⁵⁰⁹ Kometani 2021, 79. Ozu Kiyoko disclosed this anecdote in a 2003 interview.

⁵¹⁰ Ozu stated in 1957 that the reason he was unmarried was because he was a polygamist who lacked 'the ability to put that into practise'. Kometani 2021, 77.

an individual and offers a break from more important tasks.⁵¹¹ More so than American directors, Ozu shows young women enjoying themselves and the company of their friends, without the source of this happiness having anything to do with men, dating or sexuality. Ozu also does not stress the virginity of the young women as much as American films do, but perhaps the audience is meant to take it for granted, as exceptions like Akiko in *Tokyo Twilight* receive special attention. Hara Setsuko was known as ‘the eternal virgin’ due to the purity of her star image. She is also frequently shown in a pose where she lowers her head down as opposed to looking straight at a male character, which classically implies virginity.⁵¹² Of course, Japanese customs also affect this physical behaviour.

Richard Dyer has theorised that stars are born because they express things that are important to us, and performers become stars when that which they are performing touches upon seminal things in our existence.⁵¹³ On the other hand film scholar Fujiki Hideaki, who has studied Japanese film stardom in a historical context, has framed movie stars as a central product, agent and icon of modernity, that ‘comprises the multifaceted relations of various historical conditions and processes, which include contradictions, fissures, and paradoxes’.⁵¹⁴ For both views, it would be difficult to think of a better example than the marriage narratives for Hara Setsuko in *Late Spring* and *Early Summer*. According to Jennifer Coates:

‘In the early postwar period, Hara’s perceived Westernisation and independent attitude were the target of a backlash from adult, educated and generally elite male film critics. Yet many young female viewers remained attracted to her, finding in her Western dress and idiosyncratic mannerisms a model for their own behaviours.’⁵¹⁵

Outside her film work, Hara guarded her privacy fiercely and lived a solitary life, retiring upon Ozu’s death in 1963. Due to these things, her star persona was very different from that of contemporary actresses and evoked conversation amidst the moviegoing public. Film scholar Saito Ayako has directed attention to the contrast between the de-sexualised female bodies in wartime Japanese cinema and the active, dynamic female figures that came to represent post-war democracy’s cinematic space.⁵¹⁶ In the wartime, bodies were symbols of national belonging, while the

⁵¹¹ Akiyoshi 2019, 53.

⁵¹² Dyer (1992) 2002b, 99.

⁵¹³ Dyer (1987) 2002b, 117.

⁵¹⁴ Fujiki 2013, 4.

⁵¹⁵ Coates 2022, 99.

⁵¹⁶ Saito 2014, 331.

following years saw images of female bodies symbolise the freedoms enjoyed by the citizens of a liberated nation. Saito's article points out how SCAP's attempt at also liberating women cinematically included the visual materialisation of the female body, which could also serve the interests of the male viewers.⁵¹⁷ This is, of course, true for many depictions of sexuality and determined agency.

Besides being his comeback, *Late Spring* kicks off Ozu's post-war exploration of modern femininity, characterised greatly by the free-time activities and liberated agency, as well as the built-in contrast with the depiction of Japanese masculinity.⁵¹⁸ The two films Ozu did in the immediate post-war do not feature such free-spirited female characters, or at least they are not similarly celebrated. In *Record*, Tamekichi's daughter Yukiko wears Western-style clothing and has apparently gained weight while others still go hungry. In that sense, Yukiko is an interesting curiosity as a character: acting not unlike some later young women in Ozu's filmography, but much too soon, as others still face real-life problems. Edward Fowler sees the character as a criticism of the Americans' corrupting influence on the Japanese⁵¹⁹, and in this instance, the comparison-based reading of the film supports this view. However, for me, Yukiko's short presence in the film does not affect the thematic of the film quite as much, as it seems less like a hostile sentiment, and more a comment about the country's dubious modernity. Sexual behaviour is culturally governed but can vary within a culture and evolve historically.⁵²⁰ Ozu captures a society uncertain about the direction of their future, and the uncertainty also manifests itself in a dating culture where the rules are yet to be laid down. However, even for unmarried young women, the surrounding society sets expectations that form limitations on their freedom. After she is suspected of having an affair with a married co-worker, Goldfish in *Early Spring* is slut-shamed and morally preached at by the community, whereas the man is not. The co-workers see it as their duty to intervene in the immoral behaviour of others. Wrecking a marriage is viewed as unacceptable behaviour, but foremost an act, where the other woman is the one presenting improper sexuality. The man, on the other hand, is envied, since the woman is sexually desirable. However, within the discussions, the film clearly acknowledges the double standard, and makes fun of it.

⁵¹⁷ Saito 2014, 332–333. Although it should be noted that Saito's article focuses on films from this period that showed a little more skin than those made by Ozu.

⁵¹⁸ Though scholars like David Bordwell (1988, 322) have also pointed out how the pre-war comedy *What Did the Lady Forget?* also explores similar themes, and the 1952 film *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* especially has a lot of narrative similarities with that previous work.

⁵¹⁹ Fowler 2000, 282–283.

⁵²⁰ Dyer (1987) 2002b, 117.

A requirement of Ozu's post-war feminine leisure is that the basic needs have been satisfied, and that the characters are not in trouble economically. Joo has noted that the tea ceremony near the beginning of *Late Spring* 'is essentially a "woman's hour" for upper-middle-class ladies with time and money to spend on themselves'.⁵²¹ Whether a character is married therefore is not the only thing that affects their leisure opportunities, but the economic status of the family is also a massive indicator. Social class and economic growth allow the change in lifestyle and especially free-time, and a film like *Flavor* takes extra time to document all these interesting new opportunities, also showing how in post-war society these new innovations are available regardless of gender, even if gender affects the consumerist tastes of the characters. Not having a child greatly increases the amount of free time left for a housewife, as the housekeeping duties for a normal Japanese apartment do not take all of her time.⁵²² While Ozu's films give value for leisure, there can also be too much of it: the wealthier Taeko in *Flavor* is shown to be escaping the home environment, while Masako of *Early Spring* (the wife of a salaryman) is shown to be bored and lonely in an empty apartment.

If one were to view their actions cynically, as opposed to being based on the emotional needs of a child and cultural continuation, the Ozu patriarchs can be viewed as trying to get women into marriages before they start loving their freedom too much. The fact that men usually want to marry a woman of certain age (about 23–25) is not the only reason why advanced age lessens the women's chances of getting married. There is also their independent agency to be considered. According to Iwao, as Japanese women grow older, they develop higher standards, which are harder to meet: they also develop a deeper appreciation of the freedom that comes with being unmarried.⁵²³ This is one of the key conversations about the various 'Norikos' of the Ozu canon: do they resist getting married because of emotional attachment to their family unit, because they detest arranged marriages, or because they wish to enjoy their freedom? As we are speaking of several characters in different narrative contextualisations, it is most likely impossible to pick a correct answer out of the three that would prove the other two motives false. The way the women's reasons are not singular, or articulated in a black and white manner, increases the ambiguity of the films. Out of the Ozu scholars, Robin Wood, portrays the ending of *Late Spring* in the darkest way. Wood views freedom and mobility such a central aspect of the personality of *Late Spring*'s Noriko that her becoming a

⁵²¹ Joo 2017, 158.

⁵²² As Japanese birth rates have dropped and families have fewer children, women's leisure time has grown with each post-war generation, prompting more women to search for paid work. Broadbent 2003, 101.

⁵²³ Iwao 1993, 62.

wife and receiving limitations on these categories means that she is no longer 'Noriko'.⁵²⁴ Wood sees marriage as a way to imprison the personality of woman into wifedom, with freedom now 'a thing of the past' for her.⁵²⁵ I see where he is coming from, but I think he exaggerates it a bit. Even Ozu's films show married women still enjoying mobility and freedom, and the option of divorce is stated as existing for the unhappy.

It is an important distinction to make that in Ozu's films young people are not forced to marry, but are instead made to see that marriage is something that they should at least try, as it might bring them happiness.⁵²⁶ In *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*, Mokichi finally opposes Taeko's oppressive meddling to Setsuko's life, by saying: 'You can't force her to marry if she doesn't want to. It'll only make another couple like us.'⁵²⁷ The father in *Tokyo Twilight* is cast as a patriarchal force that pressures the female characters. He tries to interrogate his younger daughter about what she has been up to, and to fix the dysfunctional marriage of the eldest daughter. He also loses his temper and denounces Akiko after the police have arrested her.⁵²⁸ It is easy not to notice Ozu's feminism in this film, and yet it is a central aspect of the viewer's experience of it. All three women in the film, the mother who has deserted her family, the older sister considering divorce, and the younger sister who got pregnant before marriage, are sinful characters in the society's view. Yet the film tries its best to give all of them as much sympathy as possible and allows us to see the cold world through their eyes. *Tokyo Twilight* puts forward the question of whether broken families give rise to more broken families, as Akiko's problems are assumed to exist because she never knew the mother who abandoned her.⁵²⁹ Akiko feels the mother's abandonment to be a sign that she was an unwanted child, which lays a negative foundation for her own life. The ending that features Takako returning to her husband for her daughter's sake, gives hope that the vicious circle will be broken, but does not necessarily answer the initial dilemma.

⁵²⁴ Wood 1998, 119.

⁵²⁵ Wood 1998, 119. Kathe Geist (2022, 200) has suggested, that Wood's own generational sentiments and homosexuality have caused him to have a biased perspective on this, as for a long time marriage, for gay men, meant marrying a woman to hide one's own sexuality, thus being in a trap.

⁵²⁶ Sorensen (2009, 173) has viewed it differently, as little more than a sly tactic where subtle approach yields the best results.

⁵²⁷ *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* (1952), timecode: 1.08.00.

⁵²⁸ *Tokyo Twilight* (1957), timecode: 58.40.

⁵²⁹ Joan Mellen (1976, 322) puts the blame entirely on the mother, stating that because of the abandonment, all characters are left so traumatized they are unable to 'construct meaningful lives of their own'.

Both *The Munekata Sisters* and *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* question the necessity of marriage by featuring a troubled couple, as well as a young woman enjoying her modern freedom. Both films pose the question of why the woman should hand over her current happiness in exchange for marital misery. In *The Munekata Sisters* it is a lesser theme, and Mariko's possible marriage is not given much thought. The film's conclusion allows her to enjoy her freedom, just as long as she also develops a taste for Japanese tradition. Her older sister Setsuko also chooses not to remarry, and the end result is possibly Ozu's most anti-marriage film, where marriage in fact does not seem the least bit necessary. *Flavor* begins with a conversation where 'the single years' are highlighted as the best years of a woman's life, as women have time for having fun in the absence of harsh husbands.⁵³⁰ As the film closes, Setsuko is on a date, but still unmarried, and she has just been told that she is allowed to take her time before making the life-impacting decision of choosing a husband.

Married Japanese women have less time for leisure activities, media consumption, and sleeping than the married men.⁵³¹ Yet studies have shown that women get more pleasure from the high-return leisure activities they participate in, such as getting together with friends, than men do.⁵³² As there is less free-time, the women will therefore make the most of it and invest it wisely to activities that bring them happiness. *Flavor* includes a sequence of four women enjoying leisure time by going to the bathhouse (**Graphic 5.2**). The women are shown to be very liberated, casual and joyful, as they get to eat and drink as much as they like. The scenes preceding this have established that Taeko, being married, has had to sneak out by lying to her husband. This would imply that even a childless mother who has no job obligations cannot enjoy the same level of freedom as unmarried women do. Then again, the societal edge of this narrative element is softened by the comedic nature in which it is presented: the scenes show the women having created a careful system of sneaking out that involves one of them always coming down with a case of appendicitis, or some other ailment. Later, as the women attend a baseball game, the plight of the patriarchal system is made fun of by having the announcers call Taeko, telling her to return home. The wake-up call is of a rare volume amidst Ozu's films. Yet when she does hurry home, it is still not the husband who has something to discuss with her, but the niece Setsuko, implying that neither generation lives in complete certainty about their lives.

⁵³⁰ *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* (1952), timecode: 5.20.

⁵³¹ Akiyoshi 2019, 50.

⁵³² Akiyoshi 2019, 62.



Graphic 5.2. *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* (1952). Women enjoying their shared leisure time in secret. (Screenshot by the author)

On the other hand, the groups of female friends depicted in the post-war films often include both single and married ladies, such as in *Flavor* and *Late Spring*. In *Early Summer*, the group of friends consists of two married and two single women.⁵³³ In the teahouse scene when all of them are together, we can see that this division has placed the women into two opposing teams. Even though friends, there is a slight resentment coming from the married side towards the singles, noting that they do not understand what real happiness is.⁵³⁴ However, the single ladies are quick with a comeback about the extent of the freedom they enjoy. Later, the film gets more serious about how this group is gradually drifting apart, as the married women do not have as much time for their old friends as they used to. *Late Autumn* treats Ayako's free time as a precious commodity: something she will no longer have to this extent, once married. Of the post-war films, it is also the one that places the greatest importance on friendships between women. The two core relationships that Ayako has in the film are with her mother, and with her best friend Yuriko (Okada Mariko). Ayako and Yuriko have a conversation about how marriage can lead even close friends to drift apart. Ayako acknowledges the parting of ways as inevitable in

⁵³³ According to Anne E. Imamura (1987, 97), the findings from studies have shown 'that it is the friends one sees regularly during the years between high school graduation and marriage that become the closest'. Ozu films also suggest that this is the time of forging lasting friendships for both men and women.

⁵³⁴ *Early Summer* (1951), timecode: 40.00–41.28.

the long run, while Yuriko rebels against it: 'If friendship is just a temporary filler until we get married, what's the point of all this?'.⁵³⁵

Ozu does in fact see an important point in women's friendships, their free time, and their leisure activities: the simple fact that they bring women happiness gives them a point and a reason to be practiced. It cannot be said that Ozu would view women's participation in working life as similarly essential, as work is not shown to bring happiness for the men either.⁵³⁶ Ozu's interest is in the home sphere, and therefore his films campaign for the formulation of new families and new homes through marriage. Yet the way he presents women in the bloom of youthful happiness begs to find a way to somehow hang on to the things that give birth to this happy time in their lives, even as they grow older and get settled down. The films view women's happiness as equal in importance to that of men, and frequently show that women can find happiness in all stages of life, often more easily than men, as their happiness stems from simple things in life, such as friendship, food, and good relationships with their loved ones.

In Ozu's films, womanhood is shown to exist as a category with limitations that are both amplified and challenged by the presentation of gender. Gender can indeed be viewed in the performative sense, as an expectation that produces the phenomena that it is expecting.⁵³⁷ Judith Butler highlights repetition as a core mechanism of performativity, and Ozu, perhaps better than any other filmmaker in history, captures this mundane repetition with the way his films are constructed.⁵³⁸ The director reveals himself as fond of the old ways, but his humane individualism also gets extended to the characters struggling with expectations, and therefore the gender system displayed is not opposing the improvements in individual liberties. Ozu is not hiding the subjective way his films view the changing fabric of society, but he mostly manages to abstain from judging others, and offers sympathy even to the characters whose actions oppose his harmonious worldview. This way he manages to evade the stereotypic representations that Richard Dyer warned about, something which Ozu's marriage narratives could have easily turned into under worse writers. By viewing Ozu's female characters in a comparative way, it becomes evident that the films have both a realistic understanding of how society is treating women in the present moment, as well as thoughts on the improvements that could be made to the system without it feeling too foreign to the people involved.

⁵³⁵ *Late Autumn* (1960), timecode: 49.10–51.10.

⁵³⁶ There has in fact been discussion about whether the salaryman lifestyle is something that should be emulated at all, as it is unsure whether it really feels more satisfactory for men to perform these tasks day after day, than it is for women to attend to their work. Imamura 1987, 18.

⁵³⁷ Butler (1999) 2007, xv.

⁵³⁸ Butler (1999) 2007, xv.

6 Orphans, consumerists, fart-makers: the depiction of childhood

This chapter deals with the way the Ozu filmography presents children and childhood. Japanese cinema has frequently studied the country's historical moment through child protagonists in order to understand the environment in which future generations or past ones have come to age. Directors such as Shimizu Hiroshi, Goshō Heinosuke, and Tasaka Tomotaka have explored post-war childhood in critically acclaimed films, as has Ozu. Ozu's films include toddlers (*A Hen in the Wind*, *Tokyo Twilight*), schoolboys (*Late Spring*, *Early Summer*, *Good Morning*), as well as teenagers (*Equinox Flower*, *Late Autumn*). This chapter is concerned with children who have yet to hit the teenage years, but rather than categorise them further based on age, I find it more meaningful to separate the two settings for childhood witnessed in the post-war Ozu films: childhood in the immediate post-war and childhood in a consumerist society. Both depictions include a mix of worries and sympathy, but the juxtaposition between them shows the radical societal change that occurred in a short period of time. In both settings, childhood forms a comparative category to adulthood, and the ideological gap between generations becomes a source of both sadness and humour. The audience is allowed to inspect the situation from both sides: to see how the adults view their children and how the adult world appears to Japan's youngest citizens.

6.1 Childhood in the immediate post-war

Dramatic works depicting childhood have a rich history in Japan. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, there was a boom of critically acclaimed films dealing with childhood while 'not specifically targeted towards young spectators'.⁵³⁹ The wartime films used childhood to portray innocence, as does Ozu in *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*: later, the functions of presenting childhood would expand further and into more diverse narrative functions. Of Ozu's post-war films, two feature children

⁵³⁹ Salomon 2017, 102–103.

as the lead characters. *Record* offers a look into the plight of a young boy without parental figures in his life amidst the immediate post-war reality. The film documents how being born during, or immediately after, the war, meant an early childhood characterised by unique circumstances and turmoil. Twelve years later, Ozu made *Good Morning* (1959), a depiction of children who have been born after the hardship and are growing up in the middle of the increasingly capitalistic landscape of a newly built welfare state. Despite these two being the only films where one could describe a child character as the protagonist, children appear in nearly all of the director's post-war films, usually with lines of dialogue.

A central feature of childhood for most Japanese children during the war was the absence of the father, as the war had left over 370, 000 women widowed.⁵⁴⁰ Many children lost their fathers, while others spent their early childhood without knowing or remembering them.⁵⁴¹ Ozu's *A Hen in the Wind* features a child, Hiro, whose father Shuichi left for the war while Hiro was still an infant. As the father returns, the boy is shown to be initially shy with him. Ozu does not make this a major issue in the narrative, and by the same evening, Hiro is shown to be joyous and excited about his family being back together (**Graphic 6.1**).



Graphic 6.1. *A Hen in the Wind* (1948). The joyful family reunion sees Hiro jumping and running around in circles, while the parents observe his happiness. (Screenshot by the author)

⁵⁴⁰ Takenaka 2016, 775. The number refers to the period of the Asia-Pacific War, 1931–1945.

⁵⁴¹ In their memoirs, children who grew up after the war have often brought up their childhood being characterised by ‘absent fathers, distressed mothers, and many strained, dysfunctional relationships’, also in cases where the father returned. Hashimoto 2015, 44.

As the film is very much about the married couple, Hiro receives little character development, and his presence – the fact that he gets sick with a catarrh of the colon – is there primarily to put the plot in motion. A later film to offer a closer study of the psychological torment amidst a similar family re-unification is Gosho Heinosuke's *Yellow Crow* (Kiiroi karasu, 1957). Gosho's film shows the young boy Kiyoshi, played by Ozu's regular child actor Shitara Kôji, dealing with his father's (Itô Yûnosuke) return by seeing him as a competitor for the mother's (Awashima Chikage) attention. The father has PTSD from a prison camp, which puts further distance between him and his son. Unlike Ozu, Gosho strives to portray the child as a psychological individual just as the parents are. It is noteworthy that the returning father in *Hen* does not appear to have visible psychological scars from the war experience, though like the father in *Yellow Crow* it has taken a while for him to return to Japan. Whereas many fathers brought home the strict, authoritarian military values they had become used to⁵⁴², Shuichi in *Hen* is shown to be a normal guy, happy to be home, and things only get sour after he finds out what has transpired in his absence.

The central, defining element of the two films Ozu made in the immediate post-war era is poverty: in *Record*, a father has to leave his son for several days in order to provide for him, whereas *Hen* focuses on a mother who has to resort to a night of prostitution to pay for her son's hospital bill. Between the lines and through their imagery, the films also discuss Japan's status as an occupied country. Edward Fowler has viewed this as a second narrative hidden in plain sight in *Record*, while Jonathan Rosenbaum has speculated that the visible nature of Japan's shattering defeat may have been the reason, why Ozu later recalled *Hen* as a 'bad mistake'.⁵⁴³ Joan Mellen has presented *Hen* as an attack against the Americans and Tokiko's dark journey as an allegory of a nation prostituting itself to a foreign power.⁵⁴⁴ Her argument is very persuasive. She notes that the child Hiro is not named after the emperor by a mere coincidence, and by sacrificing herself for the boy, Tokiko is really protecting the Japanese tradition. Mellen also makes the point that the reason why we do not see Tokiko in the brothel is that 'spiritually, in her deepest self, she never *was* there' (italics by Mellen).⁵⁴⁵ There is no doubt that both *Record* and *Hen* contain anger, but I would argue that this anger is more general in nature than what Mellen and Fowler have viewed it to be. It is deep frustration about the ugly, bombed-out state of Japan; desperation that is eventually conquered by Japanese people remembering their roots

⁵⁴² Hashimoto 2015, 44.

⁵⁴³ Fowler 2000, 279, Rosenbaum 2012, 12.

⁵⁴⁴ Mellen 1976, 216.

⁵⁴⁵ Mellen 1976, 216.

of humanity.⁵⁴⁶ This humanity is not presented as stemming from the national tradition, but from the people, who make a pledge to stick together and weather the storm, hopeful that things will eventually get better.

Ozu opts for female perspectives in both films, showing the difficulty for a mother to provide for her child in *Hen* and the lack of food ingredients in *Record*: both films also comment, how expensive everything has become. *Record* and *Hen* do not stress the issue, but from their imagery we can also gather a lack of public transport, as characters go everywhere on foot, sometimes considerable distances.⁵⁴⁷ Apparently, there are also not services that take care of children, as Otane cannot give Kohei to any authority, and Tokiko does not have a babysitter for Hiro, instead taking him along when she sells her kimono. Tokiko's situation also comments upon the national ideology during the war, as the state encouraged women to become mothers at a young age, which meant that women did not often possess employment skills.⁵⁴⁸

Understandably, this was also a time when getting sick was more serious. As the war ended, Japanese life expectancy was far behind that of the Western nations and a big contributor was the infant mortality rate, which started to decline during the late 1940s.⁵⁴⁹ The decline was achieved through rapid improvements in living standards as well as medical advances and public health strategies.⁵⁵⁰ In *Hen* this is visible in the way that Hiro receives hospital treatment and survives, though staying at a hospital is costly. Children getting sick had become a recurring motif in Ozu's films of the 1930s. After *Hen*, he seems to have retired the trope, possibly because of its heightened melodramatic quality which no longer fit the films he was making.⁵⁵¹ There were also children without any parents, but it is noteworthy that with the exception of *Record*, Ozu's films leave the subject of war orphans without inspection. One could argue that Ozu tones down the political nature of the subjects

⁵⁴⁶ It should also be noted, that while the tenement buildings in *Record* appear flimsy and dirty in comparison to the clean environments Ozu would relocate to from *Late Spring* onwards, that is not how they were seen by the contemporary audience. Yoshida Kiju calls *Record* 'a utopia', as it depicts a place that does not exist. This is because, for him, all the buildings are perfectly placed in beautiful compositions and the biggest devastation is left unseen. He notes that the film was criticised as anachronistic when it came out. (Yoshida (1998) 2003, 53.) Yoshida's view is very strange, as he seems to forget about the existence of censorship rules: I would say that in *Record*, Ozu is not criticising realism, but being as realistic as he can under both the present circumstances and his own umbrella of humanism.
⁵⁴⁷ *Hen* features one shot of a streetcar, but in the same shot, Shuichi is going to his destination on foot.

⁵⁴⁸ Takenaka 2016, 775.

⁵⁴⁹ Yorifuji, Tanihara, Inoue, Takao & Kawachi 2011, 601.

⁵⁵⁰ Yorifuji, Tanihara, Inoue, Takao & Kawachi 2011, 601.

⁵⁵¹ Except for *Early Spring*, where we hear a story about how the main couple's child died.

by not having Kohei be an actual war orphan, and not having Tokiko be an actual war widow, but merely showing their situations as similar. A noted film about actual parentless orphans made in the immediate post-war years was Shimizu Hiroshi's *Children of the Beehive* (Hachi no su no kodomotachi, 1948), which follows a pack of eight homeless children, showing the full extent of the societal disarray. Made in the contemporary present, *Record* and *Hen* feature darkness as much as the censors would have it – it is unlikely that Ozu would have wanted to turn in nihilistic works even without the SCAP presence – but are, in the end, determined to give people hope.

Record introduces its central narrative problem, the young Kohei without a father, in the first scene, where the kind Tashiro (Ryû Chishû) brings him home to meet Tashiro's roommate Tamekichi (Kawamura Reikichi), who refuses to take him in. Tashiro then takes the boy to the neighbour Otane (Iida Chôko) who also does not want the strain of having him around, but Tashiro makes a comedic escape, and the woman is stuck with Kohei. The bleakness of the film's worldview is heightened by Ozu casting previous regulars Iida, Ryû and Sakamoto Takeshi in the film, as all three had played positive parental role models in previous Ozu films. This is most evident in the scene, where the characters hold a lottery about who has to take the boy to search for the father. Otane gets the unpleasant duty, because the two other characters cheat. This shows the audience, how everybody is more concerned about their own well-being and if necessary, will cheat their way out of helping a child in distress. In *Hen*, Akiko makes a passing remark about Hiro possibly being in the happiest age, underlined by the idea that is happiness constituted of not understanding the nature of the surrounding reality.

Record's core thesis about people having grown more cold-hearted is capsulated in the way how instead of trying to help the child find his father, characters would settle for just getting him out of their sight. This is further developed by having most of the adult characters be traders of sorts, who thus view the child as a commodity they are desperate to get rid of. Whereas Ozu films often show stone-faced children as a source of comedy, *Record* uses the silence of the young boy to crystalise his mental state: by not having him talk for a long time, we are led to understand his sad situation and his inability to affect what happens to him. *Record* is a film that starts off as a depiction of economic poverty and morphs into a study of emotional poverty. The beginning of the film shows adult characters viewing children as an economic strain, and the film follows Otane's journey of discovering the emotional richness brought by children. The film shows the negative sentiments amidst the common people in the immediate post-war period and reminds them of their humanity. It closes with an inspirational monologue by Otane, about the importance of kindness, a lesson she learns through her time with Kohei. In the immediate post-war, Ozu pitied the children and criticised the people who only thought about their own well-

being, but once the country grew prosperous, this criticism too had to adapt its nuances to the inspection of a consumerist society.

6.2 Children of consumerism

After *Record* and *Hen*, Ozu's next films feature children in roles that have less to do with the narrative, and more with the comparative individualism of the whole. The baseball-playing kid from *Late Spring* as well as the two brothers from *Early Summer* are there to highlight that the Noriko characters from these films are still unmarried and without children, but it is not their only function. It is evident from what we see that these boys are enjoying considerably higher living standards than the children of Ozu's immediate post-war works. This is a clear indicator about the consumerist development of Japanese society that increased as the years went on and was tackled by Ozu most consistently in the childhood depictions of *Early Summer* and *Good Morning*. Ozu's post-war films present children as impatient materialists, always pestering their relatives to buy more stuff for them, which contributes comic relief, but also poses comments about the surrounding world. This subchapter first looks at how children embody consumerist ideology in general, and then proceeds to give special attention to the role of television in the shaping of said ideology. According to Igarashi Yoshikuni:

‘It is important to recognize that Japan’s high growth was made possible by incorporating the vast majority of its citizens into the system of production and consumption, and television was essential to this process. Through their participation in this system, a new sense of belonging emerged in Japan.’⁵⁵²

Igarashi notes that while the lifestyle characterised by access to culture and mass media had been the privilege of urban worker families in the 1920s, the same things ‘diffused to every corner of Japanese society in less than half a century’.⁵⁵³ Ozu's films discover the first signs of this development in the post-war society, and comment upon it especially in the 1959 film *Good Morning*.

Consumerism has been viewed as a threat not only to Japanese tradition, but to entire world religions like Buddhism. Peter Harvey, the editor of the article collection *Buddhism* (2001), calls consumerism:

‘currently perhaps the greatest corrosive force undermining Buddhism in such lands as Thailand and Japan. Its commodification of life and emphasis on

⁵⁵² Igarashi 2021, 26.

⁵⁵³ Igarashi 2021, 28.

possessions has heightened elements of greed in human nature and encourages a reorientation of values accordingly.⁵⁵⁴

Ozu acknowledges these sentiments but voices the corrupting nature of consumerist society through humour, at least when it comes to children. *Early Summer* features one of the director's finest comedic strokes, with a sequence between the grandfather and the younger of his two grandsons. The old man gives the boy a treat every time he says 'I Love you' to his grandfather (**Graphic 6.2**). After he has all the treats, the boy leaves the room with his arms full and playfully declares: 'I hate you'. The scene is charming enough for its own sake not to warrant heavy analysis, but it does introduce the mischievous attitude in which later works like *Good Morning* – which turns the phrase 'I Love you' into English – would treat the theme of growing up in a democratised, consumerist society.



Graphic 6.2. *Early Summer* (1950). The love of a grandson does not come cheap. (Screenshot by the author).

Consumerism is targeted more head on with a later *Early Summer* scene, where the two boys massage their grandmother. They are doing this not out of family closeness, but instead for a potential reward, as they are saving money to buy additional pieces for their model train track. Later, when they play with their friends, each boy brings the pieces they own, and they put them together to form a longer track. While the

⁵⁵⁴ Harvey 2001, 26.

Mamiya boys would like to own more pieces themselves, the scene manages to capture the mutually dependent nature of friendship in life.

Ever since *I Was Born, But...* the children in Ozu films were featured not simply for the sake of realism (aka. a realistic depiction of society includes kids), but to show the audience the generation that will follow the present one. While writing about the 1932 film, Alastair Phillips notes how Ozu positions an argument about the future direction of Japan's modernity by constructing a close analogy between the worlds of the children and the adults.⁵⁵⁵ Yet likely because Ozu was himself a young man (of twenty-nine) while making the film, it seems to mourn the stagnation of Japanese social roles and the society in which the boys will grow up, as opposed to the post-war films where Ozu's opinions have grown older alongside him. A sequence in *Early Summer* introduces an elderly, visiting uncle, who has trouble hearing. The two boys get a kick out of this, and the younger goes behind the uncle's back and yells 'idiot' without him hearing. The old man is indeed an idiot from the perspective of these boys, as he has lived almost a full life, and the fact that he has succumbed to aging is proven by partial deafness. Fittingly, when the uncle finally does notice the boy behind him – who quickly runs away – he gives a sympathetic laugh, informing the audience that he has a better understanding of the wider narrative playing here. Another noteworthy example comes later, when the two boys mistakenly believe that their father has bought them the train track they desired. They open the wrapping paper and are furious to find out that he has bought bread instead. The contrast between the 1951 film with *Record* and *Hen*, made only a few years earlier, is striking to say the least.

The strange thing about Ozu's various depictions of children is that usually the families he depicts only have boys.⁵⁵⁶ The absence of young girls sticks out as strange and makes the viewer ponder whether the director only found young women interesting to film at the age when their upcoming marriage could be made into a plotline.⁵⁵⁷ Of Ozu's 1930s output, *Tokyo Chorus* is a rare example that includes a seven-year-old girl, played by later prominent actress Takamine Hideko. Still, it is the family's son (Sugawara Hideo), who gets more attention in the narrative, with the daughter depicted as quiet and proper. Ozu's post-war films include even fewer girls, with the director usually opting to feature families, with two young boys, one

⁵⁵⁵ Phillips 2007, 27.

⁵⁵⁶ Though in this, he is not alone. Most of the famous childhood depictions of the studio era featured boy protagonists.

⁵⁵⁷ Joan Mellen (1976, 36) argues that 'the third generations in Ozu films are invariably male, and, in the postwar films, self-centred little animals', and the caring demanded from the mothers has 'dehumanized' them, turning them into 'non-individualized human beings'. Mellen refers to the housewife played by Miyake Kuniko in *Tokyo Story*, but the effect is visible in other housewives as well, often played by Miyake.

usually more rebellious than the other.⁵⁵⁸ This pattern dates itself all the way back to *I Was Born, But...*, a film that serves as the prototype for Ozu's depiction of children. Another reason why Ozu might have mostly excluded young girls from his films, is that in these works, children usually serve as comedic relief. The strict upbringing of girls made it harder for young girls to be the source of such wild comedy antics and still represent the norms of society realistically. Girls were expected to act more politely while boys were allowed more leeway, through which comedic behaviour could be expressed. Therefore, Ozu's funny kids are, by default, boys.

Several Ozu films feature parents sharing their beliefs about proper up-bringing. In *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* Taeko accuses Setsuko of being too carefree and sees that the fault lies in the parents who spoiled her. *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* would appear to show Tamekichi's daughter as a spoiled child, partly because of American cultural influence, and partly because of a possible divorce between the parents.⁵⁵⁹ *The End of Summer* shows Manbei visiting his old flame and her daughter Yuriko, who calls him 'father', though the film shows there is a general uncertainty about whether he is a biological parent. Perhaps the lack of a permanent father figure has caused Yuriko to turn into a spoiled young woman: she outright declares to her mother that she will consider her present father to be her father, when he buys her a mink stole. It is however unlikely that the films are actually trying to share serious arguments about how children should be raised, but merely to offer more character development by exposing people's views and attitudes about these issues.

The peak of Ozu's depictions of consumerist kids was reached in *Good Morning*. A re-working and a commentary of the themes from *I Was Born, But...*, the film depicts a generation of kids whose childhood is characterised by steady economic growth, and the things made possible by it. The film's conflict deals with two young brothers Minoru (Shitara Kôji) and Isamu (Shimazu Masahiko), who, based on the actors' ages, are about twelve and six years old. The boys want their parents (Miyake Kuniko and Ryû Chishû) to buy them a television set. Their friends already have televisions in their homes, and the material need is greatly bolstered by this association. With the boys constantly studying English for their class, the film hints a direction from which the winds of materialism might be blowing towards Japan.

⁵⁵⁸ A small exception is *Tokyo Twilight*, where Takako has a daughter instead of a son. Then again, this child is visible only briefly, and is meant to serve as a parallel to Akiko, so the gender choice can be attributed to the usual practise of character comparisons. In *Early Summer*, Noriko's husband-to-be also has a young daughter named Mitsuko, but although seen briefly, she is not a character with lines or an arc, like the boys in the film are.

⁵⁵⁹ Fowler (2000, 283) certainly views the film as supporting this reading.

Isamu has even taken the habit of repeating the English phrase ‘I love you’, which is the film’s way to show that the young generation has lovingly embraced the materialist way of life. The children studying English is also a great contradiction with the school system of the 1930s, which highlighted nationalist agenda and shut out Western influence.

Though the film initially shows television to be something for the children and the dim-witted, the narrative also shows older characters profiting from new household appliances, like a housewife who gets a washing machine. The introduction of these kinds of appliances in the post-war decades also affected the image of ideal womanhood, as women were viewed as those who most benefitted from them.⁵⁶⁰ The new machines saved time and thus ‘liberated’⁵⁶¹ women to commit themselves to other activities, as the women in *Good Morning* show, even though the divide between male-dominated workspace and female-dominated home sphere did not change with the introduction of a washing machine. The modernity brought by the steady consumption of household-appliances became in the post-war period a marker of families who worked hard and thus stayed on the life course that was viewed by society as normative.⁵⁶² Woojeong Joo has also viewed *Good Morning* as touching upon this issue, as the two boys are ‘frustrated by the possibility of ‘staying behind social homogenisation’’.⁵⁶³ In a sense, you are not middle-class, if you do not own the same household appliances as your middle-class neighbour. This highlights consumerist needs as social constructions, with hit products creating new needs.⁵⁶⁴ These needs then get amplified through the very human need of looking over the fence to see, whether the grass is greener on the other side.

While the neighbourhood kids of *Good Morning* compete about whose family has a television, the film itself engages in another type of competition with this particular innovation. Japanese television began broadcasting in 1953, and by the end of the decade, most ordinary households owned a television set.⁵⁶⁵ Igarashi Yoshikuni argues that television particularly had a key role in the development of Japanese consumerism, as ‘viewers acquired a new level of reflectivity on their relations with the larger society by beginning to see themselves as if they were inside their own visual field’, ‘an outside perspective from which to view themselves critically’.⁵⁶⁶ Colour films replacing ones in black and white was part of cinema’s attempt to compete with the new medium, but by the Tokyo Olympics of 1964,

⁵⁶⁰ Pantzhar 2000, 58–59.

⁵⁶¹ Pantzhar 2000, 59. This is, at least, how they were marketed to consumers.

⁵⁶² Allison 2013, 22.

⁵⁶³ Joo 2017, 192.

⁵⁶⁴ Pantzhar 2000, 18.

⁵⁶⁵ Yomota 2019, 2019.

⁵⁶⁶ Igarashi 2021, 4–5.

colour TV had become a common item: this gives a meta element to the narrative of *Good Morning*, itself a colour film. In Japan, just as in other countries, television was seen as a huge threat by the movie industry. Therefore, many movies did not initially show people watching television, as this would be legitimising the competition.

The film industry people were far from being the only ones with fears about the new medium. Television brought the news of the world into the living rooms, which during the tensions of 1960s generated fear and anxiety: Jean-Marie Bouissou states that the violent images had a profound effect for Japan, a nation that traditionally ‘regards harmony as the supreme virtue’.⁵⁶⁷ Television’s violent content being visible to children has been a topic for great debate almost universally: television has also been accused of being an ideological and manipulative force that serves the interests of big business.⁵⁶⁸ According to scholars Bob Hodge and David Tripp, who have studied the relationship between children and television, the belief that television is bad is often a conservative one, ‘part of a rejection of contemporary society and technology in favour of earlier, often idealized social and cultural forms’.⁵⁶⁹ The criticism that Ozu issues in *Good Morning* certainly carries a nostalgic motivation. Television is portrayed as a force of modernisation that is impossible for the younger generation to resist. Hence, it participates in the erosion of the traditionally Japanese homes and is met with scepticism by the older characters.

Then again, older characters can just as likely be seduced by the innovation. In *Autumn Afternoon*, Kawai is going to a baseball game, but the next scene reveals that his friends managed to talk him into going to a bar that has a TV.⁵⁷⁰ Television was an American addition to Japanese society, and thus, foreign by nature, but as Aaron Gerow has noted, cinema too was initially a foreign object for the Japanese.⁵⁷¹ Both forms of entertainment were, from the start, viewed in connection with a lifestyle transformed by capitalist development.⁵⁷² Bordwell has suggested a similarity between *Good Morning*’s television and *Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*’s pachinko.⁵⁷³ I would assert that this tones the criticism down, as the object of criticism ceases to be a singular innovation. As a repeated narrative trope, it also

⁵⁶⁷ Boissou (1992) 2002, 94. Boissou relates this specifically to the political violence that preceded the 1960 elections, as socialist leader Asanuma Inejiro was stabbed to death by a seventeen-year-old schoolboy, while being broadcast on television to millions of people.

⁵⁶⁸ Hodge & Tripp 1986, 1-2.

⁵⁶⁹ Hodge & Tripp 1986, 1.

⁵⁷⁰ Though it is undetermined, whether he is keeping track of the score even via television broadcast.

⁵⁷¹ Gerow 2000, 3.

⁵⁷² Fujiki 2022, 48.

⁵⁷³ Bordwell 1988, 348–349.

adds a further layer of comedy with the audience understanding that the characters are having the ‘classic’ reaction to the newest ‘new’, before something else gets their attention. In the year of his death in 1963, Ozu wrote the teleplay for a TV movie called *Seishun hōkago*, although this happened through an acquaintance and not because of a love for the medium.⁵⁷⁴

Another conservative view suspects that the seemingly passive activity of television watching has a negative impact on children’s intellect.⁵⁷⁵ Many have argued that television makes children downright dumb, one such critic being Kurosawa Akira, who in the early 1990s expressed his worries about the future of a civilisation where people watch TV instead of reading books.⁵⁷⁶ Despite having worked a year as a teacher, Ozu pursues hardly any pedagogical arguments with *Good Morning*. Instead, out of the first Japanese films to depict television, his is one of the most light-hearted. One driving force for civilization has been viewed to be ‘the gain-in-pleasure’⁵⁷⁷, and Ozu is always willing to acknowledge this, even if he himself is not a fan of television. Though *Good Morning* shows a conflict between the children and the adults, it is also worlds apart from the gruesome everyday reality of *A Hen in the Wind*, a film only eleven years older. The boys may complain about always getting the same food for dinner, but they constantly have food, and sometimes even treats. They are also clearly healthy. And then of course, there is the farting, but farting as an activity and a cinematic signature is so emblematic of Ozu as a filmmaker – and as a historical individual for that matter – that we shall begin a new subchapter to inspect the functions of farting within Ozu’s cinema.

6.3 Why all the farting?

The more one watches the cinema of Ozu, the more one notices little cracks in the otherwise polished surface, created by the steady presence of endearingly child-like, crude humour, often dealing with things like farts and urination. I maintain that a key difference between Ozu and his contemporary artists is that what others saw as socially awkward bodily functions, Ozu presented without shame as the central joys of life, most notably with the farting motif from *Good Morning*. Donald Richie framed the ‘earthly touches’ of Ozu films as particularly important for the director,

⁵⁷⁴ Joo 2017, 193.

⁵⁷⁵ Hodge & Tripp 1986, 10. The authors of the book in question strongly disagree with this view. According to them, children are ‘learning important and complex structures of meaning, and developing capacities for thinking and judgement that are a necessary part of the process of socialization’.

⁵⁷⁶ Schilling 1999, 60.

⁵⁷⁷ Laporte (1978) 2002, 14. Laporte says this while discussing Freudian philosophy.

as the moments when humans are most human.⁵⁷⁸ I agree with Richie, who argues that ‘a man who farts, a man having sex, is – among other things – acknowledging his similarity to all other men’ and that etiquette is a way to pretend we are somehow more than simple humans.⁵⁷⁹ Due to this, etiquette has to be ignored occasionally. This subchapter is all about farting, peeing, and other things viewed to be in bad taste, as sources of humour – without which Ozu would not be Ozu.

In his classic work *History of Shit* (*Histoire de la merde*, 1978), Dominique Laporte has suggested a deep connection between human waste and individualism. Laporte argues that the European states of the sixteenth century attempted to strengthen their power by purifying speech and domesticating waste, which led to a restructuring of the hierarchy of the senses with smell relegated to the bottom.⁵⁸⁰ Cleanliness, order, and beauty being associated with the state, the presence of different forms of human waste was tied to the home sphere and the experience of individuality. *Good Morning* presents a similar division, where sanitised public speech is marked as the cornerstone of the realm of the adults, while children rebel against this order through the socially frowned-upon act of farting. Bryony Dixon stresses the difference between the games that the boys play in *I Was Born, But...* and *Good Morning*, writing how in the earlier film:

‘the stronger boy is allowed the power to immobilize the weaker ones with a gesture of the hand leaving them lying flat on the ground, ‘dead’ till released with another gesture. In *Good Morning* the pecking order of the boys is based on a sonic equivalent – the ability to fart at will.’⁵⁸¹

It is a fascinating juxtaposition, which I interpret is meant to further highlight the cultural difference with the strict, militaristic 1930s and the informal, fun-loving late ‘50s as a childhood setting. Instead of giving merit to physical strength, in *Good Morning*’s version the child who gets humiliated is the one who cannot successfully fart, and instead messes up his pants. This is the film’s way to show that in the current society, it is important to know how to be relaxed and have fun. Also, because her son dirties his pants so often, the woman who has bought a washing machine gets to use it daily, further relaying how the consumerist development of society does not have solid reasoning at its core, nor a practical purpose, but it is very funny.

The farting game that the boys play throughout the film serves as a mark of a carefree time to be a child. The fact that we also see an older gentleman happily

⁵⁷⁸ Richie 1974, 36.

⁵⁷⁹ Richie 1974, 36.

⁵⁸⁰ Laporte (1978) 2002, 96.

⁵⁸¹ Dixon 2010, 2.

farting in his apartment further indicates that farting is not one of the nasty Americanisms taking over Japan, but instead one of life's small, universal pleasures, and now Japan is historically at a place where everyone can freely let out air. Indeed, it is not just Ozu who loves farts, as farting has been a classic element of Japanese art and literature for centuries.⁵⁸² During the Edo period (1600–1868) there was a popular fart artist in the Japanese capital, who entertained his audience 'by farting to the tune of theatre songs and the beat of clapping hands as well as by imitating cocks crowing and fireworks cracking'.⁵⁸³ Even then it was considered shameful and against Confucian morals⁵⁸⁴, which is also what made it funny. According to author and polymath Hiraga Gennai (1728–1779), who witnessed such a performance and immortalised it into a famous essay (1774), the value was in the individuality expressed by 'the fartist'.⁵⁸⁵ Farting criticised the Japanese tradition and authority, which is what makes *Good Morning* so interesting: the fart game makes fun of national culture but is also a continuation of Japanese (anti)cultural self-expression.

In *Good Morning*, farts are part of the children's language.⁵⁸⁶ Richie, among others, has viewed farting to be a comment on the meaningless phrases – like the titular 'Good morning' – that adults utter in their everyday life:

'One reason the boys are so taken with breaking wind, then, is that a fart is a spontaneous utterance pleasantly devoid of just that kind of predictable meaninglessness found in the everyday phrases they have decided to dislike. Specifically, they call such phrases unnecessary.'⁵⁸⁷

Humorously, the film presents the sad world of the adults with the notion, 'why even grow up?', and the meaningless pleasantries of conversation pose a similar question about the necessity of talking. The film that so charmingly embraces the children's point of view, not only presents farting as the children's way to communicate, but also talking as the adults' way of exchanging farts. Two centuries earlier, Hiraga admired professional farting because it is a craft that one has to master without outside influence: nobody will teach it to you.⁵⁸⁸ Ozu uses farting and speaking to

⁵⁸² Bordwell 1988, 350.

⁵⁸³ Jones & Watanabe 2013, 391.

⁵⁸⁴ Jones & Watanabe 2013, 391–2.

⁵⁸⁵ Hiraga 2013 (1774), 398. Hiraga's masterful essay *On Farting* (1774) should be published alongside every subsequent DVD release of *Good Morning*, as they are works that complement each other to an astonishing extent.

⁵⁸⁶ Bordwell 1988, 351.

⁵⁸⁷ Richie 1974, 37.

⁵⁸⁸ Hiraga (1774) 2013, 398.

form the contrast between natural habits and cultural customs – and as the film chooses children for protagonists, it is then allowed to let farting win the day.

In the same spirit, Laporte has also viewed polite speech and natural bodily functions as the two opposites, but also pointed out the presence of both in human life:

‘If language is beautiful, it must be because a master bathes it – a master who cleans shit holes, sweeps offal, and expurgates city and speech to confer upon them order and beauty.’⁵⁸⁹

Ozu is definitely seeking order and beauty but finds the greatest beauty in natural behaviour that is juxtaposed with manufactured social order. Bordwell sees these endearing elements carry an important function for Ozu’s films, by ‘shaking the geometrical expectations of narrative structure’.⁵⁹⁰ After all, the dramatic tension of a scene cannot be maintained if a character rushes towards the toilet to take a leak. As always, balance is very important, and Ozu seems to have had the proper understanding of the extent these activities should have in his films. He never goes overboard with the farting, but instead leaves his audience wanting just a little more, just as it should be. A biographical reason for the heavy presence of farts in *Good Morning* was offered by Ozu himself. He had recently won the acclaimed Academy of Fine Arts Prize, and wanted to let his audience know that this did not mean he was now committed to making only serious films.⁵⁹¹ The fact that they enrich and enlighten the world of Ozu’s films does not mean farts are a forced integration into this realm. On the contrary, they are a central way to present one of its core theses. According to Hiraga:

‘To consider this phenomenon with all due attention, we may first observe that within the microcosm of the individual human body, farts correspond to the thunder of the macrocosm. Being like thunder, the sound of yin and yang in contention, sometimes farts explode, sometimes they silently escape—this is their nature.’⁵⁹²

Farting thus can be seen as a manifestation of *mono no aware*, even though a more comical variant than what we are usually served.

⁵⁸⁹ Laporte (1978) 2002, 7.

⁵⁹⁰ Bordwell 1988, 154.

⁵⁹¹ Richie 1974, 244.

⁵⁹² Hiraga (1774) 2013, 393.

Much like farting, peeing is an important element of the Ozu blend, though the connotations that the two acts carry are shown to be the opposite. In *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*, young Kohei wets his mattress because he is scared and lacks a parental figure to take care of him. Otane scolds him for this, which does not improve the situation, and the bed-wetting becomes a repeated motif. Edward Fowler views *Record* as Ozu's effort to secretly outwit his American censors, against whom he wanted to voice an angry, even hateful sentiment, a work in which Ozu communicated 'an extraordinary blunt and indeed xenophobic message to his Japanese audience without getting caught by his American one'.⁵⁹³ The biggest piece of evidence for Fowler's case about the hidden xenophobia is also what, I would argue, proves it wrong. After the scolding, Otane makes Kohei dry the *tatami* mattress with a fan, as it is left to hang outside. When the camera shows the mattress, we see that it just so happens to bear a striking resemblance to the American flag (Graphic 6.3).



Graphic 6.3. *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (1947). Stained tatami mattress that just so happens to bear a resemblance to the flag of the occupiers. (Screenshot by the author)

Fowler sees this as proof of Ozu's hostility, but it is nothing of the sort. As we have seen, in Ozu's comedic worldview, the open display of things considered crude is an endearing form of coming together. There is no pretence, no social tensions, and no need to conceal oneself, one's thoughts, or indeed actions. Ozu is not hiding the flag – he leaves it out to hang in all of its stained glory. It is my view that by peeing on the American flag, Ozu is introducing the American occupiers to *his* Japan. The fact that the scene remains in the film after being examined by the SCAP censors can have only two possible reasons. The first is that the censors were somehow distracted

⁵⁹³ Fowler 2000, 278.

during this particular scene or did not catch the resemblance of the mattress to the American flag. The second is that they understood the sentiment to be a comedic one and allowed it to stay.⁵⁹⁴

At first, *Record* views the act of urinating as repulsive, but gradually finds it to be understandable, even sweet. After Kohei has run off in the face of Otane's wrath, Otane confesses to a friend that come to think of it, she used to wet her bed at that age too. This childhood habit is not the only thing that Otane and Kohei have in common, as the film also discovers a clever use of lice. Kohei is shown wriggling almost constantly, because his situation has not made it possible to take care of things like personal hygiene. Lice, like urination, first makes him more off-putting to the other characters, who do not want him into their homes. However, when Otane expresses regret for being too harsh on him, she starts to wriggle herself. Ozu thus shows his audience that the young boy has found his way into the woman's heart, by revealing that this new family shares what little they have: that being their bugs.

Though waste-related bodily functions are socially judged, Ozu continuously finds new ways to cherish them within the post-war works. Laporte points out that:

‘To this very day, civilization’s ambivalence towards shit continues to be marked, on the one hand, by a will to wash those places where garbage collects (i.e., in city and speech) and, on the other, by a belief in the purifying value of waste – so long as it is human.’⁵⁹⁵

Ozu's films give great value to people's ability for self-restraint and his characters are shown to practise restraint on most occasions. Yet it is only after they casually let go of the etiquette that we get the full picture of them as individuals. There are several ways to accomplish this. Mariko of *The Munekata Sisters* protests against the cultural norms by constantly sticking out her tongue as an act of rebellion. However, usually Ozu's etiquette breaches are not reserved for any one character, nor are they as conscious of an effort as Mariko's quirky behaviour, but instead occur quite naturally through the mundane character interactions. *Equinox Flower* features a discussion about urine turning blue. Erectile disfunctions are a running gag in *An Autumn Afternoon* that everybody seems to find hilarious. In *Late Autumn*, after Hirayama is informed that he might actually get to marry the beautiful Akiko, the gentleman suddenly has to rush to find a toilet. *The End of Summer* shows a family waiting whether the patriarch will die or not, only to have him walk into the room to

⁵⁹⁴ It should also be noted that both the *tatami* mattress and the holding fan are Japanese objects. Therefore, if we read it as a straightforward metaphor, it seems to relay that Japan has to dry up the mess they themselves made ‘during the night’.

⁵⁹⁵ Laporte (1978) 2002, 37.

announce that he slept well and will now have to take a leak. In *Tokyo Story*, Shige unashamedly remarks upon her mother's fatness to her face. *Good Morning* closes with the pants drying on the line (**Graphic 6.4**).⁵⁹⁶



Graphic 6.4. *Good Morning* (1959). The final shot of the film brings together the plot threads of farting and washing machines and uses pants as a flag symbolising childhood. The perfection of the shot is crowned by the simultaneous presence of electricity poles that television sets require to operate. (Screenshot by the author)

Even without the resemblance to a flag that *Record*'s mattress has, the pants perform the function of a flag: they celebrate the straight-forward world of the children and the child-like, before the intruding effect of the etiquette shapes their behaviour. According to Richie, 'Ozu's world is one of supreme loveliness, of art, of aesthetics, but its major beauty is the natural beauty of human nature.'⁵⁹⁷ In the end, the answer to the question 'why all the farting?' can simply be: why not?

⁵⁹⁶ While it gets special attention in *Record* and *Good Morning*, hanging laundry had been a frequent visual motif of Ozu's since the early '30s. Geist 2022, 44-45.

⁵⁹⁷ Richie 1974, 36.

6.4 Childless couples

From the cases inspected in the previous subchapters, we can determine that Ozu gives great importance to children in his films, as children indicate the future of the world, remind adults about the natural core of humanity, and liven up the family units depicted in the post-war works. As reproduction is one of the most important traditional meanings associated with marriage, the presence of children often marks a functional marriage in cultural products. In many Japanese films, childlessness is used as a marker of a dysfunctional, unhappy alliances between man and wife. This is visible in several Naruse films, but since Naruse overall sports a more pessimistic attitude about marriage, it does not seem that he is purposefully casting blame on couples without children. Ozu, on the other hand, with his emphasis on the family system, would seem to present a more one-sided argument. In his films, couples without offspring are shown near-continuously to have bad, failing marriages where neither party lives life to the fullest. The missing element of children is shown as a factor that separates them from other, succeeding couples – as well as their partner. Childlessness is never handled as a central theme, but it is heavily present in the subtext of many Ozu films.

Childlessness can be both voluntary and involuntary. Ozu's films either depict involuntary childlessness or people who have not yet understood that they want children. There has historically been a stigma for women who choose to remain childfree, as this broke the *ie* tradition of a continuing family line: infertility was also grounds for divorce in the Tokugawa period.⁵⁹⁸ During the Meiji period and the creation of the salaryman culture, the binary division between sexes – where the woman was supposed to stay home and have children – grew, and during the early twentieth century, the country's industrial capitalism further standardised people's life courses.⁵⁹⁹ It is notable, how none of Ozu's films that deal with marital childlessness seem to blame the wife. If anything, these films criticise the husbands for being emotionally or physically absent, too child-like, or lacking skills for intimate conversations. During the post-war years, the government no longer enforced the *ie*, but it was still a standard for Japanese families to have at least two children.⁶⁰⁰ As has been discussed, *Early Summer* and *Good Morning* feature the two-child norm, but if childlessness is not an issue for a family unit, Ozu is always sure to find some other problems.

The Munekata Sisters and *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* present childlessness in the marital sense, by the lead characters being married without

⁵⁹⁸ Tanaka & Lowry 2018, 338–9. In the Tokugawa period, the stigma as well as the concept of *ie* applied to the upper classes instead of the whole nation.

⁵⁹⁹ Tanaka & Lowry 2018, 342, 344.

⁶⁰⁰ Tanaka & Lowry 2018, 345.

children. These kinds of cases are not the only mode of childlessness presented in Ozu films. *Early Spring* is about a couple whose child has died. *Record* is about an aging woman without children, whose voluntary childlessness turns involuntary, causing her to adopt. *Floating Weeds* features a man who has a biological son, but who cannot be a part of the son's life. If Ozu's films seem to portray childless couples as unhappy, it is interesting to keep in mind that many of his more positive depictions of parenthood involve widowed parents. Therefore, it is evident that a sense of absence is a key factor in any Ozu family.

Though it is not highlighted as such, childlessness is one of the most societal themes in the Ozu filmography, at least to the modern audience. After the war, Japan experienced a baby boom from 1947 to 1949, with 1949 being the post-war year that saw most children being born. Yet in recent decades, Japan has faced declining birth rates, with record lows in 2019.⁶⁰¹ Japan's child population has been in steady decline since 1982.⁶⁰² Women receive more pressure to have children than men do, and the older generation still uses rhetoric like 'Are you married?' and 'Do you have a child?' when encountering young women, without even that small subtlety that Ozu possesses when approaching the subject.⁶⁰³ One reason for this development that has been speculated is the dissolvment of the traditional family system. In *An Autumn Afternoon*, Koichi confesses that he and Akiko are using birth control, because they are not yet ready to have children. As this element parallels Michiko's thoughts about marriage, it is but logical that the father begins to rush Koichi, once the sister's marriage thread has been successfully put in motion. Comparisons being the guideline through which characters analyse their own situation, Koichi is told by his father that he himself became a parent at age twenty-six, much younger than Koichi is when the film is taking place.

The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice builds the marital crisis in a careful, subtle manner. Neither party is portrayed as particularly unhappy, both Mokichi and Taeko are even shown to have fun in their everyday life. Yet they are nearly constantly in the presence of others. The emotional distance between them gradually becomes obvious as it is displayed to us in the form of physical distance. Though childlessness is not portrayed as the reason for their troubles, both characters are shown to have substitute children in their introductory scenes. For Taeko, it is her young niece

⁶⁰¹ 'Japan's birth rate hits another record low in 2019', CNN 30.12.2019. In 2019, the estimated number of babies being born fell to 864 000, which means a severe decline in population for a country of Japan's size. Compiling of data about the birth rates began in 1899.

⁶⁰² 'Japan's child population falls 39th straight year', *The Japan Times* 4.5.2020. Compiling of comparable data began in 1950, with 1954 being the peak year with 29,89 million Japanese children.

⁶⁰³ Tanaka & Lowry 2018, 346.

Setsuko, with whom she spends a lot of time. In the bar scene that introduces Mokichi, he is shown to undertake a fatherly role with the student Okada. The caring that the older characters display, discreetly leads the audience to wonder what these characters would themselves do differently, if they got to rethink the life choices. It also establishes that while they are not parents, they are very capable and willing to ‘parent’ someone, if given the chance. However, during the scenes that take place in their home, Ozu seems to imply that a house without children is not a home, and both characters are clearly trying to find reasons to be elsewhere. Taeko and Mokichi also have a maid – the right age to be their daughter – through whom many of their conversations transpire.

In *Early Spring*, we do not get to know how Sugiyama’s child died, except that it was a sickness.⁶⁰⁴ The film does not clearly signal that the loss of their son would have been the cause for the couple drifting apart, since the child is only first mentioned halfway through the film. In this scene, the wife mentions that the death anniversary is coming, and they should visit his grave. Only much later, when Shôji’s friend Taizô (Takahashi Teiji) is about to become a father, does the protagonist discuss this family history. Taizô is worried that having a child will cause a man with his pay level to go broke. On multiple occasions, the film discusses how difficult it is to raise children with a salaryman’s paycheque. Another character in the film, Kawai, notes that babies tend to arrive faster than pay rises. Shôji reassures Taizô that eventually they will find a way to make ends meet. In this discussion, the film relays that the emotional gain from having children always weighs more than the level of financial discomfort caused by them. The protagonist also expresses regret that they have not been able to have another child. Thus, the two major issues in his life coincide. He is stuck in a dead-end job, where even the best possible future is a dull and dreary one, and the future of his family life is likewise bleak, since he cannot produce this future in the form of children.

6.5 Not related by blood

To fully understand the relationship between families with children and childless families, we should also inspect the grey area between, the cases in Ozu’s films where family connection is shown forming from elements other than blood relation. As a Confucian society, Japan has traditionally placed great value at the continuing family line being composed of biological children.⁶⁰⁵ Before World War II, the masculine line of continuity was viewed especially important and the extended

⁶⁰⁴ There is also a mention of some other kid getting hit by a truck.

⁶⁰⁵ Yonemoto 2019, 48–49.

family unit was governed by this patriarchal structure.⁶⁰⁶ The fact that so many Ozu fathers (especially those of the Ryû variety) have daughters as opposed to sons may be an intended criticism of the old-fashioned value given to masculinity, or an added touch of melancholia: everybody knows that the line of the father will end with his death. Kristin Thompson views it as a triumph for Ozu's more progressive side, as the father in *Late Spring* clearly is not driven by the idea of Noriko having to get married in order to 'have children to perpetuate the *ie*'.⁶⁰⁷ I conclude this chapter by inspecting the notion of families that are formed without the members being related through blood. Even though a small minority within the whole of Ozu characters, the presence of these kinds of families positions an argument about what constitutes a family. They present a counterargument for the unhappy traditional families of other films and explore a new side to Ozu's humanism.

In his reading of *Paris, Texas* (1984), fittingly a film directed by Ozu-fan Wim Wenders, Mas'ud Zavarzadeh analyses the effect of presupposing families to consist of people related to each other by blood. According to him, the film repeats the cultural obviousness of families being 'the most important aspect of life' and that a 'true and genuine family is based on a blood tie'.⁶⁰⁸ Zavarzadeh sees this as one of the most important functions of ideology, since by naturalising the biological family unit, by presenting the existing social relations as normal, films can mask the fact that family structures are developed under certain historical arrangements. Thus, the depiction of 'reality' conceals the fact that these concepts are culturally made and not spontaneously born. Applying this argument to Ozu's family depictions, we can see that Ozu's films also presuppose families to be biologically related. This is rarely stressed in the films, which again implies that the filmmakers assumed their audiences would presuppose biological relations among the characters who are presented as a family. Ozu's films attempt to repeat the family norms that exist in the society they depict, and in so doing, strengthen these notions, by portraying them as naturally occurring. The families have – almost always – close friends who are presented almost as family members, making the connections between people looser: the three merry gentlemen from *Late Autumn* are friends of the long-dead father character, but to all intents and purposes, they serve the role of uncles for Ayako. The Ryû character of the film is an actual uncle from the countryside but present in only two brief scenes. However, the film does comedically clarify that all three uncles who are busy matchmaking Ayako do have children of their own, to whom they could also be investing this

⁶⁰⁶ Thompson 1988, 319.

⁶⁰⁷ Thompson 1988, 321.

⁶⁰⁸ Zavarzadeh 1991, 112.

time. Therefore, even a film with a broadly communal sense to it, can attribute to the argument for biological blood lines.

There are, however, a few exceptions to the norm: family depictions that challenge the naturalized notion of automatically biological family units. *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* and *Tokyo Story* both argue that biological kinship is not the glue that ties people together as a ‘family’. Instead, families are presented as forming through empathy as a form of determined agency. Ozu did this most famously in *Tokyo Story*, where the biological children do not have time for their aging parents, but Noriko, a relative merely through marriage, goes out of her way to *make* time. She is more of a daughter to them than the actual children because actions are shown to outweigh biological kinship. In *Record*, upon understanding the emotional fulfilment made possible by having a child, Otane decides to adopt the young boy. Thus, people decide to form a family not because they are related, or because the law obliges one to take care of the other, but because motivated by the emotional gain they start treating each other as family.

Record then positions the question of whether this can be a family. The arrival of the biological father to take the boy away brings the maternal daydream to a quick end. Is Ozu then presenting that although we may fantasise about family institutions with a little more leeway for individual implementation, the high value of biological kinship in the end overrides the alternatives that are based on emotional compatibility? I would argue that the answer is yes and no. The key element of the film’s narrative is that Otane assumes that Kohei has been abandoned by a no-good father. Due to this, the notion of Otane and Kohei forming a new family comes to be under circumstances, in which the existence of this family unit is not only practical, but possible. Adoptions in Japan have historically, at least among the more privileged classes, been conducted for the sake of continuing the family line, but *Record* gives up all such ideology to concentrate on the Western adoption model, which highlights emotional attachment.⁶⁰⁹ In the end, when Otane finds out that Kohei’s father is a good man after all, she comes to realise that the substitute she was going to offer is not needed after all. Although the film’s physical narrative portrays Kohei being a guest in Otane’s house, Otane is amusingly a visitor in Kohei’s family. Through the time that they have spent together, Otane comes to understand the joy of being in a family, though this particular one was not hers. The worldview of this woman expands to welcome the notions of a child and a family. This makes her decide to adopt. The parental moral of the film’s ending is fascinating. Whereas an

⁶⁰⁹ Tanaka & Lowry 2018, 340. However, among the lower classes there has historically been a greater ‘variety in family structures and dynamics’. I view the overall communality of *Record* to have a timeless sense to it, which Ozu uses to comment upon the current historical situation, the future and the past.

American film with this storyline would have most likely ended with (the single) Otane marrying (the likewise single) father of Kohei, the Ozu film does not even consider the option of adding a moment of consideration about ‘who gets the kid’. Instead, it shows all three characters in agreement that the boy is to be raised by his biological father, as that is the primary parental option in society. Yet, by having shown that another option would have been available, had Kohei’s father really abandoned him, the film argues that it is not blood relation that makes families, but caretaking.

The ending of *Record* makes the progressive move to put aside the notions of bloodline and parental age that define the concept of motherhood. Otane asks her friends whether they think she is too old to get a child by adoption and receives their encouragement. The final shots show a famous statue of samurai Takamori Saigo (1828–1877), who in his political career supported continental expansion into Asia.⁶¹⁰ Bordwell has viewed the usage of the statue in this scene ‘ironic in a postwar context’.⁶¹¹ I argue that Ozu purposefully follows the emotional growth of an individual by highlighting the importance of emotional growth for a nation. Showing children left orphans by Japan’s latest expansionist war hanging around the Takamori statue (**Graphic 6.5**) could be seen as a piece of dark humour, if it were not for the tone of the ending, which makes the audience view it as an anti-war statement. Joan Mellen has called it ‘the most politically meaningful image in the entire Ozu canon’.⁶¹² One could argue that the ending is unusually didactic for Ozu, as the film seems to voice a request: adopt if you have the financial means to do so.⁶¹³ For Otane, adopting a child is a way to rise above the passive cynicism, the emotional poverty that defined her existence when the film began: children being the future of society, she is now taking an active role in shaping that future. An unmarried middle-aged woman adopting a child may not be a traditionally Japanese solution, but instead one made with the hope of discovering personal happiness. This makes it a fine sentiment to kick off Ozu’s post-war filmography.

⁶¹⁰ Mellen 1976, 217.

⁶¹¹ Bordwell 1988, 301.

⁶¹² Mellen 1976, 217.

⁶¹³ Geist (2022, 123) notes, that in the context of the times this ending, even if it is simplistic, formulaic, or overtly didactic, was also a radical call for Japanese people to reach out and help those in need.



Graphic 6.5. *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (1947). War orphans near the Takamori statue. (Screenshot by the author.)

Cinema has been viewed as an invaluable, potentially overwhelming resource through which we can reflect the different cultural histories of childhood in the twentieth century.⁶¹⁴ Ozu's post-war filmography addresses the subject historically in two different time periods and uses child characters comparatively with the adults, who usually occupy the narrative central stage. In the immediate post-war, Ozu expresses serious concern about children's well-being in a time when adults prove to be disappointing in their cynical mentality and poor choices. After things settle down, Ozu still finds a lot to worry about in the newly established consumerist welfare state, but this time his concern takes a comedic form, and children also become the targets of his criticism, symbols of the society's direction. The films find melancholia in families without children, but also suggest ways to combat loneliness through alternative family relationships. They draw humour out of older characters' complaints about how the later generations have turned out, but one of the core theses also establishes that childhood now is not that different from what it used to be, and the small joys that come with being a child are worth celebrating. Despite the occasional moment of frustration, children in Ozu's films only really become a nuisance once they grow up, as the following chapters will show.

⁶¹⁴ Lebeau 2008, 12.

7 Material homes and physical relationships

We have now inspected the gender-specific role expectations and expected lifepaths for both men and women, as well as the light in which childhood gets framed within the post-war works, but Ozu's depiction of the home space and marital relations still warrants further attention. This chapter focuses on physical and material aspects of home and marriage, in order to gain full understanding about Ozu's depiction of the Japanese home and the family dynamics that govern this space. My goal is to show how Ozu presents the home space and its residents as narratively completing each other: how the living conditions, characterised by their sense of a shared, comparative middle-classism, affect the way the characters behave in their everyday life. I begin by mapping out how the physical home environment evolves from one film to another, as the post-war society prospers, and how the films invent new ways to use the general elements, such as the size of the family and their home, to slip in details about their life without the need of dialogue. I then look at different performative patterns that contribute meanings to depictions of domestic affairs, such as divisions in clothing, physical intimacy and marital brutality. Through these subjects, I strive to capture how Ozu shows his fictional average citizens existing both during the calmness of everyday life and periods of crisis. By focusing on the physical relationships and domestic materialism, I direct attention to the possibilities and limitations that characterise Ozu's middle-class family roles, highlighting the narrative richness within the dynamics of the mundane.

7.1 Living arrangements and consumer preferences of the middle-class

This subchapter looks at the Japanese home as a material, middle-class space that affects both the communality and the sense of individuality witnessed with Ozu's characters, allowing the director to weave together individual families to form a larger document about the historical evolution of everyday culture. A central element of Ozu's depiction of family roles and the home environment is their shared middle-classism. In Japan, it is very common to think of oneself as middle-class. Polls

conducted in the 1970s and '80s reported that an estimated eighty to ninety per cent of the Japanese people viewed themselves so.⁶¹⁵ Wada-Marciano Mitsuyo argues that mass media of the 1920s and 1930s gave form to 'the new urban subjects' and cinematic depictions of Japan's modern space defined it as middle-class.⁶¹⁶ Most Ozu characters can indeed be labelled this way, but in the broader sense of the word. As scholars like Woojeong Joo have pointed out, the economic background of the characters varies widely.⁶¹⁷ Alastair Phillips has noted how Ozu's 1932 film *I Was Born, But...* 'is marked by a distinctive sense of social stratification'.⁶¹⁸ For this early work, comparative individualism is used to highlight how social class and wealth form categories and hierarchies between people. The two boys display anger and rebellion towards their parents, because they discover that the world to which they have been born is one where 'rank in hierarchy has been achieved through money and position rather than merit' and see no escape from this circle.⁶¹⁹ It is however more directly concerned with the things that keep people apart, whereas post-war Ozu would, even in his more melancholy works, focus on the elements in common. This subchapter scrutinises the development of the middle-class mentality during the post-war decades through Ozu's display of the physical living conditions, the homes, and the materialist preferences that the characters are shown to have.

The amount of attention given to the home architecture in Ozu's films varies depending on the scholar. Noël Burch has viewed architecture as a key element in any Japanese film, the main function of which is to produce a framework designed to suit a specific mode of image composition.⁶²⁰ Burch also notes the semi-mobility⁶²¹ of the Japanese home space (with sliding doors and folding screens), which fits the purposes of cinema wonderfully, as it turns the Japanese home into a stage that can be modified for the needs of a particular scene. Woojeong Joo has looked at the effect these spaces have upon the depiction of modernity. He highlights the cheerful movement of Noriko around the house in *Late Spring* as a marker of both the articulation of femininity in the film, as well as the differentiation between

⁶¹⁵ Eccleston 1989, 4. Yet the class identity is related more to middling incomes than a set of values associated with a social class. Already in a 1958 opinion survey, seventy-two per cent of Japanese people found themselves to belong to the middle stratum of Japanese society. Igarashi 2021, 45.

⁶¹⁶ Wada-Marciano 2008, 19. She also notes (2008, 56) that while Ozu's early dramas have been viewed as the emergence of the middle-class genre, it actually began earlier, in the films of Shimazu Yasujiro.

⁶¹⁷ Joo 2017, 36.

⁶¹⁸ Phillips 2007, 28.

⁶¹⁹ Mellen 1976, 316.

⁶²⁰ Burch 1978, 201.

⁶²¹ Burch 1978, 198.

the post-war film, and the wartime predecessors.⁶²² While not necessarily disagreeing with these methods, I look at the historical development of post-war living quarters from a perspective focused on the narrative employment of these spaces, as well as their relation to the families that inhabit them. Though the display of living quarters in Ozu's post-war films can serve many functions, the emotional function that these depictions contribute grows to be the dominant one. By allowing his audience into these spaces, Ozu creates a comparative network of middle-class homes that evolve throughout the post-war decades and form the narrative stage in which mundane stories get played out and inspected by the audience. Many Ozu films start with a shot of the characters' living quarters. They are usually accompanied by other similar houses, to show that these characters are average people living among a nation of similar characters. Often the first shot also includes a larger structure near the houses to portray the characters as small or common. Sometimes it is an in-joke that has to do with the movie's plotline: *Early Spring* later reveals that the huge metal structure is an alcohol commercial, and *Good Morning* features an electricity pole, something that television sets require.

By inspecting Ozu's post-war filmography in its entirety, one can gather the extent to which the middle-class home space developed during these decades, the historicity of homes. The two films Ozu made in the immediate post-war show people more crammed in together and making do with what they have. Due to the air raids, eight million people had been left homeless, and in 1948, one in four families still lacked regular dwellings.⁶²³ Tashiro (Ryû Chishû) and Tamekichi (Kawamura Reikichi) in *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*, the first two characters we meet in a post-war Ozu film, live together in a small tenement house without no apparent relation. Sharing houses was very common due to the large-scale housing crisis.⁶²⁴ As works of the immediate post-war, *Record* and *Hen* share visual likeness and even stylistic resemblance with some of the famous works from Italian neorealism, which flourished at the time. Italian neorealism did resonate strongly with Japanese audiences, most likely because they could relate to both the poverty of the characters as well as the mentality of a defeated nation. However, the similarities between Ozu and the neorealists are a coincidence. According to Hirano Kyoko, the first such Italian film to be shown in Japan, Roberto Rossellini's *Paisan* (1946), was released only in September 1949⁶²⁵, by which time Ozu had moved to

⁶²² Joo 2017, 158-159.

⁶²³ Hane 2001, 364.

⁶²⁴ Waswo 2002, 1-2, 45.

⁶²⁵ Hirano 1992, 245.

the petit-bourgeois wealth of *Late Spring*.⁶²⁶ Furthermore, the subsequent reviewers have also made the neorealist comparison to some of Ozu's pre-war works like *An Inn in Tokyo*, based on the visual landscape.⁶²⁷ Even so, Ozu's first two post-war films can easily be inspected alongside other international depictions of poverty that were made in the aftermath of a horrible war, comparatively contributing to the documentation of a world-wide devastation and loss.

By the 1950s, Ozu films show that conditions have stabilised, but some of the problems persist. Even if things are shown as getting back to 'normal' relatively fast, the concept of normal is then put under scrutiny. Though Masako and Shoji in *Early Spring* live in a larger, two-storey house, even this accommodation lacks real privacy, as their next-door neighbour (Sugimura Haruko) is not just constantly at a hearing distance, but also has a direct view of their living room. In the film's communal reality, the watchful eyes of others stress the uncomfortable crisis depicted. Studies have shown that company housing can cause great stress to housewives, and living in close contact with the wives of the husband's colleagues relays the idea of home as a workplace for the woman, affecting her social behaviour.⁶²⁸ An opposite purpose for implementing this kind of a setting is found in *Good Morning's* wealthy suburbia, where the proximity to other people is shown to cause both harmonious everyday co-existence, as well as a consumerist competition in wealth and commodities. *Early Spring* sees the community supervising the individuals, who have to feel shame if they do not meet the standards upheld by the larger communal entity. In *Good Morning*, there is a temptation to see the community as a challenge that needs to be answered and a pace that needs to be kept up: if a neighbour has a washing machine or a television set, and another neighbour does not possess these things, the lack of space between the living quarters highlights the financial difference between the two households. The push of consumerism in the middle of the private sphere is underlined by having the main cause of strife in the film be a television set, the most American of objects.

While studying Japanese consumerism, Igarashi Yoshikuni has suggested that 'the concept of self-reflectivity is the key to understanding the complex relations between individuals and a society dominated by consumption'.⁶²⁹ Then again, from the very beginning, Ozu's films have allowed their characters to desire mundane,

⁶²⁶ Of course, the Italian filmmakers may have had similar influences as Ozu did. *Record*, for instance, is clearly inspired by *The Kid* (1921), by Charles Chaplin.

⁶²⁷ Bordwell 1988, 262.

⁶²⁸ Imamura 1987, 4.

⁶²⁹ Igarashi 2021, 3. However, according to Igarashi, even critical awareness is not enough, as it can be hard to imagine an identity other than that of consumer in a consumerist society.

trivial, luxurious or superfluous items, and presenting this as a Western trait that the Japanese should learn to cherish. In *A Hen in the Wind*, Tokiko remembers fondly the carefree pre-war days, when all she wanted out of life was to marry a police officer, and to have a house with a garden, a dog and a Max Factor compact. The interwar period, during which Tokiko grew to adulthood, was marked by accelerated urbanisation, the growth of modern consumerism, changing fashions and new, dynamic forms of womanhood characterised by these developments.⁶³⁰ In Tokiko's case the wish list she confesses having dreamt up reveals both a wish of middle-classism and a display of individuality through consumer choices: a certain kind of house, a certain kind of make-up, a certain kind of pet, and so on. Consumerist behaviour can often be guided by little joys and vanities instead of efficiency and practicality.⁶³¹ As a mother raising her child temporarily alone, Tokiko remembers fondly the time when she did not have economic worries and allowed herself to dream of a future where she was allowed these non-necessary things. This aligns itself with Ozu's societal criticism: the Japanese experience very Americanised dreams that are suffocated in the likewise Americanised occupation. I view Tokiko's confessed nostalgia for her dreams of youth as a sincere, tender and endearing moment, but a cynical reading could point otherwise. After the fateful night, Tokiko expresses regrets and notes that instead of selling herself, she should have sold all of her material possessions. One could make the argument that a reason for her terrible fate was that she had been corrupted by Western ideology to prize material possessions above herself. Then again, Tokiko explains that the reason she did not sell the furniture and possessions was that she was afraid how her husband would react upon returning. Thus, the fault can also be found in the patriarchal Japanese culture.

The 1962's *An Autumn Afternoon* is a rare Ozu film that depicts a young married couple, Koichi (Sada Keiji) and Akiko (Okada Mariko). They live in a small city apartment and Akiko is trying to conduct the traditional role of a wife. However, they are also shown clearly to be both modern and equal, as Akiko voices her opinions in a straightforward manner, and we even get to see Koichi wear an apron in the kitchen. From the beginning, we can see that they are having some bumps in their union. One indicator of this is that they do not have a child yet. We also get to see a financial argument, when Koichi borrows money from his father to buy a fridge but uses it instead on a set of golf clubs. The introduction of the golf clubs – which come in a wrapping to make Akiko assume she is getting flowers – is a further marker

⁶³⁰ Sato 2003, 1. Wada-Marciano 2008, 87.

⁶³¹ Pantzhar 2000, 18.

of middle-class Japanese families becoming like their American counterparts.⁶³² The possession of material things is shown to be a crucial factor in the happiness of the younger generation, and although the film creates comedy from this, it also extends sympathy to the characters, who occasionally want to indulge and buy something for themselves.

Some Ozu films stress the availability and the price of common goods as an indicator of the society's increased wealth; most notable are *Good Morning* with its television sets and *An Autumn Afternoon* with the golf clubs. *Early Summer* features extensive discussion about the high price of cake, but characters still end up getting cake. Ozu believed that luxury in the form of food, which fed the soul, was a separate thing from frivolous spending and sometimes to be encouraged.⁶³³ His characters inherit these views: it is often the little things in life that are viewed as the important meter for the quality of life, even if this is done with a satirical edge that also points to the consumerisation of society. *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* is more directly concerned with the absence and the lack of the basic goods, like common food ingredients, and views luxury products through a nostalgic lens: something un-essential in the present moment, but nevertheless the subject of warm memories. *A Hen in the Wind* voices similar opinions with Tokiko discussing her younger self's view of materialistic happiness as beautiful, if slightly naïve vision. *Early Summer* also features a discussion between two women about their highly Americanised dreams of youth, including a house with a fridge full of Coca-Cola. Despite the humorous grandeur of this old plan, the film frames their talk in a melancholy manner, as Noriko leaving Tokyo for Akita means she will have to walk away from the modern/consumerist lifestyle that she has already had the chance to enjoy.

As career advancement is tied to age, the economic differences in late Ozu films often are as well. *Equinox Flower* paints the gap with whisky. Mr. Kondo (Takahashi Teiji), an underling of the protagonist Hirayama, is able to drink quality whisky when his boss is buying but confesses that the cheaper brand tastes better because he can pay for it himself. The couple in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* have a maid called Fumi (Kosono Yôko), who is treated kindly. Her function for the narrative is to highlight the emotional distance between the husband and wife. Instead of talking to each other, they are often shown to communicate the everyday things using the

⁶³² Marilyn Ivy (1993, 249) notes that television, tackled by Ozu in *Good Morning*, enhanced the comparative way the Japanese viewed American middle-class lives in relation to their own, with shows like *I Love Lucy* (1951–1957) and *Father Knows Best* (1954–1960) becoming popular with Japanese audiences and introducing them to consumer luxuries and electric appliances.

⁶³³ Kometani 2021, 29.

young girl as a messenger. Perhaps the large house would also feel unbearably empty without at least somebody who is constantly there, as the couple tends to avoid each other's company. As the film progresses and the crisis between Taeko and Mokichi grows more severe, the way they call out to the maid starts to sound more worried, even panicky: they want to know that there is still someone there, and Fumi serves as a substitute in this sense. After all, they are much too proud to call out for each other. In the end, when the couple reconciles, they start to prepare food together. Bordwell sees that the way in which the couple is completely lost in the kitchen of their own home shows how the bourgeoisie have become alienated from the basics of everyday life.⁶³⁴ This might be true but more importantly, without the maid's assistance, the couple has to learn co-operation. Therefore, the narrative reason for the film giving this family a maid has more to do with the emotionally divided state of the couple as opposed to their financial status.

Even if we agree to view all these characters of various income to be part of an imaginary middle-class, their communality is shown to be different. Joo has observed that films like *Early Spring* and *Good Morning* manage to keep the neighbourhood communality of Ozu's prewar *Kihachi*-films, while depictions of wealthier families such as *Equinox Flower* and *Late Autumn* 'completely elide the concept of regional communality'.⁶³⁵ I view that these films present a shift in communality, but not a disappearance of it. While characters no longer live within seeing distance of their neighbours, the previously regional or class-based communal identity has made way for networks of family, friends, and acquaintances, that are no less tight. People of wealthier status are no longer crammed in together, like the families of *Good Morning*. This elevates the agency in their social behaviour, by making things voluntary.⁶³⁶ The characters are no longer part of social units automatically due to them living closely. Instead, they socialise because they *want* to keep these people in their lives. As time goes by, Ozu is in a way becoming pickier about the company his characters keep. This communality is not based on regionality or chance, but the willingness to keep contact even when faced with physical distance. The narratives of films like *Late Autumn* and especially *Equinox Flower* would seem very slow-moving indeed, were it not for a strong communal sense between the large cast of characters. Ozu's filmography includes a wide collection of characters from different walks of life, who nevertheless view themselves to be

⁶³⁴ Bordwell 1988, 323.

⁶³⁵ Joo 2017, 72.

⁶³⁶ Anne E. Imamura (1987, 6) writes that communities have members, and they normally have boundaries, but these boundaries are not necessarily geographical – as is the case with Ozu's looser networks. Imamura makes the distinction that for an 'urban dweller' the concept of 'community' can be more complicated, and consist of various interlapping categories, such as civic administration, workplace, family and friends.

part of the same national middle-class. This belonging is established not because of income, which varies, but by their willingness to make up this whole together. The films present all of these characters as individuals but also maintain their comparability. This then allows the films the ability to turn money and wealth into a secondary characteristic for the people portrayed, as the audience is directed to view them similarly.

For Ozu, the material home space is there to serve the story, and while his families vary in size, the extent of these units is always used as a narrative feature. *Late Spring* gets its dramatic effect from the family consisting of only two people, who now must separate. Then again, *Early Summer* shows seven people living under the same roof, which more closely resembles the normal family size that existed before the war. The pre-war household typically included three generations living under the same roof, whereas the Western-style nuclear families started to become more common in the post-war.⁶³⁷ *Early Summer's* opening breakfast sequence does not highlight the matter in dialogue, but it is noticeable that the family members do not all fit around the same breakfast table simultaneously – and must instead take turns (**Graphic 7.1**). This relays, how there is a need for one of them to mature out of this living arrangement, with the unmarried daughter being the only logical choice. The family of *Early Summer* has canaries, and because domesticated birds live inside cages, this is apt material for an overtly metaphorical reading of the opening illustration.⁶³⁸ Then again, the canaries are also not there by accident. The opening sequence sets the mood of the film in an interesting manner by featuring non-diegetic music: a repetitious melody with an arrangement that resembles a music box. We see the large family waking up to a new work/school day, and the lingering background melody gives their morning activities a sense of mechanised repetition: it was like this the day before, and it will most likely be like this the next day. The combination of the caged birds and the music shows the upper-middle-class characters unknowingly trapped in their repetitious everyday routine: as this is one of Ozu's marriage narratives, it also serves to show the audience the calm before the storm, the status quo that will be broken by the end of the film.

⁶³⁷ Iwao 1993, 31. Iwao reports that in 1991, the average size of a family had decreased to 2.95 persons. However, Harald Fuess (2004, 153) notes that despite a popular belief, the number of three-generation households remained the same until the end of the century, even though the number of nuclear families increased.

⁶³⁸ Only a few Ozu families have pets, possibly since animals could not obey the detailed instructions that the director laid out for anyone appearing in front of the camera.



Graphic 7.1. *Early Summer* (1951). The film begins by showing the audience the normal morning routines of this family, and as there are seven of them, they must take turns at the breakfast table. (Screenshot by the author).

Not only is the number of family members a vital element in the comparative individualism, but so is the size of the living quarters occupied by them. The house in which Somiya and Noriko live in *Late Spring* is enormous for just two people and serves as a reminder about the absence of the mother, without the dialogue having to refer to it. However, the cleverest example of Ozu using home architecture to slip in details about the residents can be found in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*. The childless couple of this film likewise have a big house, with much emptiness that stresses how there are no children, even though this is not mentioned through dialogue. Their crisis is discreetly relayed to us in their first scenes. The husband Mokichi arrives home, where the wife Taeko has been waiting for him. The maid informs the wife that the husband has arrived, and Taeko moves through two rooms (and two shots) to meet him in the hallway. After a poor exchange of greetings, the husband leaves the hallway, and the wife follows him through another two rooms (and two shots) to the living room. This slyly establishes a feeling of Mokichi trying to escape the obligation of conversation with Taeko. In the living room, they finally manage to have a talk, and Ozu adds the finishing comedic touch that assures the

audience they were correct in their hunches about all not being well: Taeko tells him a story about the niece Setsuko being sick, which is a lie to get Taeko out of the house, where she does not want to be. She is instantly caught though, due to the unannounced arrival of Setsuko, which then relays also to Mokichi that the wife wants to be somewhere else. After her cover is blown, Taeko comes up with another friend that happens to have appendicitis and thinks she has managed to fool the foolish husband, whether that be the case or not. In this sequence, film editing and home architecture are perfectly combined to tell a story: by the end of it, we have a full understanding of the home space, the people living there, and their feelings about one another – even when the dialogue has only served us lies and evasion.

Even though the material home space witnessed in Ozu's films is marked by its mundanity, it is evident from these examples that the home environment exists in a carefully-thought-out relationship with the characters. It never steals the attention from the family members, but instead leads the audience to inspect them in a certain way. The post-war films show how the society prospers, and the middle-class is similarly constantly depicted as an imagined, evolving entity. The consumerist tastes that colour these Japanese homes correlate with the characters' shared communal experience, as well as helping them build a sense of individuality in contrast to the people they know. The material aspects of this cinematic world help highlight different characters, as well as pointing out the things they share. To further inspect the way the films contribute to the depiction of family roles through material aspects of everyday life that are viewed as normative, I will next call attention to the matter of wardrobe, one of the most fascinating and least-studied aspects of Ozu's films.

7.2 Men in suits, women in kimonos

The previous subchapter displayed the various ways in which an Ozu film engages the audience through the home space. As this study views gender and family roles to be instituted by performative behaviour, the unspoken elements that are not highlighted are often just as important as the most famous of scenes. I would argue that the most inescapable element of this sort is clothing. It might seem a novel suggestion to analyse the wardrobe of Ozu's films, since it is clearly not trying to stand out (or to differ) from the viewer's expectations of how a contemporary Japanese person would dress up in a given situation. Kometani Shinnosuke suggests that consideration for others was the consistent basis for the wardrobe of Ozu's characters, and it is also characterised by a sense of cleanliness.⁶³⁹ It is exactly because of its normality, the self-evident and contextually varying application of

⁶³⁹ Kometani 2021, 27.

wardrobe that makes it important to discuss it. According to Liza Dalby, clothing is the most easily changed and manipulated aspect of selfhood.⁶⁴⁰ A sense of fashion was also a mode of self-expression for Ozu, as the director had a dress code for both when he was making his films, and for going out.⁶⁴¹ Therefore, to understand how cinema represents people, we should not omit, what they are represented as wearing. Ozu's films give us a rich selection of scenes taking place in both home and outside of it, also conveying the different dress codes for different social functions. By analysing how these dress codes are applied, we are allowed a unique perspective into the divisions both between genders and between the traditional and the modern. Thus, the seemingly unnoticeable presence of clothing proves to be one of the core elements in Ozu's presentation of material reality.

The most obvious division maintained through clothing has to do with gender roles. Gender as a social construction is manufactured and maintained through its performance, and therefore clothing must be viewed as an essential element of this process. Different cultures define masculinity and femininity in different ways, and often the styles of clothing are governed by the constructed norms of gender.⁶⁴² In Japan, clothing in the twentieth century became a forum for societal discussion: about the clash between traditional Japanese clothing (*wafuku*) and Western-style clothing (*yōfuku*), as well as equality between the sexes. Before the Meiji period, the Japanese people only wore *wafuku*. In earlier centuries, the Japanese were not even aware that they were wearing ethnic clothing.⁶⁴³ This is noticeable in the way the word *kimono* literally means 'a thing to wear'. When *yōfuku* became widely available in the 1880s, the official work clothes for men were changed to Western-style suits, which led to a large-scale visual reform of societal space. Ozu was born to a society where kimonos, in public life, had become women's wear. In the first half of the twentieth century, men used kimonos as relaxing clothes while not working.⁶⁴⁴ These are the main outlines of the dress code that Ozu's everyday depictions obey. Yet, throughout his fifteen post-war films we see slight changes of wardrobe, due to changes in Japan's financial situation as well as changes in fashion itself.

Wafuku became a symbol of Japanese culture and a counterpart for the West in the Meiji period, when the Japanese national mentality discovered its form:

⁶⁴⁰ Dalby 2001, 4.

⁶⁴¹ Kometani 2021, 26–27. 'When he filmed, he wore a white Pique hat, a white dress shirt and a pair of dress pants in charcoal grey.' Then again, 'His suit for going out was a three-piece charcoal grey suit', which, when combined with a soft felt hat, gave him the look of 'a classy British gentleman'.

⁶⁴² Lunceford 2010, 63.

⁶⁴³ Dalby 2001, 10.

⁶⁴⁴ Dalby 2001, 90.

therefore, kimono can be viewed as an invented form of tradition.⁶⁴⁵ Historian Eric Hobsbawn has defined the concept of invented tradition as:

‘a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.’⁶⁴⁶

While *wafuku* and kimono were considered points of national identification, the West was viewed as the significant other, from which other things were adapted, but these things in particular needed to be protected. Is it any wonder then that the wardrobe of characters adds an additional layer to the films of Ozu that express similar concerns about what remains of old Japan after all the new innovations? In the post-war years, while democratic reforms shook up the order in the previously patriarchal family system, clothing served as an indicator of the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity in both home life and public appearances. At home, people were more relaxed, and interestingly, more traditional than when appearing in public. Besides the family roles and the choice of clothing, the decoration of Japanese homes received Westernised features much more slowly than the public spaces.⁶⁴⁷ The contrast is highly visible in Ozu’s films, where characters dress traditionally in the architecturally Japanese home space, and then change into Western attire when venturing to the outside world that has moved away from this tradition. The clothing therefore helps to establish Ozu’s deep connection to the home space.

The choice of clothing for women became linked with democracy, and Western-style dresses became popular immediately when they were available for purchase.⁶⁴⁸ Kimono ties women to a traditional notion of femininity, while men’s Western attire confirms the norms associated with masculinity, such as rational action and achievement: therefore, clothing simultaneously produces a constructed nationality and a constructed gender system.⁶⁴⁹ Anthropologist Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni argues that kimono not only forces women’s bodies into a well-packaged, cylindrical form, but also moulds them into the cultural pattern of ‘good wife, wise mother’.⁶⁵⁰ Classically, there is truth to this, but Ozu also uses clothing to express his character’s

⁶⁴⁵ Hall 2015, 60–61.

⁶⁴⁶ Hobsbawn 2014, 1.

⁶⁴⁷ Okkonen & Okkonen 2010, 23.

⁶⁴⁸ McLelland 2010, 519.

⁶⁴⁹ Goldstein-Gidoni 1999, 351. The writer argues that this distinction is, in modern times, best seen in various ceremonies, as the women wear *yofuku* in their everyday life.

⁶⁵⁰ Goldstein-Gidoni 1999, 352.

search for the comfort that stems from tradition. Goldstein-Gidoni's article likewise sites an interview with an owner of a kimono school, who states that wearing a kimono gives her a feeling that 'non-Japanese cannot understand'.⁶⁵¹ Kimono is in a clash with many of the modern freedoms celebrated by the post-war filmography. It has been noted that one cannot ride a bicycle or drive a car while wearing one.⁶⁵² Not only is it easier to wear a suit than kimono, because there are less rules and variations, but it is also easier and cheaper to buy a suit, than to get the kind of kimono that cultural norms view as the right one.⁶⁵³ Naturally this means that women have to dedicate more time to their appearance, while men can use the time to pursue other things. *Late Spring* makes the distinction by first presenting Noriko bicycling, in Western attire (**Graphic 7.2**), enjoying herself and her mobility, and finally showing her in a traditional wedding dress, in which the lack of mobility results in a much more ambiguous, constrained emotional reaction.



Graphic 7.2. *Late Spring* (1949). Noriko (Hara Setsuko) sports a wardrobe that highlights her youthful freedom and happiness. (Screenshot by the author).

Kristin Thompson sees Noriko's wardrobe in *Late Spring* as a constant indicator of her modernity. According to her, the 'overt Westernization' is emphasised especially

⁶⁵¹ Goldstein-Gidoni 1999, 354.

⁶⁵² Hall 2015, 60.

⁶⁵³ Goldstein-Gidoni 1999, 357. Goldstein-Gidoni points out that as modern women are often unaware of the many traditions, they have to consult experts.

in the tea ceremony sequence, when Noriko arrives wearing (untypically) a kimono, but carrying a purse.⁶⁵⁴

Of course, clothing for the brides in Ozu's marriage narratives warrants special attention. For Robin Wood, Noriko's wedding dress (**Graphic 7.3**) means a death of personality.⁶⁵⁵



Graphic 7.3. *Late Spring* (1949). Noriko's reflection in the mirror, with the mirror contributing the frames to the artwork that is her wedding dress. (Screenshot by the author).

Certainly, it is strikingly different from everything she has worn up to this scene (as wedding dresses often are). It is interesting to consider the difference, as Noriko's everyday wardrobe serves to epitomise her modernity: it is comfortable-looking and practical. The wedding dress is stunning, an artwork for other people to gaze upon, but it also limits her movement.⁶⁵⁶ Thematically, it ties her to the home sphere – even though she will most likely change to 'normal' -wear the next day. The practical freedom of her youth is over once she puts the wedding dress on, as the dress is tied to tradition, expectations, and duties. Kathe Geist has argued that an unspoken

⁶⁵⁴ Thompson 1988, 321. Thompson argues this to be a sign of Noriko's resistance to the traditional family culture.

⁶⁵⁵ Wood (1998, 118) excellently shows, how the 'spontaneous, open smile' that we see from Noriko throughout the film 'hardens into a fixed grimace'. We last see Noriko 'reduced to a reflection in the mirror', and after everybody has left the room, we get a shot of the empty mirror, with Noriko 'no longer even a reflection'.

⁶⁵⁶ According to Wood (1998, 118), the film follows the 'deprivation of Noriko's movement, her energy, her exuberance, a progress that culminates logically in her literal immobility, weighed down by the cumbersome traditional wedding headdress imposed upon Japanese brides'.

connection between weddings and funerals is established through the colour white: brides, like corpses, are dressed in white, which in an Ozu film highlights how the bride symbolically dies as a member of her original family while she is reborn into her groom's family.⁶⁵⁷ A cynical view could even suggest that after a film's worth of attempts and preparations, she has finally been caught to serve the ideology of her contemporary society, with the dress serving as a net.

Ozu – and filmmakers overall – uses clothing to make comparisons between characters. In *The Munekata Sisters*, the character traits of the two sisters are highlighted by their wardrobe (**Graphic 7.4**). Setsuko is considerably older than Mariko and wears traditional kimonos. Mariko is introduced as a 'tomboy' and wears Westernized shirt and skirt combinations that relay to the audience her free-spirited nature.⁶⁵⁸



Graphic 7.4. *The Munekata Sisters* (1950). The clothing division that highlights the different personalities and generational sentiments of Mariko (Takamine Hideko) and Setsuko (Tanaka Kinuyo). Mariko's habit of rebelling against the system by sticking her tongue out is also visible. (Screenshot by the author).

⁶⁵⁷ Geist 1992, 110.

⁶⁵⁸ Joo (2017, 99) notes how such divisions in wardrobe are already present in the pre-war films, such as *Dragnet Girl*.

Similarly, *Early Summer* creates Noriko's modernity partially through her wardrobe. We are led to make comparisons between Noriko and her more traditional sister-in-law, as well as her two married friends, who are also seen in kimonos as opposed to Western-style dresses. In the case of actress Arima Ineko, it is not simply the wardrobe that visually relays the modernity of her characters in *Tokyo Twilight* and *Equinox Flower*, but also the fact that she has cut her hair short. The kimonos worn by Hara Setsuko in *Late Autumn* are primarily grey, which creates a seasonal distinction between her character Akiko and the daughter Ayako. Then again, as if it were a Joan Crawford vehicle, the screenplay includes various remarks both by men and women about how good-looking the mother is, so the star of the film will not be overshadowed even when playing a mother to an adult character. In *Early Spring*, clothing is also used in the dualistic division of ideal wife Masako and naughty worker-girl Goldfish. Masako is depicted wearing light-coloured kimonos as well as skirt and shirt combinations. This portrays her confidently moving between tradition and modernity. When the affair between Shoji and Goldfish starts, she is wearing a black, sleeveless shirt as opposed to Masako's light clothing, further portraying her as the sinful other woman. After they have slept together in a hotel, she takes time to put on lipstick and brush her hair, which could be seen as a marker of Western vanity.

Floating Weeds is a film notable for its wardrobe. Despite being a director whose films are mostly about the fleeting nature of the contemporary present, Ozu showed his nostalgic side more and more as he advanced in age. According to Donald Richie, Ozu always wanted to make a period film, and in his filmography *Floating Weeds* comes closest to it.⁶⁵⁹ The remote island setting gives the film a timeless visual quality. The biggest contributor to this is the wardrobe. The majority of the important female characters are either actresses or geishas, the two groups of modern women who are most directly associated with wearing kimonos.⁶⁶⁰ In *Floating Weeds*, more than any other Ozu film, kimono is viewed as a tie to the past. The same can be said of geishas, who otherwise scarcely appear in Ozu's post-war works. The actors and the actresses perform a traditional *kabuki* play with a period setting and appropriate costumes, but even in this remote corner of Japan, this glorification of the past does not seem to interest people. Most of *Floating Weeds* is actually about boredom: people complaining about the heat, killing time, as nothing is happening.⁶⁶¹ If Ozu's

⁶⁵⁹ Richie 1974, 246. Ozu's directorial debut, the now-lost *Sword of Penitence* (Zange no yaiba, 1927), was a proper period film.

⁶⁶⁰ Dalby 2001, 335.

⁶⁶¹ According to Yoshida Kiju, the lives Ozu knew 'were composed of stagnation, delays and peripheral transitions', not plotlines like one would find in a movie. Yoshida (1998) 2003, 28. I would claim *Floating Weeds* to be the Ozu film that comes closest to capturing this mode of existence.

films set in contemporary Tokyo are bustling with action, this picturesque setting of nostalgia does not similarly live but instead feels stagnated. People are not dressing up, as if they were conducting their lives normally without thinking about it, but instead their dress code has the feel of a performance, and yet it is lacking an interested audience. In Ozu's modern films there is a sadness about the national past that is vanishing by making way for the modern. In *Floating Weeds*, a film set in a re-creation of the national past, there is hardly any joy, and the characters hope that the future is going to be better than this.

Ozu used several costume designers during his career: Saitô Taizô worked on most of his films from *The Only Son* to *Tokyo Story*, while Nagashima Yûji served on many of the later films. Yet throughout the Ozu filmography the filmmaker found clever ways to use clothing as a narrative element. I am not trying to give Ozu sole credit for these innovations, as many filmmakers dress their villains in dark and their heroes in bright colours, and many Japanese filmmakers use the division of *wafuku* and *yōfuku* to frame the mentality of their central characters. Yet watching the Ozu filmography in the *comparatively individualistic* way that I have proposed suits it best, allows us to see the multitude of ways in which clothing crucially participates in the character work. We know that Ozu needed to know who was going to play a part before writing it, but most likely he also had a strong mental image of what kind of clothes his characters were going to wear. Unlike the recycled actors who bring cohesion into Ozu's oeuvre through their repeated presence, wardrobe seems to have the opposite effect. It celebrates the variety of situations and the nuances within the human condition and the more consideration one gives to it, the more diversity one finds from the wardrobe of Ozu films. There is a logic behind these choices that suit the individuals who wear them, and thus the choice of clothing crucially contributes to both the performance of gender as well as the general framing of identity.

7.3 Almost no kissing: the physical signs of affection

Having now analysed the material aspects of the home sphere in the form of the living arrangements and the wardrobe in Ozu's films, I next want to focus on how the characters are shown to conduct themselves within this space. The next two subchapters will explore physical contact, first through tender affection and then through domestic brutality. This analysis has already been touched upon in a previous subchapter about the Japanese dating culture adapting to the occupation period. However, my focus now lies in married families mostly in the privacy of their own homes. Among the key elements in any marriage are the physical signs of affection (or the lack thereof), which are negotiated through the cultural sense of

intimacy. Intimacy, while a difficult concept to define, commonly refers to emotional or physical closeness that is constructed to be considered private, and often has to do with love or sexuality.⁶⁶² Cultural anthropologist Allison Alexy calls Japanese intimacy a ‘key platform through which people negotiate shifting social norms, balancing personal preferences and desires with what might be possible or acceptable’.⁶⁶³ The view of Japanese life presented by Ozu shows us only limited glimpses of physical intimacy, but this narrow evidence still manages to convey a lot about the societal view of gender roles, as well as the historicity of physical affection between married partners.

The Japanese have traditionally held a very different position on the issue of romantic gestures than that of the West. The physical side of love has been viewed as unsuitable for public display.⁶⁶⁴ Due to it being a foreign custom, kissing was forbidden in Japanese films under wartime censorship. Hirano Kyoko notes that especially during the wartime, ‘the slightest amorous expression had been condemned as a symbol of Western decadence’.⁶⁶⁵ When it was allowed, there was something of a race between filmmakers, as to who would be the first one to release a movie that includes a kiss, the first such film premiering in 1946.⁶⁶⁶ As kissing was incorporated into the Japanese popular culture during the occupation, it was initially seen as a symbol of democracy.⁶⁶⁷ The post-war youth quickly adopted this custom as a normal part of their everyday life, but the outlook on the institution received a generational framing. Due to most of Ozu’s protagonists being the same generation as the director himself, physical affection in his films is almost non-existent. This is not exclusively so, however, because the characters depicted are old-fashioned, but because Ozu’s filmmaking strives for ambiguity, and kissing as a gesture is too blunt, too easy to read one way, with less room for interpretation. While Ozu’s films display the younger generation as having a sexual orientation, his view of the middle-aged people usually shows them having given up this aspect of selfhood. If they actively still pursue the matter, such as does Hirayama in *Late Autumn*, they can gently be made fun of. As reproduction was considered the primary reason for marital sexuality, the completion of it could (and, still can) leave a marriage on an asexual footing.⁶⁶⁸ It has been pointed out that as the norm for men was to work hard to support their family, doing this to the utmost (to a point where one is almost never

⁶⁶² Alexy 2019, 6.

⁶⁶³ Alexy 2019, 4.

⁶⁶⁴ McLelland 2010, 528.

⁶⁶⁵ Hirano 1992, 154.

⁶⁶⁶ Hirano 1992, 156–157.

⁶⁶⁷ McLelland 2010, 528.

⁶⁶⁸ Dales & Yamamoto 2019, 76.

at home) was, in a way, a method of expressing care and intimacy.⁶⁶⁹ Motherhood has also been viewed as a more central category of femininity in modern Japan than wifehood.⁶⁷⁰

Iwao Sumiko has pointed out the paradoxical nature of the juxtaposition between American and Japanese expectations of happy marriages. Americans are all about individualism, yet they expect that in a romantic relationship everything is shared, and that they should know what the other is feeling all the time.⁶⁷¹ According to her, the Japanese view of marriage is ‘much more passive and exacts a lesser degree of involvement’.⁶⁷² Her depiction is very fitting for the marriages that we witness in *Early Summer*, *Tokyo Story*, and *Equinox Flower*, though a film like *Early Spring* can also show, how being passive and expecting to know what the other is feeling without asking can also lead to the deterioration of a relationship. Though the characters in Ozu’s films tend to be social and fond of their friends’ company, there is also a need for privacy within the home sphere. The marital crisis in *Early Spring* is shown to stem from the husband’s absence from home. Masako is constantly waiting for Shoji to return and when Shoji does come home, he is usually on his way out, and merely comes to change his clothes. Whenever Masako has a visitor, whether it be her mother or a friend, Shoji urges them to stay and be at home. When he himself does stay, he is not alone, but brings along either a friend from work or drunken army buddies, thus strongly indicating that he cannot bear the intimacy, and does not want to be alone with his wife. He also rather sleeps with the drunken ex-soldiers than the wife he has waiting for him downstairs.

However, Ozu’s films are not entirely without people showing their feelings through gestures. The final scene of *A Hen in the Wind* depicts the husband and wife forgiving one another, after the wife has just fallen down a flight of steps. They end up embracing and hugging one another in a shot that almost looks like ‘a final kiss’ (**Graphic 7.5**). It is understandable that this film would need to include positive physical connection, since it had previously shown domestic violence. In this, Ozu is striving for balance. As the film has previously covered the topics of rape and prostitution, the final embrace is portrayed as a moral high, something so purifying that it is hard to read the moment as sexual in tone.

⁶⁶⁹ Alexy 2019, 3.

⁶⁷⁰ Dales & Yamamoto 2019, 76.

⁶⁷¹ Iwao 1993, 77.

⁶⁷² Iwao 1993, 77.



Graphic 7.5. *A Hen in the Wind* (1948). The final embrace that seals the reconciliation. Tokiko's hands in praying position crystallise the moment as a moral high, making it also harder to read the scene as sexual in tone. (Screenshot by the author).

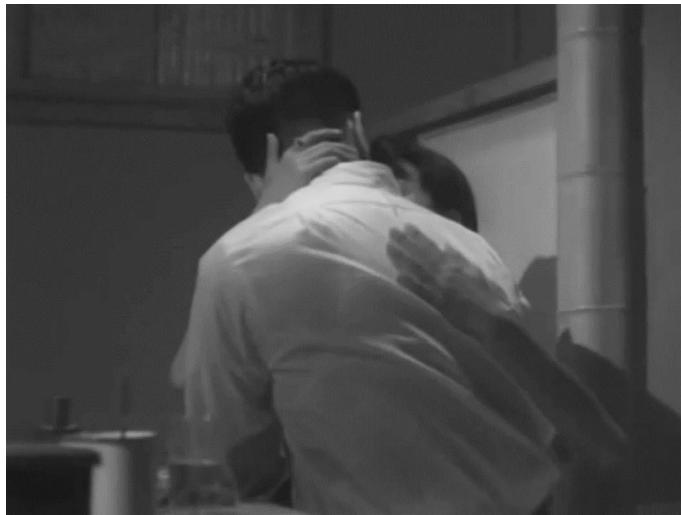
Overall, it needs be noted that not all physical signs of affection are sexual. Robin Wood gives a good example of this with his analysis of *Tokyo Story*. According to Wood, 'touching is all but banished from the film', but the sequence of the grandmother Tomi staying at Noriko's home features two key moments of human touch: 'Noriko gently and tenderly massages the old woman's aching back and later presses money into her hands'.⁶⁷³ From these examples it is evident that although Ozu presents a world, where human touch has become all too rare, this is deliberate criticism, something that should be challenged, as opposed to being emulated.

Ozu's films seem to champion physical affection when it comes to families and married partners, but amusingly enough, the first actual kiss in an Ozu film is a moral misstep. In *Early Spring*, Goldfish kisses the protagonist Sugiyama (**Graphic 7.6**), which starts an affair that nearly destroys the man's marriage. It is natural that this would be the film to include a kiss, since it focuses on younger characters than most of Ozu's output. Yet it is interesting that when the director decides to have his first kiss, it is used as a clear marker that the characters have strayed from the good path. After spending the night with his mistress, Sugiyama returns home, lies about his recent whereabouts, and then kisses the wife, who slaps him on the butt and asks: 'What's that for? Are you hungry?'⁶⁷⁴ This shows, how kissing is not part of their everyday behaviour, or at least has not been recently. The lack of romance and the

⁶⁷³ Wood 1998, 132.

⁶⁷⁴ *Early Spring* (1956), timecode: 49.45.

lack of children also make housekeeping the only element of Masako's home existence, highlighting her maid-like role to her husband. Characters in Ozu's films do flirt, but there are different levels of flirting. Goldfish in *Early Spring* is portrayed as promiscuous with her habit of flirting with all her co-workers. They do not mind it, but no one also takes her seriously. Her teasing of Sugiyama gets a negative tone with Goldfish constantly mentioning the salaryman's wife. As they kiss, the camera cuts to the electric fan in the corner: the eyewitness in the room that is shaking its head in discomfort.



Graphic 7.6. *Early Spring* (1956). The first actual kiss in an Ozu film, framed as a moral misstep in shady surroundings. (Screenshot by the author)

Ozu's most serious commentary upon the changing norms pertaining to sexual relations can be found in *Tokyo Twilight*, where the pregnancy of young and unmarried Akiko is a cause of shame for her, something she needs to cover up. The impregnation has occurred before the film's beginning (not that Ozu would show it anyway). It is, however, made clear through people's behaviour that this sort of pregnancy and later the abortion go directly against the society's norms of acceptable sexual behaviour. The film seems to be unresolved about whether it only strives to present that these things happen, or issue criticism about the demanding and unambiguous family values that cause depression for Akiko and later drive her to suicide. One could make the case for either reading. By presenting a sympathetic character who goes through this, the film extends sympathy to others who face similar problems. Then again by presenting Akiko choosing dying over living, the film relays a crushing view about how a person would act in this situation, even

though it might simultaneously remind other people to be more caring, more forgiving, and more understanding of their fellow humans.

It is noteworthy that even though *Tokyo Twilight* invites controversy with its subject and shows us many milieus that could be viewed as scandalous, the gynaecologist's office where Akiko goes to get an abortion is not portrayed this way. The subject itself might be risqué, but the doctor Akiko meets is one of the most supportive people she meets during the entire film, and moralisation is nowhere to be seen during this sequence. Whereas Japan might have otherwise lagged behind Western nations pertaining to women's rights, the country legalised abortion in 1948 effectively, allowing it 'where economic grounds indicated it was in the woman's interest'.⁶⁷⁵ The doctor points out that these things are very common, and the only negative remark she makes is that some patients leave without paying. The scene is allowed to play out in a very casual manner, and people can make their ethical deductions about it based on their own views on the subject. The only possible detail that could be interpreted as the filmmakers voicing a general position about abortion is Ozu's decision to end the sequence by cutting to Takako's baby daughter Michiko. Then again, this is the logical, comparison-based way for the film to establish Akiko's feeling of guilt to the audience.

The Munekata Sisters was a film not favoured by critics upon release or afterwards, and Ozu himself found the book that served as the source material difficult to adapt.⁶⁷⁶ Due to its literary origins, the work is in many ways the 'odd film out' amidst Ozu's post-war works, also in terms of its marital depiction, which gets framed with an underlying psychological subtext that the film does not fully explore. A narrative problem is the connection between Setsuko's feelings and the state of her husband Mimura. The film shows the husband as an alcoholic who cannot find a job. It also discloses that, since their wedding, Setsuko has been in love with another man, though she has tried her best to be a good wife. The screenplay frames the husband's agony in such a vague manner that we are left to wonder, whether the film partially puts the blame for his condition on her, as this is shown to be at least a factor in his depression. If this was the case, it would imply the marital symbiosis to be a highly toxic relationship, because neither can be released from the other, and neither can help the other either. The bleak dysfunctionality and the lack of mundane humour in the marital depiction makes this Ozu's most Naruse-like film, though it is worth pointing out that *The Munekata Sisters* preceded Naruse's many 1950s films about the issue by at least a year.⁶⁷⁷ In his original screenplays, Ozu tends to give

⁶⁷⁵ Tokuhiko 2009, 41.

⁶⁷⁶ Richie 1974, 236.

⁶⁷⁷ These films include at least *Meshi* (Repast, 1951), *Tsuma* (Wife, 1953), *Fûfu* (Husband and Wife, 1953), and *Anzukko* (Little Peach, 1958).

more concrete reasons for marital crises, while also opting to strive for harmonious conclusions where partners come together.

Ozu's films capture Japan in transition in relation to the physical display of affection. The films do not feature a great deal of touching, but then again many of them also mourn the lack of contact, even if this does not get phrased through dialogue. At times, the changing of ways and the generational gap can become a sore subject. The father in *Equinox Flower* asks his daughter whether she has already slept with the guy she is involved with, which she finds an insulting notion: 'Father, you should have a little more trust in me. He's not that kind of a man.'. The father's lack of faith also displays how people have the tendency of expecting the worst, which is especially fitting for Ozu's films. Marriage seems like a scarier step into unknown territory in these works, partly because we never get to spend that much time with the grooms: in *Equinox Flower*, Taniguchi at least gets shown to the audience so that we can take the daughter's side against the father who is clearly the protagonist of the picture. As previously discussed, *Late Spring* does not show the groom at all, therein allowing the audience to share Noriko's unease about what is to come. While examining the signs of affection in Ozu's films, we must remember the central strategy of not showing everything to the audience. Sex definitely exists in Ozu's world, but the director leaves it for the audience's imagination, and tackles it only through the occasional joke.

7.4 From closeness to conflict: domestic violence

While the previous subchapter covered physical signs of affection in a positive sense, emotional attachment can also manifest itself in negative expressions and domestic violence. Kuwajima Kaoru argues that because domestic violence towards intimate partners is often excused with the term 'love', it can be difficult to understand how violence can exist within intimacy.⁶⁷⁸ As incidents were often not reported, there is little data about the extent of domestic violence in Japan during the twentieth century.⁶⁷⁹ Traditionally, the Japanese have understood the concept of domestic violence to refer to children's physical and emotional violence towards their parents, but since the early 1990s, awareness of violence towards women and children has increased, as has the number of reported cases.⁶⁸⁰ Ozu's films, while perhaps containing children that are ungrateful or neglectful towards their parents, do not feature filial violence towards the older generation. The victims are instead women and children, and in the cases of *A Hen in the Wind*, *The Munekata Sisters*, *Early*

⁶⁷⁸ Kuwajima 2019, 113.

⁶⁷⁹ Koza 1999, 50.

⁶⁸⁰ Koza 1999, 50. Kuwajima 2019, 112.

Summer, and *Floating Weeds*, the physical conflict is used to comment on the historical situation and the changing of family roles within the domestic sphere.

One reason for domestic violence being a taboo subject in Japan is that it brings shame to the family, who want to save face.⁶⁸¹ *A Hen in the Wind*, like many other Japanese films, can seem like it is opposing divorce to a point of being unrealistically stubborn. It is common in Japan for battered wives to stay in marriage for a long time, and police intervention is rare: divorces likewise bring shame.⁶⁸² Writing about the possibility of divorce motivated by violence, Kuwajima argues that:

‘The complexity of such a decision reflects many factors, including economic needs and resources, social norms surrounding families, and the women’s own emotional attachments, as well as the ambivalent nature of intimacy itself.’⁶⁸³

As discussed in Chapter 3, the idea of divorce used to be linked with Western culture and therefore considered un-Japanese. Gradually, things have shifted, and in 1992, domestic violence was the second most common reason for women to file for divorce, following ‘incompatibility of character’.⁶⁸⁴

Of all Ozu films, none features imagery as shocking as *A Hen in the Wind*. After the husband Shuichi finds out about his wife’s night as a prostitute, he rapes her, and later, pushes her down a flight of steps.⁶⁸⁵ The 1948 film touches upon several taboo subjects. Prostitution would only be decriminalised in 1956, while female adultery had been decriminalised in 1947. The latter had also been a forbidden subject to film since 1925, because Japanese officials did not want to corrupt public morality.⁶⁸⁶ Depiction of domestic violence, on the other hand, was forbidden by SCAP authorities.⁶⁸⁷ The fact that these issues were covered in the usual ‘safe space’ of an Ozu film must have been a shock for the audiences, as well as a possible contributor to the film’s lack of success. Narratives about social problems, such as prostitution and infidelity, became common on a global scale after the war, as many filmmakers wished to tackle realistic issues, as opposed to distracting their audiences from them by offering escapism. Critics have read the film’s prostitution narrative as symbolic of Japan’s lost purity, though the exact meaning has divided the scholars.⁶⁸⁸ Joan

⁶⁸¹ Kozi 1999, 52.

⁶⁸² Kozi 1999, 51.

⁶⁸³ Kuwajima 2019, 112.

⁶⁸⁴ Kozi 1999, 50.

⁶⁸⁵ The scene with the stairs was reportedly inspired by *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Kometani 2021, 11.

⁶⁸⁶ Hirano 1992, 16.

⁶⁸⁷ Hirano 1992, 72.

⁶⁸⁸ Sato 1978, Cited in: Bordwell 1988, 302–303.

Mellen views the husband's violence to be echoing Ozu's 'own anger at what the war and the Occupation have made of Japan'⁶⁸⁹, while Sato Tadao has interpreted it to address the brutality of the Japanese during the wartime.⁶⁹⁰ It is indeed difficult to watch the film without searching for a deeper reasoning for the brutality witnessed in the subtext, even if the thematic remains ambiguous regarding the larger context of sentiments.

Perhaps because of her history of playing tragic roles in the films of Mizoguchi, Ozu cast Tanaka Kinuyo as a victim of domestic violence in *Hen* as well as *The Munekata Sisters*. Association with suffering and stoic endurance was a key element within Tanaka's star persona: Jennifer Coates has also considered, that as she was a pre-war movie star, the audiences were already attached to Tanaka, and her presence in post-war films carried a sense of nostalgia for a time when the national self-image of Japan was better.⁶⁹¹ In both films, the violence stems from masculine jealousy, and the films take the side of the woman. Both men are stoic in their anger, and domestic abuse is their unfortunate way of channelling these feelings, as they are unable to partake in the honest conversation that Tanaka's characters are hoping and begging for in both cases. These scenes carry shock value not only, because we as the audience are used to Ozu's characters being likable, but because the women take the violence in such a calm manner. This may give the audience the impression of the wives feeling that spousal abuse is within the rights of a husband. Then again, after the abuse sequence of *The Munekata Sisters*, Setsuko is finally willing to consider divorce, even though the husband dies before this opportunity gets explored. Jonathan Rosenbaum also argues that the ending of *Hen* makes clear that what seals the reconciliation (Tokiko's hands as she embraces Shuichi), is 'significantly her gesture of accepting him'.⁶⁹² Thus, the films suggest that the culture of abuse is not something that cannot be changed, and women have the power to shape the continuation.

Another case of violence is seen in *Floating Weeds*, when Arashi slaps Kayo after she went out with his son. Later in the sequence, he pushes the woman and twists her hand while interrogating her. Arashi is portrayed as a concerned parent who feels she is not good enough for his son. Still, the violence is not depicted as warranted, since the audience already knows that Kayo initially met Kiyoshi because of Sumiko's scheme. When Arashi finds out about this and summons Sumiko, she gets a more severe beating, and also a verbal assault with Arashi calling her a 'bitch', a 'slut', and a 'fool'. The man's anger stems from him having wanted his son to have

⁶⁸⁹ Mellen 1976, 218–19.

⁶⁹⁰ Sato 1978, Cited in: Bordwell 1988, 302–303.

⁶⁹¹ Coates 2016, 41 & 103.

⁶⁹² Rosenbaum 2012, 17.

a life more proper than his own, and feeling that Kiyoshi has now been corrupted. Sumiko even notes: ‘Like father, like son’. This, of course, plays to Ozu’s central motif of the younger generation becoming like the previous one. As Arashi’s drifting lifestyle precludes him from an ordinary lifepath, his hopes for Kiyoshi’s future have a more obsessive tone. Like Tokiko in *A Hen in the Wind*, Sumiko is less concerned about having been a victim of violence, and more affected by the emotional gap that has formed between her and Arashi.⁶⁹³ This shows how domestic violence was not viewed as something out of the ordinary, and break-ups were viewed as more traumatising.

While addressing this subject, we should also consider the post-war Ozu films without domestic abuse. This allows us to see differences between post-war Ozu and the films before that. *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* was based on an earlier screenplay of the same name that Ozu wrote with Ikeda Tadao in 1940. Wartime censors did not accept it, and it was never made into film as such. The original screenplay also was about a marital crisis, but in the film’s culmination point, which is a moment narrated by the wife to her friends, the Mokichi character slaps his wife. After this they have a similar reconciliation as in the later film, but this one also relays how the wife accepts her role on the patriarchal wartime society.⁶⁹⁴ In the post-war *Flavor*, Mokichi is perhaps dull and passive, but also tender and kind, and the couple manages to patch up their relationship without a violent outburst or establishment of marital hierarchy. Before the post-war decades, domestic violence was considered a justified means of discipline, and it remained common after the war.⁶⁹⁵ Children finding the parents’ insistence on Confucian hierarchical family structure inappropriate or irrational, is a common reason for domestic violence in Japan.⁶⁹⁶ Yet physical punishment is treated differently in the pre-war films, where it is shown as almost normal, and does not get highlighted in the narratives like it does in the post-war works. *Early Summer* features a confrontation with Koichi and his sons, where he slaps the older boy. The conflict is shown to be caused by a small reason, a case of bad timing, but it has an emotional effect on the children. Later, the father acknowledges to a friend that he should not lose his temper like that.

Much like with Koichi in *Early Summer*, both *A Hen in the Wind* and *Floating Weeds* show their abusive male characters having a reason for their anger, even though the films do not agree with their violent outbursts. Arashi also apologises to

⁶⁹³ It is common for the cycle of violence and gentleness, as well as the ambivalent form of intimacy, to confuse the victims of abuse about the nature of a relationship. Kuwajima 2019, 115.

⁶⁹⁴ Joo 2017, 126.

⁶⁹⁵ Koza 1999, 52.

⁶⁹⁶ Koza 1999, 51.

Kayo for having scolded her. In Ozu's post-war films domestic violence exists, but not as common practise, not even as a justified last resort, but as individual mistakes. This comments upon the male characters not having fully adapted to the post-war culture, which gives the perpetrators the chance to cling on to some sympathy, as the loss of national tradition is otherwise mourned in the film. It is, however, clear that Ozu does not view violence to be an element of tradition that should be cherished, but instead sides with the victims. None of the films show us families where such occurrences are common, and, in all of these individual cases, masculine self-hatred or self-doubt is shown to be a catalyst for the abusive behaviour: nobody 'has it coming' because of something they did, the grey area in the case of *Arashi* and *Sumiko* notwithstanding. Jonathan Rosenbaum has tackled the imaginary scenario where *Hen* was made by Kurosawa or Mizoguchi, speculating how the former would have paid more attention to the husband's wartime experience and the latter to the wife's brief moment of prostitution.⁶⁹⁷ The estimate is fair and one finds that a marker of the Ozu brand in the case of *Hen* is the understanding that he gives to both of the characters. As the films value harmony, violence is shown as an unwelcome disturbance. As the characters value harmony, and are able to improve themselves, it is not shown to tear families apart.

Ozu's depiction of the home space and people's domestic behaviour is full of interesting details that deepen the character work of his films. The living arrangements seen in the post-war films paint a large panorama about a society, where a shared sense of middle-classism serves as a motor of modernisation. The modernisation is very much tied to gender, and especially women balance their modernity through wardrobe, both at home and in the public. At home, people feel a sense of ease and can escape the hectic pace of modern life in spaces that have been decorated in a traditionally Japanese style, while wearing traditionally Japanese clothing. It is also here that the characters should be able to engage in intimacy, but Ozu's films are usually too polite to show much of this, and instead focus on the times when things go wrong. Things rarely escalate to physical violence, and most conflicts shown to us are silent in nature. It is this distance that keeps forming between characters, and the different forms of it seen throughout the post-war films, that is the subject of the next chapter.

⁶⁹⁷ Rosenbaum 2012, 13.

8 The distance

The previous chapters have touched upon absence as a key factor in any Ozu family depiction. This chapter builds from that and looks at the forms of distance that separate or otherwise impact the relationships between people. Ozu films include emotional and verbal distance with characters who do not communicate their feelings to their loved ones successfully, as well as physical distance, and often these categories are used interchangeably. This chapter begins with the little things relating to the home sphere, only to distance itself then to distances of a more concrete variety. I am interested in both the different categories of separation, as well as the causes for which people are shown drifting apart. It is from this perspective that I address the generational gap in Ozu's family depictions, as well as the historical distance that gets voiced every time the characters bring up the subject of war. Finally, I conclude the chapter by scrutinising Ozu's depiction of funerals and death, the distance that cannot be mended. It should be noted that the concepts of distance and absence do not limit themselves to relations between people, and following this character-driven chapter, I will then expand upon the concepts in Chapter 9. My goal is to capture the way the films frame the future of the Japanese family system and how they comment upon this direction.

8.1 Emotional and verbal distance: 'We are together, but...'

To understand the forms of connection and disconnection within the families in Ozu's films, we should first inspect the dialogue that families engage in. Even if Ozu saw himself as committed to realism, the way his characters speak is highly unique, a form of higher realism created by the filmmaker. Donald Richie has viewed the screenplay as the most important element of Ozu's filmmaking and argues that whereas a carpenter uses wood for piecing things together, Ozu uses dialogue.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁸ Richie 1974, 19. Of course, there is a multitude of writers who have placed the *mise-en-scène* of an Ozu film as either more important than the dialogue, or equal in importance. According to Tom Milne, 'they are, in the fullest sense of the word, complementary.' Milne (1963) 2012, 184.

Richie also makes the distinction between the tempo of Ozu's films and the tempo of his dialogue, the former being seemingly slow and the latter swift and cutting to the heart of the matter, making the characters understandable individuals to the audience very fast.⁶⁹⁹ Joan Mellen is the rare case of a scholar who offers criticism of Ozu's dialogue, citing the old couple from *The End of Summer's* final sequence as an example about 'the utterly unpersuasive clichés and platitudes' with which Ozu characters face the inevitabilities of life.⁷⁰⁰ The lines of an Ozu film spring out of the ordinary, but carry immense weight. For the Japanese, silence is just as important as words, and contributes to this effect. Ozu's films have their fair share of communication breakdowns between family members, which also have the effect of leading the audience to cling onto every word the characters utter, in search of fulfilment and a deeper meaning.

Often the words exchanged could on the surface be labelled small talk. Seasons and weather are used all over the world for this purpose: they are impersonal things to discuss with people one possibly is not well acquainted with.⁷⁰¹ However, Ozu's usage of them in his films begs the question of whether there really is such a thing as small talk. The fact that the characters need these kinds of topics with their nearest family members constantly directs the audience to look for deeper clues to their character: it is frequently used as a sign that the relationship is strained, and characters need to build common ground by discussing things shared by all humans. In *Late Spring*, when Noriko refuses to talk to her father after their argument, Somiya walks into the hallway and notes that it will be another lovely day tomorrow. *Good Morning* is a film where meaningless everyday phrases and expressions are elevated to one of the main topics. The children view it as pointless to go about repeating these things day after day, but their English teacher (Sada Keiji) feels that these things make the world go round. Seasons and weather are not only useful for the characters, but for setting up the mood of a film. *Equinox Flower* begins with two railway workers discussing the weather and ranking the new brides they have seen that day, after which Ozu cuts to a sign that warns about 'strong winds'. In its opening shot, *A Hen in the Wind* features two passers-by, one of them holding an

⁶⁹⁹ Richie 1974, 24.

⁷⁰⁰ Mellen 1976, 328. This scene is the Ryû cameo of the film, and I would argue that it encapsulates in a fine way the necessary things people must often tell themselves in order to continue their life. The general nature of the dialogue also owes to the fact that the couple looking at the crematorium do not personally know the person who has died.

⁷⁰¹ While discussing the topics of seasons and weather within Ozu's body of work, film critic Hasumi Shigehiko (1997, 120) has rightly pointed how these things, despite their presence in the film titles, do not have anything to do with Ozu's narratives. No film has a seasonal context, and the weather does not affect how things turn out within these works. Hasumi highlights Ozu's fondness for sunny days and clear skies, as opposed to other directors like Mizoguchi, who used fog as a theatrical device.

umbrella. *Tokyo Twilight* opens with a discussion about the cold weather, whereas *Floating Weeds* opens with people complaining about the heat. *Early Spring* is full of mentions about how hot it is, to atmospherically frame the temperature of the marriage crisis. When the friend, to whose place Masako moves from their family home, complains how hot it is, she rebuts this by noting that the temperature in Kamata was much warmer.⁷⁰²

Besides the changing of seasons and the daily weather, Ozu uses food and drink to build a sense of unity between his loose cinematic communities. They bring people together, offer an easy topic of conversation and also contribute to the characterisation of the people depicted. Though most of the alcohol usage in the films of Ozu can be rationalised through either the personas of Ozu and Noda, or Japanese culture and the human needs of the characters, there is an additional function served by these sequences. In his films, Ozu uses cuisine and beverages as a way to give these works depth by appealing to the audience's other senses, even if it is through our imagination. While film is most often viewed as an audio-visual artform, Ozu contributes to his internal worldbuilding by leading us to also consider the different tastes in the lives of his characters. Not only are people constantly talking about food and drink, but we are also shown different dishes and bottles throughout the post-war oeuvre. The sensory stimuli also extend themselves to the smells of Japan, as we see with the various smoking chimneys of factories, trains, and even crematoriums (*The End of Summer*), not to mention the little fart-makers of *Good Morning*. Therefore, even though we cannot touch the reality presented to us by Ozu, we feel we can, as we have a clear understanding of how Ozu's Japan looks, sounds, tastes and smells. By having the topic of small talk be about common things like food or drink, Ozu manages to quietly strengthen the thorough richness of his cinematic Japan.

Most importantly small talk, however meaningless on the surface, relays a wish to communicate and to be civil. The absence of small talk is the thing to worry about, as we see with the couple in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*, who for the majority of the film seem completely unable to have a conversation about anything. A central if unannounced fear in Ozu's world is our helplessness and inability to change things. In the end, the characters have little power to affect the outcome of things, a fact that gets played out in both tragic and comedic ways in the narratives. Many Ozu films form their bitter side taste from the characters merely drifting through their everyday existence without passion or a substantial say-so as to the outcome. This also leaves many of them with little to say about anything relating to this existence.

⁷⁰² This line might of course be a nostalgic wink to the audience, as the Shochiku studio was in Kamata until moving to Ofuna in 1936.

The couple in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* are shown to be frustrated by the dullness of their union, but this would seem to apply to their lives on a larger level as well. When we see Mokichi in his work environment, he is very passive and submissive, and does everything he is asked without flinching or showing the least bit of emotion. Ozu also builds on the strengths of actor Saburi Shin, one of the most understated actors in Japan. Saburi's dry delivery and quiet melancholy are well suited for his characters in *Flavor* and *Equinox Flower* and have been used for similar purposes by other directors, such as Goshō Heinosuke and Kobayashi Masaki. In *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*, Taeko has a conversation with a friend, whose husband is often abroad due to business, and makes a wish that her husband too would be absent more often. Later we learn that Mokichi's company actually considers sending him abroad. Though the film is a loose narrative even for Ozu, there is considerable dramatic weight: Setsuko the niece does not want to get married because of the sad state of her aunt Taeko's marriage, and if the uncle moves out of Japan these problems surely will not be fixed. Therefore, the future of the family system relies on fixing the problems of its past. In the original wartime screenplay that the film was based on, the husband character was going to war instead of a business trip.⁷⁰³ For modern audience members aware of this, the knowledge of the contrast adds further dramatic weight by highlighting the uncertainty of the continuation. The goodbye scene in the airport also makes more sense with the background information.

Though the crisis in the film is a serious one, Ozu again paints it comedically, by having physical distance serve as the marker of emotional distance. After their meeting near the film's beginning, Taeko and Mokichi do not meet each other, or at least are not seen together on screen, for the next approximately forty-eight minutes, which covers several days in the reality of the film.⁷⁰⁴ Instead, they keep finding things to do in order to avoid one another. Taeko goes drinking in the bathhouse, then to a baseball game, then to meet her parents, after which she attends a *kabuki* performance. Mokichi spends time with his young friend Okada, and when he is not working, visits a restaurant, a game-hall, and a cycling race. Joan Mellen has pointed out how this shows the segregation between the sexes in Japan, as people can only truly relax with members of their own gender.⁷⁰⁵ Joo notes how the film carefully

⁷⁰³ Joo 2017, 166.

⁷⁰⁴ Their absence from each other at: *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* (1952), timecode: 16.31 – 1.03.05. This has a great impact for the narrative, since *Flavor's* entire running time is 116 minutes. It is highly possible that, as a couple who lives together, they do meet several times during this gap, but as this is not relayed to the audience, we should consider the absence as the intended message.

⁷⁰⁵ Mellen 1976, 276.

documents the post-war mass culture and the changing Tokyo landscape.⁷⁰⁶ While both are true, Ozu has an additional comical motivation for this. He seems to be challenging himself, as to how long the *characters* of the film can avoid the *subject* of the film. *Flavor* seems broader and more vague than other Ozu films because the characters are not taking part in the narrative but are instead sidestepping it. The state of their marriage is not a funny matter, but the way they handle it most definitely is.⁷⁰⁷ When the couple is finally shown in the same room again, an hour into the movie, they have a short conversation, and then exit the room in opposite directions. The conversation actually finds them agreeing that Setsuko has an attitude problem, as she simply refuses to meet the intended husband candidate.

As a resolution has to be found, the film starts searching for common ground, and again finds it in the consumption of food. Taeko thinks Mokichi eats like a dog and scolds him for that. The man is willing to change his ways, even though he has eaten this way since childhood. When Mokichi leaves for a business trip to Uruguay and Taeko does not accompany him to the airport, the film reaches its darkest point, even literally, as we next see their apartment being very dark. Mokichi, however, returns home, as there was a problem with the plane, which could be interpreted as a critique of modern life and Japanese people leaving Japan. Upon his return, the couple has their first pleasant conversation in the entire film. It is night, and the maid is asleep, so they must prepare their food themselves. They journey through the dark house together, turning lights on and then eat together, which, prior to this has always been a difficult thing for them. The meal they consume is *ochazuke*, a common dish that is also in the Japanese title of the film, *Ochazuke no aji*, literally ‘The Taste of Ochazuke’. After eating, Taeko apologises for her past behaviour and says that she understands what Mokichi meant with his earlier monologue about enjoying common things. Joo has raised the sentiment that in 1952 this ending, which celebrates the beauty of simple everyday life, feels anticlimactic, but had Ozu made the film in 1940, the thematic would have echoed differently in the context of Japanese militarism.⁷⁰⁸ Common food serves as metaphor for the common marriage, both of which may appear dull, but also have their good sides.⁷⁰⁹ Ozu continued similar naming practises for his final film *Sanma no aji*, ‘The Taste of Sanma’, which

⁷⁰⁶ Joo 2017, 167–168.

⁷⁰⁷ Yoshida Kiju makes the case that Ozu overall tries to stay away from his plotlines as long as he can. Yoshida (1998) 2003, 67.

⁷⁰⁸ Joo 2017, 171.

⁷⁰⁹ Joan Mellen (1976, 275) has remarked the film to be ‘remarkably similar’ to Naruse’s darker marriage narrative *Meshi*, also named after a food: ‘Ozu would, if he could, return the Japanese to a simplicity of experience typified by *ochazuke*; Naruse would convince his countrymen that their actual lives are far more complex than this supposed symbol of the authentic Japanese experience would imply’.

was redubbed *An Autumn Afternoon* overseas, as well as *Daikon to ninjin* (Radishes and Carrots, 1964), the screenplay he was working on when he died. These films are not about food and drink, but instead show how the very nature of everyday life is characterised by food and (especially) drink. These things, as well as seasons and weather, are brought up in conversation because they carry great unifying power that helps people mend the distance with the people in their lives. It may not be strikingly original conversation, to address the criticism of Mellen, but the words carry enriching sentiments that give them weight: most importantly, they relay a wish for communication, civility, continuation, and caring.

8.2 Physical distance: people moving away

Even though Ozu's families are not perfect, the films seem to suggest that friction is mendable with people living under the same roof. Things get more complicated and repeatedly, mournful, as characters move to other places, scattering around Japan and the world. Film scholar Linda C. Ehrlich has noted that whereas Americans have classically associated travel with the concept of 'new frontier' and a sense of hope, the Japanese tend to associate it with separation from the group.⁷¹⁰ Ozu does not seem to believe in maintaining long-distance relationships even with one's kin, and even when characters are shown as optimistic, we are led to believe they are putting on an act, so they do not have to disclose their real emotions about the separation. This also leaves room for ambiguity. The standard mix of melancholia and hope can be found in the ending of *Early Summer*: the parents discuss how their family has scattered, but overall things have turned out well for them. This subchapter discusses families breaking apart, the various reasons for this, and the effect of physical distance on the family dynamics.

People move, separate, and scatter for different reasons in the post-war films, the most common one being a daughter starting a new life in marriage. Donald Richie has stated that most of Ozu's works end with a family being broken apart because of either death or marriage. Richie makes the distinction between Western and Japanese family culture to frame the narrative motif of a daughter moving away, stating that for the Japanese this is a bigger deal, as identification with one's family is a bigger part of the identification of the self.⁷¹¹ The sentiments about a family being broken apart because of marriage are most famously voiced in *Late Spring*, during the discussion between Somiya and Onodera. Somiya says that given the choice, it would be better to have a son, not a daughter: 'You raise them, then you give them

⁷¹⁰ Ehrlich 1997, 55.

⁷¹¹ Richie 1974, 3–4.

away. If they're unwed, you worry. Yet if they do marry, it's somehow irksome.⁷¹² Onodera reminds him that the two of them also married some other man's daughters. They have a laugh about it, then quiet down (together with the audience) to consider the unsatisfactory nature of being a parent. The ending of the film creates a similar feeling. Somiya returns to a daughterless house and starts peeling an apple (**Graphic 8.1**). The skin of the apple grows bigger and bigger, until it falls off. If the vase shot – to which this moment is the fatherly parallel – was a mystery, the apple being a metaphor for a child growing up and leaving the parent, is made much easier to understand. The fact that there is less ambiguity about the reason for Somiya's sadness, as opposed to Noriko's, does not lessen the effect of the scene.



Graphic 8.1. *Late Spring* (1949). The apple skin as a visual metaphor for a child growing up. (Screenshot by the author)

Late Spring's ending gains dramatic weight from the audience not knowing whether the father and daughter will meet again: if there was even a passing mention assuring us that they will, it would not be the same film. *Early Summer* does show the family members, who are departing in opposite directions, as keen on meeting again in the future, even if the future remains uncertain. Many of the films show married women still keeping close contact with their families. Yet it is noteworthy that the films that show women having the closest ties to their parents, are usually about troubled marriages, such as *The Munekata Sisters*, *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*, *Early Spring* and *Tokyo Twilight*. In these films the emotional absence or

⁷¹² *Late Spring* (1949), timecode: 1.28.49–1.30.35.

downright nastiness of the husband has pushed the women backwards to seek solace from their parents. This is a temporary solution, as their present situation must be eventually confronted. It is an interesting narrative choice which serves balance to the films where a daughter is 'married off'. These women can go back, but never for good, never all the way.

Usually, the reasons why family units cease to exist in their previous form are natural, and therefore acceptable and understandable. *Tokyo Twilight* gives us the exception in Kisako, a mother who has left her family years ago and now regrets the decision. Historian Elyssa Faison highlights the connection between family history and Japanese colonial history: Kisako left them for another man and moved with him to occupied Manchuria.⁷¹³ Though Ozu gives limited details, Faison makes the argument that Japanese contemporary audiences would have understood the hardships that Kisako has had to endure both in Manchuria as the war ended, and again upon repatriation to Japan.⁷¹⁴ Though she too is given sympathy in the film, the central function of the film is to show the tragic effect that her absence has had on her family. It is interesting to pair Kisako's character with her male counterpart, Arashi the actor from *Floating Weeds*. Not only has Arashi not raised his son Kiyoshi, but his son does not know that the aging actor is his father. Still, the film is much more understanding about a male character leaving his kin than a woman doing so. Unlike Kisako who had only two choices, whether to stay in her children's lives or to leave, Arashi gets a third option. Kiyoshi thinks of him as an uncle and is genuinely fond of him. Midway through the picture the protagonist notes that he will stay as his uncle for all his life. Yet even he is worried what might happen if Kiyoshi finds out about it, and therefore it is not a complete double standard: even men are not free of parental responsibility upon wishing so. Besides, the film seems to view Arashi's job and lifestyle as a mitigating factor, an unusual role in working life warranting an unusual one in private life. Another difference is the general tone of the films: *Tokyo Twilight* is noirish and serious, while *Floating Weeds* is lush and contemplative. Kisako's character type is classically melodramatic, while Arashi also gets portrayed in comedic ways. The outcome, however, does appear fairly even. Upon finding out, the child of neither character wants their long-lost parent back after years of abandonment.⁷¹⁵ Both Kisako and Arashi leave town as the film closes. They are both given a romantic companion so that the ending does not feel too hopeless.

⁷¹³ Faison 2015, 58–59.

⁷¹⁴ Faison 2015, 59–60.

⁷¹⁵ Faison (2015, 57) summarises that the mother's return only serves to remind them of her absence, and the absence has become almost a necessity. The fact that she leaves again as the film closes, makes restoration of normalcy possible.

The characters who move to another place usually end up in some other, distant part of Japan, as opposed to another country. However, the films do show the world getting smaller, with mentions of characters having been in far-away places. Mokichi in *Flavor* tries to leave for South America, while Hiroshi in *The Munekata Sisters* has just returned from France. An interesting decoration element is the advertisements for foreign cities and airline companies in Ozu's post-war films. In *Early Spring* for instance, we see a sign that says 'Paris', and later an advertisement that reads 'See Finland'. Besides being a visual indicator of modern globalisation and fast travel, these ads show the films' Japanese space being slowly but surely conquered by foreign imagery.⁷¹⁶ However, I cannot bring myself to read them as a completely negative development, as travel posters are a similar piece of decor as movie posters, something Ozu implemented in his films since the very beginning of his career. The presence of American movie posters was initially a sign of Ozu being progressive and welcoming the impact of foreign cultures, and even in the post-war period Ozu continued to decorate his cinematic space with posters of the films he liked.⁷¹⁷ Like the travel posters, these images acknowledge the borders of Ozu's fictional Japan.

Physical distance gets in the way for the potential couple of *The End of Summer*, as the young salaryman is transferred from Osaka to Sapporo. Ozu gives us an unusually sentimental scene with the young couple – who have not confessed having feelings for one another – at a train station, with grandiose music working as the substitute for the dialogue they should be having. It is a very similar view of the modern generation's romance as in *Good Morning*, though the previous film, which only included a verbal distance (the failure in dialogue), painted its obstacle as a comedic one. The film, which otherwise ends on a crushing note, issues a glimmer of hope, as Noriko (Tsukasa Yôko) informs her sister she will be going to Sapporo to join the man she loves. The solution is a bittersweet one. The film has established that the people in the Kohayagawa family live in different cities and are too busy to maintain close relationships. The exception has been the two sisters played by Hara Setsuko and Tsukasa. The Tsukasa character is thus fittingly a 'Noriko', since her moving out means gaining the possibility of romantic happiness, but also the physical distance making it harder to maintain the close relationship with her sister.

⁷¹⁶ Though with *Early Spring* in particular, they could also be there so that their exotism would offer a parallel to the absolute lack of variety in the protagonist's dull everyday existence.

⁷¹⁷ Yoshida Kiju notes how Ozu in his pre-war films went so far as to use clips from foreign films, and argues this was done in order to establish what the situation was elsewhere at the same time. Yoshida (1998) 2003, 26.

It is not hard to diagnose that the inter-family struggles in communication addressed earlier are the first symptoms of a crisis that will escalate to concrete physical distance, if left untreated. Ozu's films exist in a borderland between happiness and sadness, because in order for the characters to build a good future for themselves, they must give up part of the communality that constitutes their present happiness. Characters are not allowed to stay put in one moment, because every film establishes a passage of time that steadily moves forward and demands changes. By leaning on the theme of departures so prominently, the films become dramas about the watershed moments and periods of transition in otherwise mundane lives. The fact that the changes are accepted as natural does not remove the sadness brought by them. On the other hand, the passage of time also plays with people in other ways and can itself separate family members ideologically.

8.3 Ideological distance: generational gap

Ozu was a child of his generation, and he showed this by having the majority of his protagonists age alongside him. He criticised the younger generation for their quick dismissal of older people,⁷¹⁸ as well as tradition in general, and personally sided with the older folks, even if his films thrive from the balanced juxtaposition between the two. It is a globally regular phenomena for the older generation to feel that the younger generation has turned out worse than themselves, while also conveniently forgetting that they too used to be young.⁷¹⁹ The shadow of *Tokyo Story* has harmed Ozu's body of work, and people who bring up the recurring theme of a generational gap in the director's films tend to view it in negative terms. This prevents us from seeing the other side of the coin, as Ozu also uses the gap as the foundation for his humour, and his outlook, even while grounded in that of his own generation, is not subjective to a point of being narrowminded. He is biased enough to take sides, but also humane enough to acknowledge the view from the other side. This subchapter looks at the sentiments that Ozu's filmography expresses by focusing on the generational division, and how this theme is used both for comedy as well as tragedy.

Though they clearly view the present to be very unlike the past, most Ozu films come to realise that people now are not different from how they used to be. Otane in *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* gains this understanding by the end of the film. Donald Richie argues that:

‘Ozu shows in his films both the natural reluctance of the old to let go of the young and the natural impatience of the young to be rid of the old. He is not,

⁷¹⁸ Joo 2017, 194. From a 1958 interview.

⁷¹⁹ Leinonen 1959, 125.

however, interested in comparing the virtues of the one with the shortcomings of the other. What Ozu chronicles, rather, is the impossibility of accord.⁷²⁰

The generational gaps in Ozu's family depictions do not exist because one generation is different from the other. They exist because people act, behave, and exist differently during different stages of life. Today's older generation used to be like the younger generation, and so too will the younger generation start to resemble their predecessors. Some adjustments will be made to the system, but the core will remain similar. Only a few actors appeared both in early and late Ozu films, but those who did perfectly display the effect age has on individuals. Tanaka Kinuyo played a modern girl and a gangster's girlfriend in *Dragnet Girl* (1933), a wife of a soldier in *A Hen in the Wind* (1948), and a keeper of the flame for Japanese traditional marriage in *The Munekata Sisters* (1950), before her final Ozu appearance in *Equinox Flower* (1958), as a housewife with a conservative mind-set and a mother of nearly adult children. Ryû Chishû matured from a free-spirited schoolboy into the dominant father and grandfather archetype of Ozu's post-war films. In a sense, the tragedy of families not seeing eye to eye has a comical reason: they cannot all be young or old simultaneously.

Viewing Ozu's filmography as a whole allows us to see another comical double standard. Ozu's early filmography included a variety of different kinds of films, including nonsense comedies and gangster films, in which characters behaved according to the genres. Ozu's post-war filmography is much more coherent in terms of style and does not burst over the side with its characters. Nearly all of the post-war films include older characters complaining about how the nation's youth has turned out, and how they themselves used to be different. Yet the youth in these films are polished and polite, even if they do possess differing views on Japanese tradition. Examining Ozu's pre-war films in this light points out a meta joke that was probably unintended: Japan's youth used to be much wilder and coarser than anything the post-war generation has to offer, because the filmmaker crafting this vision of youth was young himself. While Ozu acknowledged the new type of acting represented by Ishihara Yûjirô, it was the sanitised Sada Keiji who was crafted into Ozu's vision of younger, post-war masculinity.⁷²¹ Thus we can see that the generational gap could be a much more significant issue in these films, and even with this theme the characters are shown as searching for harmonious co-existence.

One of the most interesting variations of the 'older generation/younger generation' -argument is a conversation between two wives in *Late Autumn*. They discuss, how things used to be much simpler, and Nobuko (Miyake Kuniko)

⁷²⁰ Richie 1974, 69.

⁷²¹ Joo 2017, 195.

encapsulates the modern tastes by saying: ‘Nowadays they listen to rockabilly and that Presley’.⁷²² The fact that an Ozu film mentions Elvis existing is other-worldly enough, but what makes the scene so fascinating is the playful tone, the tolerant sentiment expressed by it. Ozu is fine with Elvis. The older generation remembers when they used to be on the side of modern innovations, when they used to root for the new forms of culture. Ozu shows his audience his own amusement about the tables now being turned. He is very much okay with his own generation (himself included) not ‘getting Elvis’, as each generation has its own version of modern culture, which partly gets to define them as individuals.

Though the comical variants of the generational gap tend to come up more often, we must still consider the seriousness with which Ozu tackles the subject in *Tokyo Story*. The audience can make different deductions about the extent of the children’s carelessness towards their parents. There is always some level of bad timing involved: Koichi (Yamamura Sô) gets called to work which is understood to be important as he is a doctor, and Shige as an entrepreneur has to take care of her business. Yet the film also provides quiet condemnation, and hints that they are using work as an excuse. Koichi forbids his wife to go on with the plans he had for the parents, and Shige’s beauty parlour is shown to have another worker – and only one customer. Shige also actively wants to get rid of them and pitches a scheme about sending them to the hot springs in Atami, where they would not have to take care of them. The scheme backfires though, as the children pick a cheap, noisy place from which the parents quickly return. As the hot springs sequence begins, the parents seem happy and smilingly acknowledge that they put their children through extra expense, as if sending them there had been an act of compassion. Ozu also makes a wink to the audience about the old couple’s reluctance to admit what their children are like, by having the father remark how calm the sea is, and immediately cutting to an image of the sea, which is really not that calm: the children are really not that nice.

The audience is then led to wonder why the children behave this way towards their parents. From a melodramatic point of view, the reason would seem to be that they could not know this was their last chance to spend time with their mother. In modern Japan, elderly people are often viewed in negative and stereotypical ways and the subjective experience of the elderly is not given proper consideration.⁷²³ According to Ozu, the intention he and Noda had was not to make the audience cry,

⁷²² *Late Autumn* (1960), timecode: 13.00–13.40.

⁷²³ Orpett Long 2011, 60. This also has to do with the aging of the population being viewed as a social problem for all of Japan.

but to display the parent-child relationship as it is, without denying or affirming it.⁷²⁴ The 1953 film also finds contemporary societal reasons and points at Tokyo as a place that creates a competitive mentality which turns people cold, with the film serving as a warning. This is most visible in Shige's embarrassment over her parents, as she tells her clientele that they are just friends visiting from the countryside. In accordance with Confucian tradition, it is common for Japanese, also those in Ozu's films, to have a public persona/face (*soto-zura*) and one shared within the home sphere (*uchi-zura*), but Shige goes beyond this.⁷²⁵ In order to fit in amidst the Tokyoites, she comes to deny her country -roots, further showing the way the metropolis blanks the slate of people's identities. This denial sets up the pieces for the comical punishment she receives later on when her drunken father arrives at her place in the dead of night, whether he be welcome or not. It is a case of roots coming back with a vengeance. While *Tokyo Story* is a great work, the enormous fame⁷²⁶ it enjoys also casts shadows over the rest of Ozu's post-war filmography, and I would argue it is important to keep in mind that it is not descriptive of Ozu's Japanese families in general, but more so an exception. In other films, characters do offer serious consideration to the happiness of people around them, even though the theme of loneliness is also a common one.

Tokyo Story also shows an even larger gap between two generations, using the visiting grandparents and the two grandsons. The older, Minoru (Murase Zen), is going through a very angsty phase, which sets a barrier between them. The grandmother, Tomi, gets only the younger boy Isamu (Môri Mitsuhiro) to accompany her on a walk, and in a famous sequence offers an unanswered rhetorical monologue that asks what the boy will grow up to be – and whether she will be there to see it. Jack Lichten highlights the way Tomi acknowledges her own mortality, and how her interactions with others are guided by this understanding.⁷²⁷ He points out this is to be a stark contrast to her children, who only live for the present.⁷²⁸ In his analysis of the work, film scholar David Desser considers that by cutting from the scene to the image of the grandfather sitting alone, Ozu may be suggesting the same fate (old age, loneliness,

⁷²⁴ Joo 2017, 174. This comment was made when he received a Japanese Art Festival prize for the film.

⁷²⁵ Orpett Long, 2011, 61.

⁷²⁶ Yoshida Kiju (2003, 87) goes so far as to say that 'everybody agrees that this is Ozu-san's best work', and while this is not completely accurate, it does speak volumes about the special place of the film within Ozu's body of work.

⁷²⁷ Lichten 2015, 157.

⁷²⁸ Lichten 2015, 160.

disappointment) awaits the young boy down the line.⁷²⁹ Through the interactions – or lack of interactions – the film gives attention to the obstacles between human beings. Some relate to our behaviour and could be changed, but the famous sequence crystallises that the essence of time cannot be altered. It is then, one of the purest and oft-cited examples of *mono no aware* in all of Ozu. While applying theory by Henri Bergson, Jack Lichten has compared *Tokyo Story* to Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961): the passage of time and presence of death serve the creation of an authentic self in Ozu's works, while the Resnais film displays what happens in their absence, 'total breakdown in the formation of any self'.⁷³⁰ Ozu's filmography does indeed highlight how quickly time goes by, and uses this as a narrative element to frame the character networks and motivate the storylines. Furthermore, the passage of time is looked at with deep historical consideration and the people depicted in Ozu's films carry a silent understanding of Japan's recent history, which affects their personalities and helps them bond with people who are of the same generation. By bringing up the national past in conversation, the characters can better understand the present moment, and the direction of society.

8.4 Historical distance: memories of war

The memories of war, or the lack of them for the very young, contribute to the generational gap but more importantly function as watersheds for the people to reflect on their past. This awareness of historical distance not only affects the way characters treat each other, but also the way they function as individuals in the present, and what their outlooks for the future are like.⁷³¹ Despite being drafted twice, making two films in between, and then being commissioned for a war -film about the Burma Campaign, Ozu never made a film depicting the war effort in present tense. The Burma film he was supposed to do would have featured many of his usual cast members and focused on the Japanese perspective including a humane depiction of ordinary soldiers.⁷³² In the post-war films, wartime exists as a shared memory, which like the pre-war offers a point of comparison to the present. For the Japanese audiences, the way the subject comes up might have seemed normal, as the films do not strive to voice opinions about the war, but simply to acknowledge it as part of

⁷²⁹ Desser 1997, 20. However, Desser also notes that whether Ozu views this repeated pattern of life to be 'bad', is more debatable. Linda C. Ehrlich (1997, 67) highlights the way the grownup Hirayama children have the habit of discussing their parents 'as if they were children who could be easily amused by some cheap trifle'. Therefore, we can also entertain the notion of a certain symmetry of life, captured by the depiction of the young alongside the old.

⁷³⁰ Lichten 2015, 154.

⁷³¹ Lichten 2015, 155.

⁷³² Joo 2017, 135.

the characters' personal history. Bordwell considers many of the elements tied to Japan's military history as serving a similar role to that of temples and kabuki: to be 'general place-holders for 'the past''.⁷³³ For foreign audiences, the way Ozu's last films treat the subject of war is a fascinating one. Frequently the older characters, usually male, share memories about the bygone days of the wartime. Many such memories seem to evoke nostalgic tendencies towards the memory of nationalism. This subchapter sets out to map the meanings these sequences of war remembrance carry within Ozu's films and how the historical distance affects their worldview.

The end of the war forced Japan to develop a new understanding of the country's recent history, including both the war and the pre-war period that had resulted to it.⁷³⁴ Historian Carol Gluck has studied how the different readings of the past clashed during the post-war decades, and argues that the concept of the past became 'a contested terrain on which other, larger battles over politics, society and culture were being fought'.⁷³⁵ The Japanese way of remembering the war has been referred to as the country's 'history problem', or 'historical consciousness problem' (*rekishi ninshiki mondai*) and criticised by countries such as China, Korea, and Russia, that suffered from the wartime atrocities.⁷³⁶ The occupation government viewed commitment to nationalist ideas and tradition as the core reason for Japan's aggressive militarism. During the occupation, many national symbols such as the *Kimigayo* anthem and the Rising Sun flag lost their official status, though neither was completely banned. After the occupation ended, the right-wing politicians called for the restoration of national pride and the return of the forbidden national symbols, including the previously religious status of the emperor.⁷³⁷ According to Hashimoto Akiko, 'the task of building a coherent story for the vanquished is at the same time a project of repairing the moral backbone of a broken society'.⁷³⁸ Thus, Japan's defeat, the cultural history of memorisation built around it, as well as personal memories are crucial in the formulation of the post-war society. Hashimoto maintains that the questions individuals struggle with are not just connected to a sense of guilt, but also to 'national belonging, the relations between the individual and the state, and relations between the living and the dead'.⁷³⁹

In Ozu's films, the wartime tends to be brought up in moments when the characters display tendencies that could be called nostalgic. The concept of *nostalgia* originates from Switzerland in 1688, and while it first meant 'homesickness' in a more physical

⁷³³ Bordwell 1988, 45.

⁷³⁴ Gluck 1993, 64.

⁷³⁵ Gluck 1993, 65.

⁷³⁶ Hashimoto 2015, 2–3.

⁷³⁷ Bouissou (1992) 2002, 86.

⁷³⁸ Hashimoto 2015, 2.

⁷³⁹ Hashimoto 2015, 2–3.

sense, it has since become a concept that refers to a longing for a time period before the present one.⁷⁴⁰ Cultural theorist Svetlana Boym has divided nostalgia into two categories: restorative and reflective.⁷⁴¹ Ozu is part of the latter. He stays far away from the politics in his fondness for tradition and does not present the restoration of the era that the characters seem nostalgic for. Instead, he uses the war as a historical watershed, a place of comparison with the contemporary. This is evident from his first post-war work, *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*, where the protagonist, Otane, is burdened by her nostalgia to the pre-war days. Both *Record* and *A Hen in the Wind* feature characters looking back at the pre-war period as a golden idyll, an unreachable place, which causes sadness in the present, because the bleak post-war reality cannot compete with the beautiful memories.⁷⁴² I would argue that the style of filmmaking, which resembles Ozu's 1930s films more than his later post-war works, contributes to this sentiment, creating a sense of continuation after a long gap. Yet, by the end of *Record*, Otane sees that the present is not that different from the past, because the humane core elements of life are still the same. Bordwell has pointed out the paradox in the post-war memory of the pre-war within Ozu's films: many of the pre-war films themselves showed this to be an era of 'misery and dashed hopes', whereas the post-war films only remember the 'innocent happiness' of it all.⁷⁴³ One could make the argument that this contrast is purposefully comedic, a trick of nostalgia performed by Ozu on his audience and their memory of the past. Then again, it might just as well be a trick, performed by the passage of time – on Ozu himself.

The immediate post-war – which Ozu captured fresh in *Record* and *Hen* – gets mentioned sometimes as well, but the sentiment is anything but fond. In *Floating Weeds*, characters note that they last met during 'the hard times just after the war ended'. According to Gluck, the way in which a particular time in history gets inspected changes in the light of the present, as 'national history is also ideology – a past imagined in the context of national identity'.⁷⁴⁴ She argues that although public memory is hegemonic, it is not singular.⁷⁴⁵ This is true for Ozu. In his later films, the pre-war, the wartime, and the immediate post-war tied to the period of economic growth that followed, work almost as three different entities in the communal

⁷⁴⁰ Draaisma 2013, 135–136. The term was coined by Johannes Hofer in his medical dissertation.

⁷⁴¹ Boym (2001) 2018, 233. As opposed to rebuilding the past, reflective nostalgia is about 'longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance'.

⁷⁴² According to Boym, nostalgia as a historical emotion is the longing for a shrinking 'space of experience' that does not fit the new horizon of expectations anymore. Boym (2001) 2018, 225.

⁷⁴³ Bordwell 1988, 42.

⁷⁴⁴ Gluck 1993, 65.

⁷⁴⁵ Gluck 1993, 65.

memory that is related to us. The characters gaze into the past to look at where they, as individuals and as a nation, are in the present. On the individual level, many characters express regret or disappointment, but on a national one, the sentimentality is often humorous, as if the films were amused by the confusion that the rapid modernisation evokes in the characters' minds.⁷⁴⁶ Boym has noted nostalgic manifestations to be 'side effects of the teleology of progress', and Ozu voices a similar sentiment.⁷⁴⁷ The individuals acknowledge that time goes on at a faster pace than themselves but find comfort in the shared reminiscing that sews their personal history back together with the historical developments.

According to Lars-Martin Sorensen, the prevailing narrative that characterises the relationship between Japan and the United States during the occupation has been to cast Japan as 'good losers' and Americans as 'good winners': a simplistic view that Sorensen criticises.⁷⁴⁸ It would take time for Ozu to give focus to the subject of war, and when he did from the mid-1950s on, the sentiments expressed by these sequences were complex in their tone. The most famous scene of war remembrance within these films is an oft-discussed moment from *An Autumn Afternoon*, when Hirayama meets an old army buddy Sakamoto (Katô Daisuke) in a noodle shop. They go to a bar and end up discussing Japan's defeat. A somewhat drunken Sakamoto argues that whereas Japan's young people are now imitating American culture, it would have been the other way around, had Japan won the war. Having heard his argument, Hirayama states that maybe it is a good thing that Japan lost, thus rebutting that their nostalgic sentiments would, in Boym's terms, be restorative. An old military march starts playing from the jukebox, and Sakamoto starts marching around the room while he and Hirayama exchange military salutes (**Graphic 8.2 and 8.3**). Though this could easily be viewed as a conservative moment that celebrates Japanese militarism, it can also be interpreted as ironic in the way it shows drunken ex-soldiers seeking comfort from the memory of nationalism. The scene acknowledges the memory of the war and does not judge the characters for looking back positively, but it also shows them – as well as their nation – at a stage where they can have a better understanding of history.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁶ Egyptologist Jan Assmann (2011, 6) has written about the merging categories of 'communicative' and 'cultural' memory. According to Assmann, a person's consciousness and memory are formulated through social interactions with others. In Ozu's films, historical memory is clearly displayed as a communicative, cultural process that gets its form from the characters reflecting on the past together.

⁷⁴⁷ Boym (2001) 2018, 225.

⁷⁴⁸ Sorensen 2009, 15.

⁷⁴⁹ Yoshida Kiju (2003, 140–141) has likewise maintained that the acting in the scene is 'too nonsensical and silly to portray nostalgic feelings toward the war'. For Yoshida, the goal of the scene is to show that 'human history is shallow and uncertain and that the world is filled with unreasonable chaos'.



Graphic 8.2 & Graphic 8.3. *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962). The lengthy sequence in which old soldiers exchange military salutes in a bar. (Screenshots by the author).

The characters are allowed to celebrate the surface of history, because we are all in agreement that the ideological motivation for that history no longer resonates with their national feeling. Veterans, regardless of nationality, are often reluctant to talk about what they witnessed firsthand during their service, often explaining that people who were not there could not understand.⁷⁵⁰ This is visible in the way that Hirayama

⁷⁵⁰ Hashimoto 2015, 30.

does not disclose much of his own military history, which leaves it for the audience's imagination: Hirano Kyoko has viewed this as a similarity between the character and the director.⁷⁵¹ Like the school reunions, the army reunions are used to build contrast and parallels between characters. Katô Daisuke performs a similar role as he previously did as another army buddy in *Early Spring*: he adds contrast to the main character with the way things turned out for him. The character is more working-class, but also has a happy home life, and though younger than the protagonist Hirayama, is about to become a grandfather.⁷⁵²

Overall, dealing with the more traumatic side of the war experience took its time, and war memoirs became more common in Japan from the 1980s on.⁷⁵³ Still, the tone of the memories we hear from Ozu's men can be perplexing. In the army reunion of *Early Spring*, the veteran (also named Sakamoto) smilingly recalls a time when the group killed a dog and made sukiyaki. His comrade (again named Hirayama) remembers how good it tasted and claims he has not tasted anything that matches it after returning home. A third soldier offers a criticism, stating: 'You just think that. If you tried it now, you'd never be able to swallow it!'⁷⁵⁴ This shows, how time makes memories appear rose-coloured, though a moment later the group quiets down to consider how lucky they were to make it out alive, unlike some of their buddies. Conquered Asian locations and colonial cities get referenced in the post-war films, and it has been noted that the Japanese perspective in which this happens sets out to examine the crisis of the post-war society, as opposed to Ozu's personal opinion about the war.⁷⁵⁵ In *The Munekata Sisters*, characters remark about having last met in Manchuria, again with smiles on their faces. This relays how, for the common people, the country's colonial period might seem like just another moment in history, the memories of which carry no unpleasant aftertaste. This is very much in line with the ending of *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family*, where moving to Manchuria includes no political considerations. Ozu also makes fun of masculine nostalgia for the war. In *Early Spring*, after witnessing the former soldiers returning home drunk, Masako gives her opinion about their vulgarity: 'With soldiers like that,

⁷⁵¹ Hirano 2011, 4–5. Joo (2017, 147) makes the case that a moment that signalled the end of the war as well as a brand-new era for Ozu, was when he destroyed the screenplay and the footage he had shot in Singapore, viewing it unsuitable for the new times.

⁷⁵² Igarashi Yoshikuni (2021, 31) notes that while in the pre-war decades there had been a 'psychological rift' between the privileged salaried men and the less fortunate blue-collar workers, the rift 'grew less salient' after both groups shared together the hardships brought by the war and the immediate post-war years.

⁷⁵³ Hashimoto 2015, 30. Carol Gluck (1993, 85) however notes, that even decades later the Japanese did not ask their older generation the German question 'What did you do during the war, father?'

⁷⁵⁴ *Early Spring* (1956), timecode: 57.30.

⁷⁵⁵ Joo 2017, 139. He says this in relation to Yonaha Jun's previous arguments.

it's no wonder that Japan lost the war.⁷⁵⁶ Maejima (Hori Yûji), the guy who tends the bar in *The Munekata Sisters*, was a kamikaze pilot during the war, and this gets referenced a few times.⁷⁵⁷ It might be a comment about the quick societal transformation within the last five years, or the joke might just be that a person can indeed be 'ex-kamikaze'.

Besides the endless flow of army and school reunions, there is also a feminine nostalgia that gets a presentation within Ozu's films. The gender divide of nostalgia is perhaps best presented by the scene in *Equinox Flower*, where Wataru and Kiyoko are spending a sunny day at a lakeshore. The parents are sitting on a bench while the two daughters are rowing a boat. There is a sudden understanding that this may be the final time they are all together, if their elder daughter gets married. Kiyoko hints that it is because of the husband's work – and other things like golf – that they do not often get to spend time like this. She remembers the wartime when they all had to stay in an air-raid shelter. Although she hated the war, the time is a warm memory because of the togetherness shared by the family. Wataru thinks differently and does not remember the wartime fondly, as there was a shortage of everything.⁷⁵⁸ The scene encapsulates well, how a family can drift apart even while living in the same house. It also shows the different worldview of Wataru and Kiyoko. He is more concerned with the economic well-being of his family unit, whereas she concentrates on the emotional aspects. The scene ends with the parents waving at the daughters, who have already rowed far from them.

Characters like Kyoko and Otane from *Record* show that gender affects the nostalgia experienced by characters, but eventually everyone will get nostalgic in Ozu's cinematic world. Women are shown to look at the past in terms of their family and the shared closeness, while men attempt to focus on the bonds between the men who served. Both men and women reach out for the past to mend the distances that have formed in the present. The way men view themselves as 'competent soldiers who fought gallantly' is also a defence mechanism and a way to adapt into the peacetime.⁷⁵⁹ It would take time for Japanese cinema to give attention to the horrors of war, and even then, it was hardly the job for a humanist like Ozu.⁷⁶⁰ His films do

⁷⁵⁶ *Early Spring* (1956), timecode: 1.14.05.

⁷⁵⁷ *The Munekata Sisters* (1950), timecode: 1.13.45 – 1.15.31. It is always Mariko who makes a reference to this past, possibly due to her own careless behaviour.

⁷⁵⁸ Igarashi Yoshkuni (2021, 4) has also noted that concentrating on the post-war society's economic success and newly gained access to mass-produced goods has been a strategy for Japan to distance itself from the difficult war legacies and memory of the post-war destruction.

⁷⁵⁹ Hashimoto 2015, 45

⁷⁶⁰ For the way Japanese cinema treated the trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, see: Broderick 1996.

not downplay the effects that war – and other hardships suffered in the past – have had on the characters, but the films try to treat the subject with care and respect. The moments in which the characters recall things from the past show these individuals as more philosophical than normal, even if Ozu and Noda manage this through highly mundane dialogue.⁷⁶¹ The war is merely one of the categories that defines the characters' sense of national history, and in the next subchapter, we will look at how funerals and memorials form another personal way to reflect on the past.

8.5 Unmendable distance: funerals and melancholia

The final form of distance I am going to explore in this chapter is also the most dramatic: death. In the following, I enumerate the ways in which death affects Ozu's depiction of the Japanese family system, and how it leads the characters to reflect on their existence and communal ties. The Japanese have a different way of looking at dying and the deceased than do most Western nations. Dead family members are still part of the family, present in Ozu's family depictions through living characters mentioning them. Usually there is at least one such family member. In *Late Spring* it is Noriko's mother,⁷⁶² in *Tokyo Story* Noriko's husband, in *Tokyo Twilight* the older brother of the two sisters who died in a mountain climbing accident. They are treated with respect, they are missed, but there is also a comforting element to being dead, since the troubles of the living no longer concern you, and the people whose lives continue remember you fondly. The act of remembrance carries communal meanings and brings the living closer together. This is most clearly present in the memorial anniversaries kept for the deceased. *Late Autumn* begins with a character's seventh memorial, at which the other characters marvel at how fast time goes on and express the pleasure of seeing each other again. Whereas the meanings attached to the ceremony are positive in this film, *Early Spring* shows how such a date can also be a cause of sadness. Masako is mad that her husband forgot the anniversary of their son's death, and Masako's mother notes that she too forgets her husband's memorial sometimes. The *Early Summer* family has a son who was lost during the war: the father has given up hope that he might show up, but the mother still holds on to this hope.

⁷⁶¹ Svetlana Boym argues nostalgia to be 'an intermediary between collective and individual memory'. Boym (2001) 2018, 246.

⁷⁶² In the original synopsis of *Late Spring* that Ozu and Noda pitched, the whole reason for the visit to Kyoto was that the mother's grave was located there, but this got removed from the final film possibly because the censors viewed this kind of dedication to ancestors as a tie to Japan's feudal past. Sorensen 2009, 149.

The way death is viewed in a culture is also strongly tied to religion. As in any society, religion carries important meanings in Japan, many of which are self-evident for the native people and easily unnoticeable for foreigners. Sato Tadao has gone so far as to argue that the most confusing aspect of Japanese culture for foreigners is the simultaneous presence of Shinto and Buddhism.⁷⁶³ Robin Wood notes that religious knowledge can enhance the viewing of an Ozu work but is not required to understand them: he cites the Shinto and Buddhist imagery in *Floating Weeds* as a prime example.⁷⁶⁴ It is important to note that while nothing in Ozu's films makes them feel deeply religious, religion is often aligned with the concept of tradition. I would argue that it greatly benefits the viewer if they are aware of the basic principles of Japan's religions. Just like having a wider understanding of the trends, currents, and genres of Japanese cinema, or Japan's history as a nation, it helps us narrow and separate what truly is the essence of Ozu, his contribution to that which already existed: religion is a key part in the cultural contextualisation, even if it need not be a key element of the scholarly writing. The traditional family dynamics follow the Confucian rules of loyalty⁷⁶⁵, and the way Ozu re-constructs these patterns for the modern times, is what makes the films recognisable.

The depiction of religious practises is absent from many films altogether, as careless approaches to the subject within the body of secular entertainment or artworks could be viewed as offensive by some people. For example, home altars are common in Japan, but rarely visible in Ozu's films: the reason they have been left out might be courtesy, to respect the privacy of the fictional characters. In *Tokyo Twilight*, after Akiko has died, we see the father kneel before the altar with her picture to pray silently, which is clearly shown as a very private moment. The moments that evoke religion in Ozu's films overall often deal with death and funerals, as funeral practises are globally governed by religious customs. Japan's twentieth century way of arranging funerals and remembering the dead through memorials, may seem like it is springing from ancient tradition, but is a fairly new cultural development. According to historian Fabian Drixler, elaborate funeral rituals were extremely rare in Japan between the seventh and the seventeenth

⁷⁶³ Sato 1981, 15.

⁷⁶⁴ Wood 1998, 96–97. 'A knowledge of the culture is important as a safeguard against demonstrable error, but in the last resort critics must trust their own perceptions, their own sense of relatedness to the works.'

⁷⁶⁵ Robert N. Bellah (2003, 201) argues that Confucianism has almost nowhere in East Asia managed to distance itself from its involvement with the old regime, and that nowadays Confucianism is often tied to right-wing politics. Yet with Ozu the more Confucian aspects of his films seem to work on a more general, apolitical footing, which highlights the cultural over the ideological.

centuries, due to people being afraid of the dead.⁷⁶⁶ Corpses were considered repulsive, and the locations of graves were often forgotten. The change came gradually when Japan started instituting Buddhist funeral culture for the deceased, and Funerary Buddhism also introduced the idea of the living making a benefactory alliance with the dead.⁷⁶⁷ The ritual remembrance has thereafter thought to bring good luck and rewards in life. This also made it important for the family lines to continue, as the older members died and joined the other side, requiring living kin to remember them.⁷⁶⁸

The connection between weddings and funerals in Ozu's framing of the Japanese continuity has often been observed by the critics. Kathe Geist postulates that the weddings in these films show a daughter symbolically die as her old self and get reborn into her husband's family: she likewise points out how the films present marriage and death in connection to the trains in these films, as stations upon life's journey.⁷⁶⁹ Usually, the actual deaths in Ozu's films are natural, and take place near the end of the film just like the weddings, with the dying person being an elderly character, such as the mother in *Tokyo Story*, or the patriarch in *The End of Summer*.⁷⁷⁰ These moments bring the characters together and set the atmosphere for the existential questions that are in everybody's mind. Death is shown to be a natural, accepted reality of life, but one that still causes sadness in the characters that are meant to be viewed positively. Death works as a watershed in the lives of these individuals, and instead of death itself being the saddest thing, death allows us to see the sadness surrounding it. In *Tokyo Story*, death points to both the previous times that the children could have been kinder to their mother, as well as times to come, when the father will be lonely as a widower. It does not seem to cause people to change. In *Tokyo Story*, the children make their decisions to return to Tokyo very suddenly, leaving the father behind. *The End of Summer* parallels this very closely by having Sugimura Haruko play the sister of The Old Master, who quickly announces she will return to Nagoya if her brother, the stroke -victim, will not die after all. Joan Mellen has called *The End of Summer* 'Ozu's most historically resonant film' as it displays 'the inextricable relationship between the economic structure of the society and social institutions like the family'.⁷⁷¹ Overall, death is then not quite so sad as the meaningless nature of life, or the hectic pace that stops us from seeing the valuable things in life before it is too late.

⁷⁶⁶ Drixler 2019, 80.

⁷⁶⁷ Drixler 2019, 81.

⁷⁶⁸ Drixler 2019, 82.

⁷⁶⁹ Geist 1989, 45 & 50.

⁷⁷⁰ Deaths constituting moments of clarity, Hasumi Shigehiko (1997, 125) has stated that in Ozu's films, 'the elderly, without exception, breathe their last on a fine day'.

⁷⁷¹ Mellen 1976, 329.

More often than not, death is not an immediate cause of sadness, but a surprise that makes the characters ponder the limited nature of one's existence.⁷⁷² In the beginning of *The Munekata Sisters*, we learn that the father has stomach cancer, and is going to die within the next year. Yet death manages to surprise us, as the father does not die in the film, and instead the middle-aged husband Ryosuke does. The father, we learn, is made extremely sad by it being this way round, since the younger man still had plenty to live for, the tragedy of the character thus being his inability to understand this himself. Miura's suicide in *Early Spring* comes as a surprise since he claimed to be feeling good the previous night. The death is made sadder by the man being in his early thirties, with his mother outliving him and being now completely without sons. Miura's wake is a traditional, quiet affair, with only close relatives and good friends, like the protagonist Sugiyama. The only other suicide in Ozu's post-war films is that of Akiko in *Tokyo Twilight*, it being the other dark melodrama by the director. This one is the more shocking, since Akiko is a central character in the film, and the reasoning behind her solution is made clearer for the audience. Not only has she been forced to have an under-aged abortion, but she has also found out that her own biological mother is not dead, as she thought, but instead just left the family when Akiko was a young child.

The suicides of Miura and Akiko are among the most shocking elements in Ozu's films, and they also carry the most transparently didactic social criticism. *Early Spring* criticises the hectic working life that neglects basic human needs and turns people into wrecks, while *Tokyo Twilight* shows how a cold society provides a poor environment for children to grow up in. You could also see them as 'genre markers' added to register the films as melodramas, but then again Ozu hardly had genre-defining frames on his mind while making the films. More than other works by the director, *Tokyo Twilight* feels like a film, where death is lurking around the corner, waiting in a sinister manner. Partly it is because, especially upon a subsequent viewing, we know we are witnessing the final days in Akiko's life. Throughout the film, we see characters in hunched positions, which creates a sense of mourning. Miyao Daisuke has also found a recurring motif of surveillance, enforced by the frequent inclusion of whiteness and white objects in the film. According to him, similarly to Ozu's more gloomy silent films *That Night's Wife*, *Dragnet Girl*, and *An Inn in Tokyo*, this melodrama highlights white objects to foreshadow Akiko's tragic ending. Some examples are the white mask worn by the police officer questioning her, the white ad for eyeglasses that seems to be watching her, as well as the white

⁷⁷² David Desser (1997, 7) also points out Ozu's practise of using 'dramatic ellipsis', that further increase the element of surprise for the character deaths: in *Tokyo Story*, we do not see the old couple arriving in Osaka or the beginning of the mother's illness, but instead learn about them after the fact, second-hand through the children.

electric light in the otherwise dark streets.⁷⁷³ According to Miyao, whiteness is linked to the feeling of modernity, and modernity itself is shown to include increased governmental surveillance.⁷⁷⁴ The colour white has strong connotations in Japanese culture. It is associated with death, as all-white kimonos are reserved for corpses, and actors portraying ghosts.⁷⁷⁵ It works as the opposite to the bright red, Ozu's favourite colour, which was so central in his next film, the much-lighter *Equinox Flower*. In *Tokyo Twilight*, the more Akiko tries to conceal her problems, the more she feels she is being watched, which makes her drift faster towards the great whiteness of death.

Deaths of older family members also mark the transfer of responsibility to the next generation. This is most directly shown to us in *The Munekata Sisters*. We know that the father, who is an embodiment of Japanese tradition, is going to die within a year. His two daughters are the traditional Setsuko and the modern Mariko. We come to understand that the direction of the nation will, in a short while, be determined by these younger generations. The film does not paint either sister in a negative light, but instead shows them in constant interaction where they voice different opinions and try to influence the other's actions. The final scene shows them walking together in near-harmony, thus relaying how contemporary Japan must listen to both voices in its cultural self-determination. The memorial of *Late Autumn* feels like a moment, when characters otherwise tied by their modern existence, take leave from modern-day hustle, in order to come together and remember a shared loved one. In this environment, next to monks and priests, the Ozu characters look very secular indeed. Characters arrive late and mid-ceremony for various reasons and spend most of the time talking about food. The mother and daughter, played by Hara Setsuko and Tsukasa Yoko, remain mostly silent, creating at least some semblance of devotion to tradition.⁷⁷⁶

Fabian Drixler uses Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' to describe the way the Japanese picture the union between the living and the dead.⁷⁷⁷ One could certainly apply this to the way Ozu presents Japan, though most of the time the topic is left undiscussed. Joo has called Noriko's apartment in *Tokyo Story* a 'memorial space'⁷⁷⁸ and as Noriko is portrayed as a kind character, we understand her to still have a strong emotional connection to her late husband, even though she confesses that sometimes long periods of time go by without her thinking about him.

⁷⁷³ Miyao 2012, 21-23.

⁷⁷⁴ Miyao 2012, 21-23.

⁷⁷⁵ Dalby 2001, 165.

⁷⁷⁶ *Late Autumn* (1960), 03.00–08.00. Furthermore, the Saburi character later complains that the sutra recital went on for too long.

⁷⁷⁷ Drixler 2019, 85.

⁷⁷⁸ Joo 2017, 180.

Though we do not get to see the death scene of The Old Master in *The End of Summer*, we are told second-hand that his last words were ‘So this is the end’, said twice.⁷⁷⁹ The Sugimura character of the film even laughs at the simpleness of these final words. Soon after however, we are hit with the finality of death, by the score intensifying and the characters collectively looking at the chimney of a crematorium, with the smoke indicating that nothing is left of the family patriarch. Many films, most notably *An Autumn Afternoon*, feature shots of empty rooms and spaces, where family members used to be but are no longer. *Late Autumn* ends with a shot depicting an empty corridor outside the widowed mother’s apartment: Ozu wrote in the screenplay that he wanted the final shot to be ‘lonely with no people’.⁷⁸⁰ This paints parallels between characters who have died and ones who have otherwise left the lives of the main characters. In either case, separation is the major cause of sadness, and death marks the ultimate distance that eventually will separate these characters from each other.

Ozu’s films usually begin from an established communality and the dramatic substance of these narratives is drawn from the corrosion this communality faces as the film goes on. The concept of distance is therefore a practical tool to analyse the direction these families are shown to travel, even though it is shown to manifest itself in different forms and phases. No two family- conflicts are exactly alike, but the generational sentiments and the expected life patterns do govern them, and as narrative motifs build cohesion out of divisions. While depicting inter-family problems and social stumbling blocks, Ozu is never hopeless, even if the conclusions are not always happy ones. The films give rise to a sentiment that human beings can affect the way their social relationships are maintained, even while showing us characters who are not successful in this sense. By constantly reminding the audience that life will inevitably come to an end, they offer criticism about the small quarrels and passive behaviour that separate living people from one another. Ozu shows that much can be mended between people who act considerately towards each other and criticises people who let stupid reasons keep them apart. Eventually, everything will come to an end, and therefore wasted time registers as especially tragic within Ozu’s body of work.

⁷⁷⁹ Mellen (1976, 326) among others has interpreted the death of the patriarch as symbolising the death of the institution of Japanese family.

⁷⁸⁰ Yoshida (1998) 2003, 135.

9 Ozu in the changing film industry

By analysing family and gender roles, the chapters of this study have inspected how Ozu renegotiates these categories by mixing elements from Japan's past and its contemporary present. This final chapter focuses on the cultural clash between old and new and strives to discover what is left when all is said and done. I begin by painting the contrast between modernised Tokyo and traditional Japan, and study how Ozu uses the spatial dimension to build a narrative through comparisons. I then move the discussion to the changing film culture of the post-war decades and the new generation of filmmakers, focusing on their reactions to Ozu and Ozu's subsequent influence. While Ozu was viewed as old-fashioned by the generation that followed, his last films also commented upon this through the curious strategy of remaking earlier narratives. For the purposes of *contemporary individualism*, these re-workings offer crucial evidence about the central themes and messages of Ozu's oeuvre. Finally, I consider the sentiments we are left with by Ozu's works. Is life indeed a disappointment, a sadness that must be endured, or do the films strive to leave their audience with a glimmer of hope?

9.1 Tokyo as a changing narrative stage

As I have discussed, Ozu's career and his films cover a period of Japanese history during which great changes took place. Due to this variation, it would also be logical to suggest that Tokyo, the setting for most of his films, is not a singular entity that holds the same meanings from one decade to the next. Instead, we should consider 'the Tokyos' that Ozu presents throughout his post-war filmography, how these differing locations impact the family depiction, and how the Tokyos presented to us may differ from the rest of Japan, or 'other Japans'. In this subchapter, I look at the development of Ozu's spatial depiction and then focus on three central contrasts: poorer and wealthier environments, traditional and modern spaces, and finally Tokyo in contrast to the rest of Japan. Through these comparisons, we can better understand the cinematic stage occupied by Ozu's characters.

Ozu's pre-war filmography initially presented the Japanese capital as an excitingly modern, international stage, where fresh new winds blew from all across the world, creating a bustling environment that was very seductive for the young

generation. Due to the Kanto earthquake, Tokyo had to be largely rebuilt in the late 1920s, and thus it received a modern image that separated it from other Japanese cities. Modern buildings replaced wooden ones, public transport was introduced, and cars appeared in the street scene: new forms of entertainment also contributed to the modernisation.⁷⁸¹ Wada-Marciano Mitsuyo argues that Tokyo is not simply featured in 1930s cinema, but cinema ‘shaped the image of Tokyo in the popular imaginary’.⁷⁸²

Ozu’s early student comedies show their young individuals enjoying this space and moving fluently through it. Soon however, bleaker sides started to emerge from the unemployment of *Tokyo Chorus* and *An Inn in Tokyo* to the depressed mentality tied to class awareness in *The Only Son*, and *I Was Born, But...* The municipal commentary is minimal in the two wartime works, as *The Brothers and Sisters of Toda Family* included very little outdoor scenes and thereby very few exact locations, and *There Was a Father* largely takes place outside the capital. In the post-war era, Ozu’s first two films *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* and *A Hen in the Wind* are minimalist works set on the outskirts of the big city. Central Tokyo was the area that got hit worst by Allied bombings, so leaving it undepicted for now was a conscious decision made in accordance with SCAP censorship rules.⁷⁸³ The two films capture the sense of an unwritten future, a discomfort looming over everything: *Record* begins from an emotional state that could be called frightened on a national level. The characters are shown to be uncertain about the future. Many of them, like protagonist Otane, are downright cynical. The street scene we witness throughout *Record* and *Hen* also paints a picture about the sad state of things. According to Alastair Phillips, Japan’s defeat gave the people the feeling that Japan had failed in its modernisation, as their brand of ‘modernity gone wrong’ had caused a horrifying military conflict.⁷⁸⁴

Ozu’s characters and their living environments grew wealthier as the post-war years progressed, from the extremely poor in *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* to the relatively wealthy in *An Autumn Afternoon*, even including an occasional glimpse of characters who could be called rich, most notably in *The End of Summer*. The development echoed how the Japanese people prospered during this era. All over the world, the films made immediately after the war offered depictions of poverty, but Ozu’s filmography captures an especially quick change to wealthier characters after these initial releases. The men in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* visit a restaurant, with the humorous name ‘Calorie House’, implying how the time of

⁷⁸¹ Standish (2005) 2012, 42. Standish also refers to Sato Tadao (2000, 220).

⁷⁸² Wada-Marciano 2008, 42.

⁷⁸³ Waswo 2002, 2. Timonen 2019, 16.

⁷⁸⁴ Phillips 2006, 89.

people starving is but a memory for Japan.⁷⁸⁵ During the immediate post-war, new policies brought attention to the desires of the general population, which resulted in higher wages and standard of living: the fact that the country addressed several pressing matters such as societal injustice made the rapid economic growth possible.⁷⁸⁶ Up to a point, Ozu switching his main focus to a more upper-middle-class Japan was a conscious decision. In an oft-quoted remark from 1951, about why his newer films did not feature the same kind of people and city landscapes than his pre-war films did, Ozu stated: ‘I have become less affectionate towards those people living there than I used to be. In the past, they were not as cold-hearted as now.’⁷⁸⁷ Both *Record* and *Hen* documented the struggle to get by for the Japanese poor, while also showing the relationship between poverty and emotional coldness. It should, however, be noted that after 1951 Ozu made several films about people who are clearly working-class, such as *Tokyo Story*, *Early Spring*, and *Good Morning*, even if protagonists of extreme poverty were no longer to be found.⁷⁸⁸

Though often subtle about it, the films also cast light on the economic inequality in Japan. *Tokyo Twilight*’s main family, that of a banker, lives a comfortable life, but while the daughter Takako visits her mother, we clearly see that she lives in a poorer neighbourhood, where she has to work for a living by running a *mah-jong* parlour. The moralising views about economic status held by the characters are also included in the films, though usually relayed silently with facial expressions. Several Ozu films are structured to feature the family of the protagonists being wealthy, but to also include poorer characters that are met once or twice in order to establish comparisons. Usually, these kinds of meetings are moments when the lead character is facing an emotional crisis. After confiding or analysing their own problems out loud, they are followed by the poorer characters sharing their more severe economic problems and possible envy of the protagonists. Scenes like this can be found in nearly all post-war Ozu films, and for several reasons. It can be argued that Ozu is issuing social criticism against the petit-bourgeois and their narrow, self-centred mindset. Often these are meetings between guys who used to be in the army together: the scenes show how socio-economic contrasts have formed between men, who used

⁷⁸⁵ The food shortage was made worse by a drop in rice production that was caused by bad weather, as well as Japan no longer being able to obtain food from Korea or Manchuria. In the spring of 1946, American officials began transporting food to the country, which helped them avoid mass starvation. Hane 2001, 366.

⁷⁸⁶ Hein 1993, 103.

⁷⁸⁷ Joo 2017, 167.

⁷⁸⁸ Joan Mellen (1976, 37) has made the argument that Noriko of *Tokyo Story* lives in ‘extreme poverty’, as she even has to borrow the cups with which she offers sake to the visiting in-laws. I would argue that Noriko’s situation is not quite so serious, but through her the film strives to show, how it can be difficult for a woman without a husband to make ends meet, even when she has a job.

to be in equal situations during their military service, and how the past generation has scattered in different directions. Yet, as the films are not otherwise accusatory of the more privileged, it most likely is the narrative's way of portraying that all individuals are plagued by their individual issues. Even once the basic requirements of living have been successfully met, emotional issues of some sort will appear. In Ozu's world, money cannot buy happiness. Neither can the criticism of the wealthy be pinpointed as criticism of Tokyo, as many of Ozu's wealthier characters live elsewhere and Tokyo is shown as a hectic place full of busy working-class people.⁷⁸⁹

Late Spring's main characters live in Kamakura, but commute to Tokyo on a regular basis. From this film on, Ozu would drift in and out of the area, with Tokyo itself often being used to create comparisons between the traditional and the modern. For Woojeong Joo, the contrast between traditional environments and modern Tokyo is the central aspect of post-war Ozu, and these two should be considered in contrast to one another in order to 'reflect on the postwar Japan as a defeated nation and critique her state of modernity'.⁷⁹⁰ Tokyo is the stage that was most heavily associated with the reality of post-war Japan (as well as the occupation), whereas other Japanese cities like Kyoto or Nara presented the chance of escapism.⁷⁹¹ Lars-Martin Sorensen has observed that in *Late Spring*, Ozu introduces Tokyo with an establishing shot of the Hattori building, which just so happened to be the place where the SCAP film censors resided, linking the impurity of Tokyo to the presence of the occupiers.⁷⁹² Bordwell takes a more optimistic stance and argues that the traditional imagery of *Late Spring* is meant to show how 'Japanese tradition can be reconciled with the new liberalism of the Occupation era'.⁷⁹³ Just as the city of Tokyo evolves, so does Ozu's criticism of the Tokyo space, which gains new flavours from the way history unwinds: although it is easy to view the occupation era as the high point, Ozu's social criticism did not start with the arrival of the occupiers, or end once they left.

Often the traditional spaces shown to us in contrast to the modern Tokyo are ones that carry religious meanings, even if the audience is not instructed to consider them in a religious sense. *Munekata Sisters* includes a short conversation about religious

⁷⁸⁹ It must again be acknowledged that Ozu's depiction of the Tokyo space has met criticism from his countrymen. Yoshida Kiju argues that while Ozu's films show images of Tokyo, the director did not possess the will to probe this city and to depict it in a realistic manner. Yoshida (1998) 2003, 9.

⁷⁹⁰ Joo 2017, 149.

⁷⁹¹ Joo 2015, 345. However, Joo (2017, 157) also brings to attention the example of Yoshimura Kôzaburô's film *Clothes of Deception* (Itsuwareru seisô, 1951), which presented opposite roles for Tokyo and Kyoto, with Tokyo painted in positive light for individual rights.

⁷⁹² Sorensen 2009, 160–162.

⁷⁹³ Bordwell 1988, 307.

buildings and statues. The old-fashioned Setsuko finds the peacefulness of Kyoto's temple area very appealing, while the more modern Mariko is bored. Setsuko notes that Mariko did seem to be impressed by the statue of Buddha, but Mariko puts this down by explaining that it was only because the statue reminded her of an acquaintance. In this scene, Ozu uses religion as a physical substitute for tradition. The younger generation is portrayed as treating tradition carelessly and not treasuring it as a part of its identity. Mariko is frustrated with Setsuko's need to see all the surrounding temples, noting: 'Why are there so many temples in Kyoto?'. Yet even the older sister does not seem religious in the spiritual sense but is instead charmed by the timeless harmony of it all. Religion is thus a built-in factor of the national identity, but one that is acknowledged in silence and does not need to be explained. One could argue that the role of religious buildings as a placeholder for tradition is supported by the shots of Christian churches in *Early Summer* and *Equinox Flower*, which imply that Ozu's interest in these buildings is not devotedly religious. Then again, it is no coincidence that *Equinox Flower* should feature a shot of the cross above St. Luke's International Hospital. Kathe Geist connects it to the ending, as forgiveness, change of heart and reformation are all specifically Christian virtues, as opposed to the stricter views on achieving enlightenment within Buddhism.⁷⁹⁴ As the essence of the films is constructed by the conflicting perspectives that subtly develop from one film to the next, religious imagery too can serve different purposes in the contextualisation of everyday life, while being open to various interpretations.

Even if the films do not directly address the spiritual effect that the traditional spaces have on the characters, we are made aware that the characters need such moments to cope with their otherwise modern existence, exemplified by Tokyo. Woojeong Joo cautions against referring to tradition as a general phenomenon, and views it as 'a historicized entity, deployed during a specific time to serve specific contemporary needs.'⁷⁹⁵ What is interesting about the usage of religion in *Late Spring* and *The Munekata Sisters* is that characters are shown to treat religion as a form of tourism. This is not part of their everyday, but a holiday, a time when they catch up with their Japanese roots.⁷⁹⁶ The *Noh* performance in *Late Spring* and the *Kabuki* performance in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* serve a similar function.

⁷⁹⁴ Geist 2022, 182.

⁷⁹⁵ Joo 2015, 343.

⁷⁹⁶ Besides communality, religion has been viewed as a sign of individuality. According to C.G. Jung, the notion of a personal relationship with God may be viewed as a way to retain one's individuality, instead of blending into the mass.⁷⁹⁶ (Jung (1957) 1960, 80.) For Ozu's characters however, the communal reasons seem to outweigh the individual meanings of religion.

Though Ozu made his one and only documentary about a Kabuki dancer⁷⁹⁷, his films are not influenced by traditional Japanese stage culture. The scenes showcasing *Noh* and *Kabuki* instead highlight the different nature of those artforms to that of cinema. Emotionally, they serve as breaks from modernity for the characters. Whereas the cinematic style of the films represents the modern, these traditional artforms present an artificial past that helps characters wind down and feel their Japanese roots. As was the case with the temples, reactions vary depending on the character and their generation's cultural preferences. The father in *Late Spring*, being an older man, sits quietly in awe, while Noriko's mind is somewhere else (**Graphic 9.1**).



Graphic 9.1. *Late Spring* (1949). The traditional arts, much like tradition itself, divide opinions amidst Ozu's characters. (Screenshot by the author).

Taeko in *Flavor* is not that into the play, and her eyes wander around the room before she leaves mid-performance. For foreign viewers, these scenes are the most distant in Ozu's films, as they are not explained in any way. The only thing relayed to us is their emotional significance (or lack of significance) for the characters, which is

⁷⁹⁷ *Kagamijishi* (The Lion Dance, 1936), about Onoe Kikugoro.

conveyed through their facial expressions, not their words. Thus, Japanese theatre as an experience is shown to be similar to visiting a temple: it is not for everybody and that is part of the charm.

As images of temples evoke a sense of traditional, one visual indicator for the modern that often gets highlighted in Ozu's depictions of Tokyo is the presence of trains, present in all the films from *Late Spring* onwards. *Late Spring* and *Equinox Flower* both begin at a train station and trains are included in the final scenes of most post-war Ozu films. The trains could be viewed as a sign of modernisation and speed, as they highlight the endlessly fast pace of the everyday experience. Then again, compared to the way many other directors depict trains, Ozu's point of view does not seem to emphasise speed, but instead the transition between characters and spaces. Trains mark the passage of time by bringing the characters together and then separating them; they are a crucial element in the networks inhabited by these people. In the conclusions of the films, trains are often a physical manifestation of the separation that the characters experience, used frequently in Ozu's marriage narratives. In *Tokyo Twilight* the younger daughter dies when she gets hit by a train, but otherwise the forms of separation are more ambiguous. The airport scene in *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* carries similar meanings, as the cast of characters wave for their friends in the plane about to take off. The beginning of *Tokyo Story* has ships signifying the old, but a train announces the arrival of the modern into this space.

The opening shots of *Tokyo Story* already paint the contrast between Tokyo and 'other Japans'. We see images from the old, restful Onomichi before the quiet afternoon is intruded into by a dark train, a physical connector to the Tokyo modernity, and the faster pace that characterises life in the metropolis. The whistle blows and seems like a shout over the silent landscape that will soon be changed by it. Near the end of the film, the whistle from the train that takes Noriko back to Tokyo drowns out the cheerful singing of schoolchildren. The first scene with the old couple shows them cosy and happy, their youngest daughter is shown to have time to care for them, and even the neighbours are kind. When the couple is turning in after their first night in Tokyo, their conversation reveals how the size of the city has surprised them: they are uncertain about the geography, and also expected their son to live closer to the centre instead of in the distant suburbs. The physical distance between Onomichi and Tokyo is used to mark the emotional distance between the generations: the parents can come to Tokyo, but it does not fix the emotional gap, as the film makes it clear that the Tokyo children do not visit the parents in Onomichi. The parents' visit is an attempt to maintain the ties that bind the extended family together, but it is not met with compassion by the children, nor considered essential.

The frequent use of the city's name in the names of Ozu's films also clearly connects Tokyo to the most melodramatic, most troubling works of Ozu's

filmography.⁷⁹⁸ The mundanely generalizing title ‘Tokyo Story’ relays the film’s narrative to the viewer as a universal, timeless tale that concerns all families, and cannot be altered, even if we want to. Joo has noted, how the inclusion of the sightseeing sequence in *Tokyo Story* further establishes that we are looking at the huge city from an outsider’s point of view.⁷⁹⁹ He also points at the contrast between the parents’ arrival, which takes considerable time and effort, and the taxi ride in the beginning of *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*. Linda C. Ehrlich has likewise summarised that despite the tour guide’s attempts to make the history of a great city accessible, the old couple can understand Tokyo ‘only as the locale of a handful of people they know’.⁸⁰⁰ Most of Ozu’s films are centred around Tokyoites, which explains the casual manner in which these characters move about in this environment. *Tokyo Story* differs from Ozu’s other post-war depictions of Tokyo in the sense that it makes the city look scary, instead of welcoming, disagreeable instead of appealing. Yet the major coldness that haunts the narrative does not stem from the faceless city, but from the careless children: the physical manifestation of the Tokyo spirit. The parents are trying to form a connection but are brushed aside. The simple reason why Tokyo starts to feel less and less homely as the film progresses, is that home is associated with family and warmth, things that the parents are unable to find there.

The way Tokyo turns people pessimistic and melancholy, as well as unloving or indifferent towards their families, was not a new drift for the director. *The Only Son* introduces *Tokyo Story*’s later storyline about an aging parent visiting a grown-up child in the capital, though in the 1936 picture, the son still clearly loves his mother, even if financial reasons make it hard for him to take care of her. *Tokyo Story* presents a generational gap impossible to ignore and equally difficult to patch together. Isolde Standish notes that although the latter film includes a sightseeing tour, it is the peripheries where ordinary people live that get emphasised: according to her, the gloomy urban landscapes are meant to serve as ‘counterimage to the idealized, but not depicted, image of the *furusato*, the rural country home’.⁸⁰¹ The longing for the nostalgic *furusato* is a common thread in Japanese culture and present in the films of many directors.⁸⁰² While Ozu still finds a great contrast between urban Tokyo and rural Japan, or at least strives to find one, the gap between these populations in the field of consumerism disappeared as the post-war economic surge

⁷⁹⁸ The only other film that would fit the ‘Tokyo’ category is *A Hen in the Wind*, which features brutal imagery, but chooses the wrong setting for Ozu to include it among the grim Tokyo films.

⁷⁹⁹ Joo 2017, 178.

⁸⁰⁰ Ehrlich 1997, 66.

⁸⁰¹ Standish (2005) 2012, 43.

⁸⁰² Wada-Marciano 2008, 25–26.

went on.⁸⁰³ We do not get to see a great deal of rural Japan in Ozu films, but it exists as a mental image in nearly all of them. One could argue that Ozu leaves the country home unseen so that it can be allowed to stay as a pure ideal, as opposed to being tarnished by the modern dwellers of the post-war works who cannot meet the standard as human beings, being already too far in the modern. Of the post-war films, *Tokyo Twilight* depicts the coldness of Tokyo in a literal sense, with the film's wintery setting being a frequent topic of discussion, people walking in city streets with breathing masks, and the surrounding darkness clearly affects people's mental state as a crushing force. The film opens with a discussion about homesickness, and the difficulty of finding warmth, whether it be physical or emotional, is evident all throughout the bleak narrative. Yet places on the other side of the Shimizu tunnel are mentioned to be even colder, since the Tokyo of the film does not have snow. Tokyo is also framed as cold and faceless in a physical sense, as the pregnant Akiko has trouble locating the boyfriend who is avoiding her. This echoes the disappearance of her mother, who also lives quite near in the shared physical reality but is emotionally distant.

Coming to the city and leaving it are recurring motifs of the director's filmography. At the end of *Early Spring*, the main couple move from Tokyo to the small town of Mitsuishi, when the husband's company transfers him there for a period of three years. Though the ending is not overtly optimistic, the Sugiyamas at least get a second chance to fix their marriage outside the hectic Tokyo environment. In Mitsuishi, the husband does not have his work friends tempting him away from home. Central office being able to transfer workers from one place to the next is also mentioned in *Tokyo Twilight*, and a central attribute that Ozu's films give the Japanese capital, is that Tokyo is a city full of busy people, many of whom have come from other places. In *Tokyo Twilight*, the mother and her new husband also consider relocating to northern Hokkaido, and finally do so, as the film closes. This makes for a sad ending, as the mother has lost one of her daughters and not been able to reconcile with the other. In *Early Summer*, the uncle who comes visiting from Yamato province likes his relatives in Tokyo, as well as the *kabuki* performance he gets to witness, but maintains that Yamato is 'the best place to live', also inviting his brother and the brother's wife to come visit him and leave their house for the younger generation. The young married couple of the film, on the other hand, opt to move to Akita province, because of the working opportunities for the husband. The two departures to different sides of Japan, while one third of the Mamiya family stays in Tokyo, highlight the family's scattered future.

⁸⁰³ Igarashi 2021, 28.

For the themes and motifs of Ozu's filmmaking, it is impossible to imagine a more fitting setting than Tokyo. It is not just a city where his characters happen to be, but a motor of modernisation in a constant state of change. It is evident from the examples examined here that the Tokyo space allows Ozu to quietly strengthen his thematic, and form comparisons between characters, places, and historical periods. Tokyo is what the director allows his audience to see, while many of the things longed for by the characters exist only as ideas, associated with unseen places. Ozu's way of viewing the city was strongly tied with his way of viewing life, which was heavily influenced by generational sentiments. As the post-war years went on, new directors emerged to critique their predecessors and their views, and Ozu's position within the film industry shifted.

9.2 Changing tides of cinema: elderly Ozu in contrast to younger filmmakers

Ozu's critique of certain aspects of modern Japan impacted the way he was seen in the film industry. The alleged conservatism or even stagnation of his filmmaking has been greatly debated both during his lifetime and in the decades following his death, much like the case of the suggested sameness between his pictures.⁸⁰⁴ Ozu enjoyed prestige unlike any other, especially after the internationally acclaimed Mizoguchi died in 1956. He served several years as the president of the Director's Guild of Japan, and though he was a contract-worker for a large studio, he had considerable artistic control over his work. For younger directors, some of whom started their careers under his wing, Ozu became detestable as the 'public face of the studio system', even though the composition of his films was highly unconventional.⁸⁰⁵ Film historian Isolde Vanhee likens Ozu's 1950s works to those of Douglas Sirk, as both were considered conservative due to their subject matter, both turned out well-made genre films for adult audiences, and both have been reappraised in later decades.⁸⁰⁶ The style of Ozu's filmmaking, whether one views it as youthfully playful or wistful with age, separated his work from the mainstream, evoking his standing as a lonely island in the sea of Japanese filmmakers. The contrast between

⁸⁰⁴ Noël Burch (1978, 279–281) uses the 1950s writings of Marxist critic Imamura Taihei to frame the negative way in which the post-war generation viewed Ozu: as passive, non-societal, and static.

⁸⁰⁵ Vishnevetsky 2012, 8-9.

⁸⁰⁶ Vanhee 2015, 103. Lars-Martin Sorensen (2009, 37) dug up the survey conducted by the Movie Research Group of Hosei University in 1950, which showed how most Tokyo moviegoers were members of the younger generation: of the 3,185 questionnaires that were returned, 82% were filled by people in the age group 16–30. This shows how a director like Ozu, with an older core demographic, catered to a small segment of the general audience.

Ozu and the new generation of directors, many of whom contributed to the Japanese New Wave, is worth studying to properly understand the lost idyll painted by the final Ozu films.

Ozu was not criticised merely by the younger generation, or merely during the final years of his career. Japanese film critics voiced opinions about his work throughout his entire career, and as Ozu ventured further away from the societal questions of his early 1930s output and towards more family-centred dramas, he faced disappointment from many critics who had favoured his earlier style.⁸⁰⁷ Before the war, Ozu's success with the critics led to younger filmmakers taking notes from his methods. Bordwell has carefully chronicled examples of Shochiku directors who trained under Ozu, such as Sasaki Yasushi, Hara Kenkichi and Shibuya Minoru, who clearly show his influence in their own directorial works.⁸⁰⁸ Even in the final years of Ozu's career, it was not a rule for every young filmmaker to renounce the old master completely: Masumura Yasuzo, for instance, complemented the rhythm of Ozu's storytelling and his way of creating a mood from seemingly uninteresting images.⁸⁰⁹

Shochiku's rapid decline in the late 1950s amplified the criticism of Ozu, as his public image was very closely associated with that of the studio. Joo cites the contemporary criticism of Ôshima Nagisa towards the Shochiku establishment, who viewed that the studio's output, known for its harmonious humanism, did not resonate with the younger generation who had received education in democracy and individualism.⁸¹⁰ The Kido brand of warm humanism seemed old-fashioned, as audiences wanted 'more straightforwardly realistic depictions of postwar society'.⁸¹¹ This coincides with the moment that Ozu finally agreed to start making films in colour. The younger critics viewed that Agfacolor 'rendered all things too pretty'.⁸¹² Joo also argues that the generic term 'home drama', which was increasingly used to describe Ozu's later films, made Ozu more vulnerable to this sort of criticism, as it narrowed his focus from larger societal issues to 'intra-familial matters'.⁸¹³ Richie defended Ozu from such claims, noting that:

'those other critics who complain that Ozu lost interest in social problems obviously restrict their definition to political problems, since there are no social

⁸⁰⁷ Richie 1974, 5.

⁸⁰⁸ Bordwell 1988, 25.

⁸⁰⁹ Richie 1974, 180.

⁸¹⁰ Joo 2017, 190.

⁸¹¹ Joo 2017, 190.

⁸¹² Richie 1974, 243.

⁸¹³ Joo 2017, 191. Though Joo himself (2017, 155) maintains that 'Ozu never avoided social reality'.

problems greater than the unavoidable misunderstandings between the generations, the indubitable unfairness of any society, and man's yearning for security in a world susceptible only to change.⁸¹⁴

Whether we view the generational conflict present in Ozu's narratives as a large societal issue or a tad more manageable affair, it seems clear that the films present it as a matter of utmost importance directly connected with the future of Japan. They make the case that the sentiments and feelings expressed or quietly processed by the individuals represent the well-being of society at a smaller scale. Therefore, the conflicts, while managing it in a discreet manner, do present a type of social problems. Towards the end of his career, Ozu's filmmaking increasingly focuses on the individuals and their social family networks, and although this framing changes the atmosphere from that which existed in the highly temporal occupation era films, it also serves to deepen the sentiments expressed by them through comparisons and repetition.

Late Spring started Ozu's commercially successful late period. Lars-Martin Sorensen has pointed out, how contemporary Japanese critics repeated words like 'purity' and 'old-fashioned' in their praises of the work.⁸¹⁵ From there on many of the director's films would be among the top grossing Japanese releases of their year, including *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* being the most financially successful Shochiku release of 1952.⁸¹⁶ Much of the audience who came to see his pictures was undoubtedly aware of Ozu's stature as the old master of home dramas. His critical fame was therefore linked with his box office popularity, and thus invoked other directors to critique these works more severely. Had he not been popular, it would be hard to imagine a similar discussion about his films. Upon writing *The Japanese Film*, Anderson and Richie attempted to dismiss the criticism of the younger generation by noting that Ozu was a spokesperson for both the old and the young, and that the younger generation merely saw it 'fashionable to find his films old-fashioned and to pretend not to understand them'.⁸¹⁷ Bordwell has highlighted the contrast between Oshima's angry *Night and Fog in Japan* (*Nihon no yoru to kiri*, 1960) and the film Ozu made that year, the seemingly apolitical *Late Autumn*; how Ozu's film seemed to, according to Sato Tadao, present a tranquil society that did not exist anymore, but was nevertheless the film that audiences wanted to see, whereas Oshima's film was pulled from the theatres.⁸¹⁸ Therefore we can gather that depicting contemporary society in

⁸¹⁴ Richie 1974, 69.

⁸¹⁵ Sorensen 2009, 146.

⁸¹⁶ Joo 2017, 152, 176.

⁸¹⁷ Anderson & Richie (1959) 1982, 359.

⁸¹⁸ Bordwell 1988, 360. *Night and Fog in Japan* was pulled from the theatres in the aftermath of the assassination of socialist leader Asanuma Inejiro.

any manner, whether the depiction be harsh or humane, will always turn away some people who view things differently, whether those be colleagues or general audiences. In an interview with Joan Mellen, director Ichikawa Kon suggested that the reason Japan produces so many period films is because Japanese filmmakers ‘are somewhat unable to grasp contemporary society’.⁸¹⁹

Humorously, the fact that younger filmmakers criticised the Ozu way of depicting everyday life is another case of a generation becoming like the one that preceded it. Whenever the conversation brought up the subject of Japanese ‘new wave’ directors of the early 1960s, Ozu tended to remark: ‘I used to be *nouvelle vague*’.⁸²⁰ Ozu, too, had been in the habit of critiquing the presentation of everyday life in the films of other directors as a younger man.⁸²¹ Under Kido’s reign, young Shochiku directors were encouraged to comment upon films by established directors honestly, and in terms of the films’ realism.⁸²² Just like young Ozu learned what he did not want his movies to be by watching melodramas from the 1920s, the younger generation of filmmakers would have the same reaction to his films, even if some of these directors, with age, started to resemble him stylistically. Yamada Yôji (1931–), who debuted at Shochiku in 1961, is often compared to Ozu: even though this initially caught Yamada by surprise, some of his behaviour, such as the frequent usage of Ozu-regular Ryû Chishû in his films and the director’s habit of calling himself ‘a cook who only makes ramen’⁸²³, are clearly efforts to appear more prestigious by appearing more *ozuesque*. For Yamada’s films, nostalgia is an important source of emotional relatability, and the period his films most often long for is the post-war, which Ozu captured with a fresh, contemporary outlook.

Some filmmakers mimicked Ozu on purpose to make a point. Imamura Shôhei’s 1989 film *Black Rain* made direct references to Ozu and to *Late Spring*.⁸²⁴ According to Carole Cavanaugh:

‘In some ways *Black Rain* answers the question of what Ozu might have done had the postwar ethos or his own sensibilities allowed him to complicate the domestic relations so dear to him with the politics of the times. Imagine Noriko in the 1949 film suffering from radiation sickness, a thought not so far-fetched when we recall the mention her father makes of his concerns about her blood count and the bodily fatigue she continues to endure due to wartime work.’⁸²⁵

⁸¹⁹ Mellen: ‘Interview with Kon Ichikawa’. Cited in: Mellen 1976, 9.

⁸²⁰ Kometani 2021, 43.

⁸²¹ Joo 2017, 136.

⁸²² Standish (2005) 2012, 30–31.

⁸²³ Schilling 1999, 24. As opposed to Ozu, who is world-famous for only making tofu.

⁸²⁴ Cavanaugh 2000, 253.

⁸²⁵ Cavanaugh 2000, 253.

Imamura, who trained under Ozu and hated his style, uses the stylistic and narrative meta-connections to the classic Ozu film in his own renegotiation of the Japanese post-war space.⁸²⁶ Choices like this in later films may seem to have the effect of anchoring Ozu as the spokesman for conservative studio cinema, even if we acknowledge the anachronism that nobody could have made a film like *Black Rain* under the censorship of 1949. The way Cavanaugh frames the film also has a way of making Ozu seem completely apolitical, which as a notion he might have been keen to receive, but as we have noticed, was not the case. Yet Imamura's usage of the *ozuesque* is not wholly dissimilar from that of Yamada's: both use Ozu as a visually recognisable sign of a certain period in their country's history. The difference is that one chooses to paint it as a lost idyll, and the other criticises this view as harmful.

In the decades following his death, Ozu's cinematic legacy spread outside Japan. As these films got separated from the cultural context, time and place that gave birth to them, they ceased to represent the norm and became easier to be viewed for their artistic merit, as opposed to their alleged lack of realism that angered the likes of Imamura and Ôshima. The relatability at the core of the material does not rely on the Japanese-ness of the audience, as Elyssa Faison has observed:

‘Even if one has not grown up in a society in which arranged marriages are the norm, anyone can understand how difficult it is when children grow up and leave home. Even if one has not experienced a catastrophic war and foreign occupation, most people can relate to feelings of displacement and the breaking of affective ties that accompany it.’⁸²⁷

Ozu continues to inspire and influence the work of several world cinema directors so much so that entire volumes, such as *Ozu International: Essays on the Global Influences of a Japanese Auteur* (2015) and *Reorienting Ozu: A Master and His Influence* (2018) have been dedicated to the inspection of this relationship, and the ‘*ozuesque*’ elements found in the works of others. Of course, there are various forms of influence, as influence can be drawn directly from the source, or through other people. The films of Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien were compared to Ozu years before he encountered Ozu's works. This is similar to Ozu's own films *The Brothers and Sisters of Toda Family* and *Tokyo Story*, that have often been compared to Leo McCarey's 1937 classic *Make Way for Tomorrow*, which Ozu had not seen.⁸²⁸ On Ozu's centenary year 2003, Shochiku commissioned a tribute film titled *Café*

⁸²⁶ Cavanaugh 2000, 256–257.

⁸²⁷ Faison 2015, 55.

⁸²⁸ Nolletti 1997, 26. Noda, Ozu's co-writer for the latter film, had, however, seen the McCarey film.

Lumière (Kôhî jikô, 2003) from Hou, which touched upon the themes and aesthetics of their most prestigious director.⁸²⁹ Then again, non-commissioned directors like Wim Wenders had made tributes such as *Tokyo-Ga* (1985) to him decades before. These kinds of films, as well as the director's humongous worldwide fame among cinephiles, prove that even though Ozu might have appeared old-fashioned in 1960, his cinematic output has had a surprising and far-reaching afterlife that continues to bring new perspectives from which to study and enjoy them.

Ozu seems to have been understanding of things having to change even in terms of cinematic trends. His final film includes posters for new Japanese releases in the background as an interesting flirtation with the limits of Ozu's cinematic Japan and the Japan outside his films. The downfall of the studio system, which Ozu did not live to see entirely, would have most likely caused him problems, had he lived just ten years longer. The home dramas as a genre largely moved to television as the core demographic of housewives started staying home.⁸³⁰ Faced with financial ruin, the studio system would also give green light only to the safest of film pitches, and the power in the choice of subject in the previously director-centred system was put in the hands of businessmen.⁸³¹ Ozu's death thus feels very symbolic of the death of his old-fashioned artform that would quickly vanish as the younger generation took hold of the industry. The remaining directors of his generation also turned in their final works within a few years from Ozu's 1962 swansong *An Autumn Afternoon*: Shimizu Hiroshi in 1959, Naruse Mikio in 1967, Tasaka Tomotaka and Gosho Heinosuke in 1968, and finally Toyoda Shirô in 1976.

9.3 The limitations of change: remakes as commentaries

While the national culture was changing everywhere around the director, Ozu's final films secured their home space by threading familiar narrative ground. As has been established, *Good Morning*, *Floating Weeds*, *Late Autumn* and *An Autumn Afternoon* are all retellings of earlier Ozu films, albeit very freely adapted ones, told in a contemplative manner and coloured by nostalgia. They provoke the question of why Ozu, in the last five years of his life, decided to return to these themes. This has been asked by many scholars. One easy explanation would be that all four are colour films, and in several countries famous directors were asked to 'update' their classic works

⁸²⁹ Paulus 2015, 133.

⁸³⁰ Nolletti 2005, 213.

⁸³¹ Nolletti 2005, 213.

to meet the new visual standards of the medium.⁸³² Rarely has the explanation been that Ozu would have been losing his artistic creativity, as the final films are full of clever play with the things made possible by colour cinematography, and are among the director's best loved works.⁸³³ Also, the later films are nearly unanimously considered to be independent works of art, and there are hardly ever qualitative comparisons between the films and their narrative source material by critics, a rare feat for remakes. I argue that remaking himself is for Ozu a narrative strategy tied with *comparative individualism* that serves to issue social commentary on the extent of the cultural change.

While the very existence of these films provokes a sense of nostalgia and a longing for the old, nostalgia itself was not a post-war development in Ozu's films. It had featured in his depiction of modern space since his earliest surviving works.⁸³⁴ The purpose of the remakes could therefore be to work as commentaries to the themes in the initial films. This is most visible in the various retellings of *Late Spring*'s marriage narrative, whether the later films be considered 'remakes' or not. Yoshida Kiju has pointed out that when *Late Spring* depicted a fifty-six-year-old widower parent, Ozu himself was forty-six: by the time he made *Late Autumn* he was fifty-seven and actually knew what it meant to be that age, giving him a personal understanding of his subject.⁸³⁵ *Good Morning* is a loose reworking of *I Was Born, But...* and seems to have been made to highlight how different the society has become in twenty-seven years. Though there is criticism of modern life – television turning Japan into a nation of idiots – the core atmosphere of the societal depiction is very relaxed, even happy. In his 1975 review, film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum compares the two films and comes to the conclusion that *Good Morning* gleefully embraces a world that the 1932 film could acknowledge only painfully.⁸³⁶ A crucial difference lies in the form of the rebellion by the two boys. In the original, they go on a hunger strike, where the worst-case scenario would be them dying. In the 1959 film, the boys begin a silence strike, where the terrifying prospect for an Americanised society is silence, people not exchanging common pleasantries such

⁸³² In Finland, for instance, director Valentin Vaala directed a faithful remake of his earlier masterwork *The Women of Niskavuori* (Niskavuoren naiset, 1938) in 1958. In the United States, director Sidney Franklin came out of retirement to shoot a word-for-word remake of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1934) in 1957, which used the same script as the original.

⁸³³ A quite famous exception being Noël Burch, who insists that Ozu made his best films in the period between 1933–1943, and that his 'mature work can be said to consist, then, of five films: *An Inn in Tokyo, A Story of Floating Weeds, Only Son, Toda Brother and There Was a Father*' (Burch 1978, 185). Perhaps because of qualitative estimates like this, the Burch book is not cited in Ozu studies quite as often as the ones by Richie, Schrader, and Bordwell.

⁸³⁴ Wada-Marciano 2008, 24. She cites 1931's *Tokyo Chorus* as an example.

⁸³⁵ Yoshida (1998) 2003, 129.

⁸³⁶ Rosenbaum (1975) 1995, 86.

as the film's title. The problems are also very different in size. In the 1932 film, the young boys are forced to accept that they live in a class society. In *Good Morning*, they want a television, because the kid next door has one too. In 1932, people were stuck with their societal place, whereas in 1959, the boys' family can rise to equal status simply by following the rhythm of the consumerist society and succumbing to it.

In their article about the humour in Ozu's films, film scholars Manuel Garin and Albert Elduque note that Ozu's repeated gags also aged alongside the audience, which served to highlight social and cultural changes.⁸³⁷ According to them: 'Watching 'the same gag' again, years later, becomes a way to acknowledge how everything else – friendship, society, family – has changed in the meantime.'⁸³⁸ Yet there is another side to this practise of remaking that is well addressed by Bryony Dixon. She concludes that *Good Morning* also shows what has not changed, that being the family roles: children are just as cute as they used to be, the younger brother follows the older 'like a duckling', there is rebellion against the parents, and life in the suburbs continues.⁸³⁹ Even as the families themselves are shown to be fragile units, the concept of family roles is stronger than historical change. The idea of life's core elements remaining the same, and new generations starting to resemble the previous ones in their behaviour is a frequent thesis for Ozu, but by remaking his own films, he extends this realisation to the very filmmaking, thus providing a near-infallible argument for it being the case. In *Floating Weeds*, a re-telling of a 1934 classic, Ozu straight-up confesses what he is doing by having a character note that he remembers having seen this troupe '17, 18 years ago'.⁸⁴⁰ Actor Mitsui Koji, who had a substantial role in the previous film, is also recycled to the supporting cast as a wink to the audience. Donald Richie finds that the main difference between the original film and the close remake is that the original was more bitter, but I disagree with Richie about it also having been more personal for Ozu.⁸⁴¹ Ozu is less angry about social injustice, but the gained experience which has brought him so far adds personal levels throughout the film that do not exist in such multiplicity in the original work by the younger Ozu.

Ozu was very aware of the way the younger generation of filmmakers viewed his practises. The uncompromising traditionality of his filmmaking serves as a warm energy source in the late films, a cherished source of pride, and the core subject of

⁸³⁷ Garin & Elduque 2018, 200–201.

⁸³⁸ Garin & Elduque 208, 201.

⁸³⁹ Dixon 2010, 5.

⁸⁴⁰ *Floating Weeds* (1959), timecode: 03.07. The actual time gap between the first film and the remake was twenty-five years.

⁸⁴¹ Richie 1974, 246.

his humour. *Floating Weeds* is the most striking example of this as a narrative that simultaneously plays on two levels. The first level is a melancholy depiction of an aging actor. The other is Ozu's humorous meta-narrative about his own place in the world. Nearly all of the scenes involving the *kabuki* actor Arashi can be viewed in a comedic light by viewing him as a stand-in for the filmmaker, and the old-fashioned *kabuki* as a stage equivalent for Ozu's old-fashioned films. After finishing his contractual one movie per year for Shochiku (with *Good Morning*) Ozu did *Floating Weeds* as a loan-out for Daiei studios. This enabled him to use some of the studios big-name contract-players that were associated with the films of younger filmmakers, important stars of the new generation such as Wakao Ayako, Kyô Machiko, and Kawaguchi Hiroshi. This is a film where Ozu flirts with the notion of changing his game, but finally rules it out as an impossibility.

Arashi used to be famous and played in a large theatre in Osaka. Now he views himself as something of a required taste. He does not like the quality of his recent work, but blames it on the audience, noting that 'today's audiences don't understand quality plays' (a meta-line if there ever was one).⁸⁴² Yet even the play that they are currently performing seems to be too highbrow for the locals. Before the troupe has even arrived, a passing resident asks if the play is something full of sword-fighting, as opposed to the striptease show last month that he preferred. While this may or may not be Ozu's wink at the younger generation of filmmakers venturing towards more explicitly sexual topics in their works, it is for sure that Ozu's films are not going to include striptease performances to appeal to modern tastes. Arashi's son gives him several criticisms after seeing his performance, calling it 'hammy', and noting that the character he played was unrealistic and does not relate to the modern world. This again harkens back to Ozu. Arashi notes that being hammy or old-fashioned does not matter, since he is playing a man from another era, and the audience seems to be enjoying it. The generational gap presented here is similar to that in other films but viewing it as self-reflection about Japanese culture makes it seem more light-hearted, though just as impossible a gap to mend. In *Floating Weeds*, there is also another dissolving family unit, the professional one, consisting of actors. There is no work, and the people are forced to go their separate ways, even if Arashi assures them that he hopes they later reunite.⁸⁴³ Because of the meta-elements of the narrative, it is fitting that Arashi as a character would view his troupe as a substitute family; perhaps the director did so as well? Many of the actors have to now look for employment outside of the arts, which serves to support the film's presentation of a dying artform.

⁸⁴² *Floating Weeds* (1959), timecode: 23.01.

⁸⁴³ *Floating Weeds* (1959), timecode: 1.31.30. Fittingly, the characters are drinking during these farewells.

The practise of reworking the narratives into a new form suits the great scheme of Ozu pictures, as the characters themselves are not remade, but only their situations. This again goes to show how families struggle with the same situations, even if they are distinctly different individuals. The fact that remakes exist in Ozu's filmography, but sequels do not, is also something to consider. During the wartime, *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family* was such a rare hit for Ozu that Shochiku had plans for making a sequel set in Manchuria.⁸⁴⁴ Yet it is difficult to see Ozu making a sequel to any of his films, even if loose connections can be noticed between the Kihachi films and Noriko films. While Japanese people are very fond of both remakes and long franchises, Ozu's need for a fresh crop of characters with each new film really lets us in on the fact that his characters are his narratives. After a film concludes, the characters are no longer useful, and the filmmaker must move on to the next people, who are similar to a point and most likely played by the same actors, but not a reproduced version of the same people. As an Ozu film closes, we feel sadness, because we will not see these characters, who are now dear to us, ever again.⁸⁴⁵ One could call it a case of instant nostalgia.

9.4 Reactions to change and the Ozu aftertaste

There comes a point when every Ozu film makes the realisation that all good things must come to an end. This is the sentiment that is often processed during the final moments in these films, which gives added weight and importance to the endings in terms of structure and message. Ozu believed that films won or lost based on their aftertaste.⁸⁴⁶ It is reasonable for us to then ask, what is the aftertaste of an Ozu dish; what are the feelings we are left with upon finishing our viewing of one of his works? This is another subject that really divides the fans of these films, with some feeling Ozu's endings to be hopeful and others feel they are pessimistic. Writing about the ending of *Floating Weeds*, an otherwise unconventional Ozu work, Ignatyi Vishnevetsky notes that for the characters 'it is too late in their lives for happiness. The best they can do is to compromise and endure.'⁸⁴⁷ The argument that Ozu is opting for neither happiness nor sadness in his endings could surely be extended to his other films as well, and thus help explain the multitude of available readings from them. Sadness and endurance do not rule out a limited sense of optimism, but instead exist as parallel sentiments or indeed, as a compromise. As Ozu's lack of interest in cinematic *plots* has been widely noted by both this study and others, the ending of

⁸⁴⁴ Joo 2017, 128.

⁸⁴⁵ Richie 1974, xv.

⁸⁴⁶ Kometani 2021, 92.

⁸⁴⁷ Vishnevetsky 2012, 20.

an Ozu film cannot simply be the events that constitute the conclusion of the narrative, but instead a wider texture of sounds and images that craft the sentiments the director leaves for his audience.

Ozu's most famous work *Tokyo Story* has been viewed as dramatising the continuous passage of time which points unavoidably towards death.⁸⁴⁸ The most famous line from any Ozu film undoubtedly is by the youngest daughter Kyoko, who asks Noriko if life is a disappointment. Yet even this is but a loose rephrasing of the Buddhism's first noble truth: life is suffering (*dukkha*). Peter Harvey explains the concept:

‘Here the word *dukkha* refers to all those things which are unpleasant, imperfect, and which we would like to see otherwise. It is both ‘suffering’ and the general ‘unsatisfactoriness’ of life.’⁸⁴⁹

Western Ozu scholarship still struggles to overcome the ever-so-fitting concept of *mono no aware* while discussing Ozu's films. Yet the sentiment that it describes is such a fixed part of Japanese art – whether cinema, music, or literature – that dedicating it for analysis of Ozu highlights his filmography as an inaccurately unique entity among Japanese artworks. The idea that it describes is, at least for Buddhists, part of *dukkha*, described by Harvey as ‘vague unease at the fragility and transitoriness of life’⁸⁵⁰. Instead of just the line from *Tokyo Story*, I would argue that it is the response that needs to be highlighted. A clever smile appears on the face of Hara Setsuko, as she nods: ‘Yes, that it is.’ The response turns the observation backwards: what for Buddha was a sad realisation is for Ozu at least a tragicomical one.

During Miura's wake in *Early Spring*, Kawai notes: ‘We live on, but we're not that happy, are we?’⁸⁵¹ He has a sly smile on his face which again adds ambiguity to the moment: lines from Ozu's films often sound utterly pessimistic, which has prompted many to miss the levels of sarcasm and self-criticism that the words also carry. The protagonist Sugiyama is one of the saddest characters in Ozu's films, but his sadness comes across only as complete passiveness to everything. He is having a marital crisis, but he does not want to argue with his wife. He has an affair, or at least a one-night stand, but even this is not anything he chases, but instead Goldfish is the one kissing him, and he is too lacklustre to offer resistance. Nick Wrigley calls

⁸⁴⁸ Lichten 2015, 156.

⁸⁴⁹ Harvey 2001, 76.

⁸⁵⁰ Harvey 2001, 77.

⁸⁵¹ *Early Spring* (1956), timecode: 1.48.39.

the protagonist ‘a blank canvas’⁸⁵², and the film’s depiction of sadness relies on the viewers projecting their notions about the characters’ thoughts to the still reality of the married couple. When Sugiyama is offered a transfer to the distant mountain town of Mitsuishi, his wife Masako likes the idea of moving, but Shoji himself cannot initially make up his mind. I would make the case that the wife’s keenness is not only because any change would be an improvement over the present, but because any change would mean the husband having to take an active stance on something. In *Floating Weeds*, Arashi the actor downright cites the old saying: ‘the only constant is change’.⁸⁵³ The atmosphere of the scene is that of slight disappointment, but the individual who concedes to the passage of time seems to do so without holding a grudge. It is noteworthy that during this sequence, Arashi is also day-drinking, and the atmosphere lightens up quickly.

Many of the final Ozu films include a farewell song towards the end that offers a sweet but melancholy sentiment that lingers over the ending. In *Early Spring*, the salarymen sing ‘Auld Lang Syne’ in Japanese, as a farewell song, with the lyrics addressing how quickly time passes (**Graphic 9.2**). *Late Autumn* also features a farewell song, as the mother and daughter are on their last trip together, and while eating sweet beans in a restaurant, a group of graduated students sing outdoors, marking also how the daughter now graduates to marriage. These cases evoke a tender and bittersweet, but all in all endearing, sentiment that emphasises the warm feelings between those who are now parting ways. Though *The End of Summer* contains a cheerful farewell song early on, the nondiegetic music of the film is strikingly different from the home music played in Ozu’s Shochiku films. The heavy use of strings lays down an ominous atmosphere. The characters are constantly shown to use traditional fans to cool themselves, which creates a muggy atmosphere of tormenting anticipation, even if nobody is aware of what will transpire, that being the death of The Old Master. People’s attempts at finding happiness seem to hit one dead-end after another, almost as if the film was trying to present the whole family tree as somehow cursed. Calling the film supernatural would probably be a case of over-analysis, but it does have a limbo-like, lingering undertone, which gets slowly unravelled by the mysticism of the other-worldly score.

⁸⁵² Wrigley 2012, 13.

⁸⁵³ *Floating Weeds* (1959), timecode: 1.12.25.



Graphic 9.2. *Early Spring* (1956). Sugiyama and Goldfish shake hands, to show each other there are no hard feelings, upon which the group starts singing ‘Auld Lang Syne’ in Japanese. (Screenshot by the author).

In the school reunion of *Equinox Flower*, Mikami is asked to perform a specific song. He notes that the number is somewhat old-fashioned, but obliges his mates, nevertheless. Mikami introduces the song by saying that is ‘based on the death poem by the patriot Masatsura Kusunoki’. After a few verses, Mikami notes that the song is quite long, and the fellowship should go on drinking as he proceeds. The song is deeply nationalistic and leads the gentlemen to silently contemplate as they listen.⁸⁵⁴ Ozu does not make it absolutely clear whether they like the song. It definitely stops the momentum of the cheerful re-union for its duration, being about defeat and loss, and nobody looks particularly happy after their wish has been granted and Mikami starts singing. Perhaps the slow dissolve of the national ideals tackled by the song creates a melancholier sentiment than the characters initially assumed. Richie has observed how songs in Ozu’s films are heard in their entirety without the director

⁸⁵⁴ Joo (2017, 197) points out how the song had been popular during the war, and even though the characters are not longing for that time period, it signifies particular generational sentiments about a sense of loss in the context of the post-war.

cutting away, out of respect for both the characters and Japanese tradition: out of pleasure, because ‘someone we love is singing’.⁸⁵⁵ Mikami stops halfway through, and despite cheering comments, will not continue. The characters then break into a different tune and the celebration continues.

As the Ozu film with the most families, *Equinox Flower* has also the most to say about families breaking down. Mikami and his daughter Fumiko are not talking to each other, as Fumiko is living with a man the father does not approve of. Mikami asks Hirayama to work as a peace negotiator between them, but he cannot fix the bad blood. However, the film shows the audience that both father and daughter miss each other and would like to fix things. The fate of Mikami serves as a comparable thread for Hirayama, who is driven to a similar situation by his daughter’s choice of man. The film ends on a positive note, with Hirayama having swallowed his pride and travelling to see his married daughter: his generational angst may be incurable, but he is processing it, and by humming the old military song – sung previously in the film by Mikami – is striving to find harmony as an old-fashioned man in the modern world. The endings for films like *Equinox Flower*, *Floating Weeds*, or *Early Spring* show how highly self-aware Ozu’s characters are both of their situations and the compromises they are making in order to adapt.

In Buddhist worldview, the things that bring happiness are trivial and do not last – *Passing Fancies*, as the title of an Ozu film says – and the only thing that can bring lasting happiness is enlightenment (*nirvana*).⁸⁵⁶ Ozu’s films do call out the unsatisfactory nature of existence, but for his philosophy, the trivial nature of life’s pleasures does not make them irrelevant. It does the opposite and highlights their short-lived beauty. A cup of sake is emptied with only one swig, and a fart vanishes quickly into the air. The whole of life consists of these little riches that you might miss if you blink. Therefore, we must consider that the Japanese way of viewing happiness from a longer timeframe would suggest that most of Ozu’s families live ordinary happy lives, and the major sadness in the film comes from time elapsing and all these joys quickly running past. The things that constitute happiness are constantly re-defined by each generation, as the generational conflicts in *Equinox Flower* and *Late Autumn* establish, yet much of it remains the same, just like the people themselves.

In *Early Summer*, the grandparents enjoy lunch outdoors and the grandfather notes how these are probably the happiest times for their family, as Noriko’s impending marriage will mark the family disbanding and bring sadness. They make remarks about how quickly time passes, but overall seem content with their lot. Ozu characters are not pessimistic, but instead nostalgic in advance. The Japanese

⁸⁵⁵ Richie 1974, 121.

⁸⁵⁶ Harvey 2001, 76.

modernisation that has taken place after Ozu's death unintentionally makes one view these endings in a more light-hearted manner. For all of life's grievances that the characters face in Ozu's films, their communal spirit usually remains intact, with only a few exceptions. Though Ozu expresses concern about the future of Japanese communality, about people's willingness to take the time to care for one another, the individuals of his films, while showing human failings, never stray too far away from the humanity that the films treasure. The biggest source of emotional warmth is awareness of the director's other films and the ability to view his body of work comparatively. All films have to end, but in Ozu's next film we will discover recognisably similar characters and situations. No matter what happens to the characters in one movie, there is always another family, and thus the circle will go on.

If one goes to Japan now, the modernised country that one finds there can feel completely separate from the one depicted in Ozu's films, as film-maker Wim Wenders discovered upon making his Ozu documentary *Tokyo-Ga*. If Ozu's films carry within their themes a worry about the passing nature of things, the same films also guarantee the preservation of everything they depict, through their very existence. The post-war decades and the national family culture are alive and well in these works, and through DVDs and online streaming, almost universally accessible. Kometani Shinnosuke even suggests that as opposed to blockbuster films geared towards the big screens, Ozu's cinema benefits from being consumed in the home environment, his films and small television screens being, 'a great match for each other'.⁸⁵⁷ While an avid movie-goer like Ozu (who did not care for television) would have most likely detested this, it is true that the DVD age has been kind to Ozu and introduced his catalogue to a huge, global audience. Even though gazing at these works on a big screen offers a supreme artistic experience, their focus on the home environment does agree well with the audience viewing them in the comfort of their own homes. One could even suggest that viewing them like this offers an additional level to the comparative individualism of these works, as the material homes depicted parallel the material space that surrounds the audience, adding a further layer of relatability between the fictional and the real. The post-war films of Ozu Yasujirô were made during a period of cultural turmoil, and by actively applying awareness of what was transpiring to the subtext of these family dramas, the director managed to both capture a moment in history, craft characters rooted in their historical moment, and create films that have stood the test of time. These works show how institutions such as family roles are altered by the changing times, but also point out the subjectivity in the thinking of the characters who are shown to be most

⁸⁵⁷ Kometani 2021, 5.

critical of others. The core values of Ozu's family depictions, caring, mutual respect, and good humour form a unique philosophy of life and champion the audience to be more allowing, more empathic and more understanding of their loved ones. Sometimes the characters and situations depicted offer bad examples, but mostly the people allowed into these narratives are sympathetic and well-meaning. Even though change is shown to cause friction to the harmony treasured by the films, even the bad times, like everything else, are of temporary nature.

Conclusions

Upon having seen Ozu's wartime film *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family*, fellow director Mizoguchi Kenji jokingly referred to it as 'The Brothers and Sisters of the Ozu Family'.⁸⁵⁸ The reason was Ozu's one-of-a-kind way of depicting families, which makes his films instantly recognisable. I chose to borrow Mizoguchi's rechristening of the film as the title of my work, for it is the uniqueness of the family depictions as social constructions that has been the main subject here: how Ozu constructs his cinematic families and what meanings his films give to different family roles and dynamics within their inner realism. For these questions I sought to answer, all of these films provided endless amounts of fascinating material. They also served to document the changes that occurred in the fifteen-year period during which Ozu made them. The presence of the American occupiers and SCAP censorship electrified the temporal presentation of Japanese culture in his output, and Ozu confronted the censors both upfront and with sly humour. Woojeong Joo's opinion is that 'Ozu's late films evidence a gradual decline in the director's creativity, as he becomes too involved with formal consideration and repetitive subject matter' and for Joo's examination of the historicity of the everyday life, there is probably truth in this.⁸⁵⁹ During Ozu's final films, the analysis of the cultural conflict tends to take a backseat, several films express more light-hearted sentiments, and even the older generation can forgive their offspring for loving television sets or Elvis Presley. However, my topic having been the families themselves, I found Ozu's colour period to also feature the richest character networks of his filmography, because of their focus on the individuals.

This study began with the notion that cinema has the ability to defend the present social conditions, or to challenge them through presentation. Ozu's works are prone to both, and sometimes they can engage in these arguments seemingly simultaneously. The presentation of fictional characters in films offers the audiences raw material that they can use as building blocks of selfhood, as tools with which to exist in a society. Ozu's casts are both larger and better fleshed-out than those of

⁸⁵⁸ Bordwell 1988, 166.

⁸⁵⁹ Joo 2017, 204.

most other filmmakers, but the director is also careful not to present any one character as a person whose actions we should be emulating. Instead, the films quietly craft endearing undercurrents that come to characterise the whole of the human condition. One could choose to view this as a loss for the films' realism, as the way Ozu clearly cares for his characters prevents him from exploring the darker sides of Japanese life and family culture, but it also manages to add a sense of inspiration. The films inspire their audience to be more caring and understanding of their loved ones. Not only do we learn this from the pleasantness of the fictional characters, but also from their many mistakes that come to define their existence as much as their best moments. This in itself is a wonderful thesis about human life.

The major goal of this study was to highlight the role of cultural products in the formation of national and individual identity, by presenting the ways in which films enable the re-evaluation and the renegotiation of such everyday institutions as family life. Ozu's films present a wide array of roles and characters from different backgrounds and different stages of life, to form a vivid outlook over Japanese everyday life and surrounding contemporary reality. Thus, these films not only serve as important historical source material about the post-war years in which they were produced, but were arguably made to do so, on purpose. Cinema provides a cultural platform that enables people to engage with their surrounding societies and themselves, opening their eyes to new ways of seeing things. The artform grounds the society in history, and helps viewers to see a linear continuum of development, where the past works as a prologue for the present, which then continues to define what is to come. Ozu's films are a fine example of this, as they both carry an understanding of history – so obvious for their audience that it need not be expressed in the dialogue – as well as express deep uncertainty about the future.

In the chapters dedicated to the inspection of masculine and feminine role expectations, we witnessed the wide variety of roles included in these seemingly binary categories. Through this, the director managed to evoke quiet criticism about the present order of things. I came to the conclusion that the dualistic obligations within traditional domestic life cause pressure and unhappiness for both men and women in Ozu's films. Women stress visibly when they are pressured into marriage before they are ready, and through the married ladies of the filmography, Ozu tends to showcase the limited mobility as well as the reliance on an often emotionally-distant husband. The director does not present these issues as being without a solution, and in many films the situations of the female protagonists improve with time. Yet many films also suggest that in order for the marriage institution to seem appealing to the younger generation, marriages should grow to be more egalitarian and to guarantee similar individual liberties as the ones enjoyed by single women before marriage. Men also suffer from what is traditionally expected from them, and the masculine work culture causes great anguish for many characters, causing them

to drift apart from their families and succumb too frequently to the lure of alcohol. Throughout the childhood chapter we also witnessed that the boyish rebellion against societal life expectations tends to quieten down with age. Ozu, the fan of farts, finds a similar sadness in this transition as the one witnessed with the marrying daughters of the filmography.

Ozu believed that good films create their own grammar.⁸⁶⁰ His own certainly do, both with their unique visual composition that has been thoroughly combed through elsewhere, as well as the narrative strategies explored in this study. Inspecting Ozu's character networks as a comparison-based mode of storytelling widens the scope of what is presented and puts the conflicts within individual families under a magnifying glass. This clarifies the argumentative side of these films, but also alleviates the tension by revealing the commonness of the transitional pains that the characters undergo. Japanese people link family membership to nation and citizenship, which is also visible in the way the main stakes of an Ozu film are often played on three levels: the thematic-institutional, the communal, and the individual. The problems faced by these families, consisting of small individuals, correspond with the issues that descend upon people they know, as well as the larger nation family. As depictions of the human condition, the films tie individuality to larger categories and allow the audience to witness the dynamics through which these levels and categories influence one another. The way the older generation mourns the changing fabric of society is tied to the awareness of their own mortality as individuals; likewise, the rebellion of the young against their parents is simultaneously an attempt to renegotiate Japanese customs through individual agency.

The number of parallels within the post-war filmography is truly astonishing, and one continues to notice new ones with each subsequent viewing. Yet the more concentration one dedicates to these films, the less repetitive they feel, which speaks volumes about Ozu and Noda's ability to craft unique individuals. The increasingly individualistic way of viewing people does flourish in Ozu's depiction of the post-war society, yet it comes through as part of the director's humanistic self-expression, as opposed to a way of adapting to the contemporary times. For Ozu, the individual and the collective exist in a symbiosis, and the films observe how cracks in the communal feeling cause distress in the individuals, and vice versa. Even if the cracks are caused by the characters' individualistic way of viewing their life paths, the films also seem to suggest that if the people were allowed to follow themselves more freely, a greater communality could be achieved. Kometani Shinnosuke confesses he would have loved to see an Ozu film about a woman who does not marry.⁸⁶¹ This

⁸⁶⁰ Bordwell 1988, 51.

⁸⁶¹ Kometani 2021, 79.

goes for me as well, and although the director never fully made one, the character networks of his films do suggest the possibility of a such tale occurring in the Ozu-verse.

The *comparative individualism* of these works is supported by the reliable stock company of actors, as well as ‘the guest actors’, with whom Ozu worked only once. As established, Ozu wrote the parts for the actors instead of choosing actors for the parts, and therefore through their presence in these films, the actors also affect the character-based narratives – even if the puppet master behind the camera controlled their every movement. There is a clear difference between the fathers played by Ryū Chishū and Saburi Shin, yet the parts for both actors contain inner contradictions and endearing imperfections. Both address their generational sentiments as well as the characters’ attempt to get by in a society that transforms faster than they are able to. The marriage of a daughter is the most heavily repeated narrative thread in the post-war oeuvre because it forms a platform, upon which the narratives can present the renegotiation of social roles and cultural customs in a form that is constituted by dialogue and character-interactions. From Hara Setsuko’s characters in *Late Spring* to the daughters played by Arima Ineko in *Tokyo Twilight* and *Equinox Flower*, Ozu shows how much things can change in just one generation, but he is careful not to frame the direction of change as one-sidedly good or bad. *Tokyo Twilight* portrays the contemporary society as a dark, even disturbing place, but the director feels more at home with works like *Equinox Flower* or *Good Morning*, where social criticism is established through mischievous humour.

The concept of a timeline shared by these films is very much tied to the experience of the older generation, but the sympathy expressed is not limited to them. Ozu acknowledges a generational gap, but mostly manages to paint it without dehumanising either side. Humour also plays a central role in the way these characters are presented to us. Nobody is safe from occasionally being made fun of, and the filmography gains an aura of light-heartedness through this rite of initiation. Ozu is constantly making fun of double standards, one of them being how characters are frequently more modern and accepting in their outlooks, when it comes to the lives of others. Hirayama Wataru from *Equinox Flower* is a good example. He starts the film by giving a wedding speech that celebrates romantic unions over arranged ones, partly because it is not his own daughter who is getting married. Later, when his daughter falls in love with an un-arranged man, he cannot bring himself to accept this. It is evident here that most Ozu characters have both a conservative and progressive side to them, which can clash at any given moment. The results vary because of their different personalities, gender, and generational identity, but the struggle itself is portrayed as the normal mode of existence in a society that is characterised by the same crisis of identity. Ozu shows his audience the sadness

within this friction but does not pretend that he is not simultaneously greatly amused by it.

The concepts of tradition and modernity proved to be problematic in their generality, as they materialise and articulate themselves in different ways in Ozu's works. Both tradition and modernity are lucid concepts that Ozu films produce with their assessment of them. The sum of things lumped under the umbrella of 'Japanese tradition' within the Ozu filmography represents a very loose set of norms that have been collected gradually over decades and centuries. Often tradition seems to be in the eye of the beholder, and many things that Ozu presents as traditional are fairly new innovations, stemming from the Tokugawa period or even the Meiji period. I dare say that for many contemporary viewers, Ozu's more modern outlooks are similarly a delightful nostalgia capsule. Even though many of the films use religious buildings as a physical marker of tradition, the concept of tradition is not treated religiously, but is instead implemented more freely, based on the individuals and their personal preferences. No film portrays tradition as a made-up social construction, but through their imagery they do show how the idea of tradition, like that of contemporary modernity, exists in a state of flux.

The Ozu filmography allows us to witness the Japanese hopes and fears for the future with details and nuances. The most common subject of fear is that people are gradually drifting away from each other, that a distance is forming to divide people who have until now deeply cared for one another. The melancholia we face in many of the endings is a crucial part of the films as works of art, but on the narrative level, often unnecessary. The daughters who are 'married off' can still keep in touch with their parents, and the conflicts between characters, which are left unresolved, could be resolved if the characters chose to do so, as we see in the ending of *Equinox Flower*. Even though the society, as presented by Ozu, is kept in motion by the existence of social expectations, the films do not attempt to persuade the audience to align themselves with what is expected from them. What these films are campaigning for is civility and sympathy, for the people to flourish in their individuality while simultaneously being considerate of others. This is not an apolitical agenda, nor is it revolutionary. Neither can Ozu be viewed as a dedicated advocate of the status quo, as the films repeatedly express sadness and frustration about the characters not being able to rise to do the right thing. The director acknowledges that humanity has yet to meet his standards, but he reminds his audience of these values, and in so doing issues a glimmer of hope. Furthermore, not all of our imperfections are framed negatively: some are revealed as core parts of our humanity, and therefore the characters struggle to find balance. The comparative viewing method allows the audience to view the character journeys as threads in a social critique, which expresses a wish that kindness and sympathy could be able to harmoniously coexist

with the elevated individualism, together improving the human condition for all involved.

This study covered Ozu's post-war filmography thematically, altering from one film to the next and then back again. I understand that organising a book in this manner may give some the notion that Ozu's films are in consensus about Japanese family roles, and the ideal ways in which life should be conducted. They are not. These films present a seemingly endless multitude of dynamics and perspectives. Even when Ozu is remaking himself, he is more interested in bringing new ingredients to the mix than he is in serving leftovers. The films parallel each other in several ways. They complement one another, add perspectives and showcase alternatives. They never directly contradict one another, as this would suggest that one film's attempt at realism is better or better thought-out than the other one's is. This would create a fracture in the overall production of reality in the films, which is greater than any single Ozu work. The reason why these differing views serve to support one another is that the films depict different individuals, and individuals act differently. The Noriko in *Late Spring* is not the Noriko of *Early Summer*, however suspiciously they are named. The Somiyas of *Late Spring* handle the daughter's marriage differently from the Hirayamas of *Equinox Flower*, even if the end results appear similar.

The system of social roles presented by the post-war filmography is formed by the films allowing the audience to inspect how their character networks operate and exist. Character itself is crafted not only through individual narratives in contrast with the wider texture, but by the director showing the effects that time and place have upon the people depicted. Ozu's works are structured in a way that makes every shot included a necessary stroke in the larger artwork. Murray Smith has viewed that the establishing shots without people in Ozu's films, which Noël Burch called 'pillow-shots', in his view 'border on the domain of non-narrative form where the construct of character becomes irrelevant'.⁸⁶² This study has aspired to prove the opposite, as these images build cohesion in Ozu's cinematic world, which itself is the structure that the character dynamics rely upon, for the audiences to respond to them emotionally. The physical reality occupied by Ozu's characters, with various interesting objects, tastes, sounds, and smells is inseparable from the people that reside in this imaginary Japan. For the audience to have an understanding of Ozu's individuals, we must likewise have a grasp of the home, the office, and the bar space that offer the main narrative stages that govern the characters' everyday existence.

Ozu's films include an understanding of an expected path of life with role expectations that vary depending on age and gender. There exists an unvoiced idea

⁸⁶² Smith 1995, 76.

of what people are supposed to be like, but it is also shown to be completely divorced from how they actually are. The films show how most characters struggle with what is expected from them, and this in itself adds weight to the family system. While a film like *Tokyo Story* mourns how the old are neglected by the young, a film like *Equinox Flower* can do the opposite, by presenting a case where the sternness of the patriarch threatens to tear the family apart. The films acknowledge that details and dynamics pertaining to contemporary culture will change and this cannot be helped, but the greater scope of life will go on unchanged. More often than not, it is not about who is wrong or right. This is noted by the father in *The Munekata Sisters*, when Mariko asks him to give his opinion about her and Setsuko's differing worldviews. The father states that they are two different people, and advises Mariko to do what she thinks is right. This theoretically impartial exchange highlights the expanded bloom of individualism in post-war Japan. There is optimism that this will lead to a brighter future, but also a caution against following passing trends and fashions. The scene, like all of the post-war films of Ozu, is carefully structured so that it will not swing too hard towards either direction, but the motion is definitely a swinging one. Instead of forcing people into certain moulds, the films express a wish to widen the existing moulds so that the characters would fit them and feel comfortable and happy in these social categories. Even though most of the films depict gloomy people, there seems to be an understanding, at least in the later post-war films, that these are not overall gloomy times, and the characters depicted are *the exception*. The friends and acquaintances of the lead characters are often shown as quite happy, and as for the protagonists, the films offer deep consideration to both their happiness and the things that separate them from it.

Ozu's lead characters are exceptionally reflective people when it comes to life choices and existential questions, even if much of this is non-verbal. This need for introspection and the time that it consumes often forms an obstacle to their happiness, but also keeps them from going with the flow, highlights their unique personalities and makes them interesting. Richie has argued that Ozu's characters are formed through choices and that the characters are the total sum of their choices.⁸⁶³ Yet this simplifies what is depicted in these films. It is not easy for Ozu's characters to make important life decisions, as they carry a cosmic understanding of the consequences carried by these choices. Often the final decisions are compromises that do not completely align with the way characters have hoped things would turn out for themselves. From the amount of time the films dedicate to the characters making up their minds or attempting to get others to do so, it is evident that Ozu's characters are formed not just through the sum of their choices, but by the passage

⁸⁶³ Richie 1974, 72.

they must overcome to get to them, the inner conflict and the struggle, which eventually lead to choices. It is through this process the audience gets to know these characters, and the process itself is the narrative component that all of the post-war films structurally depend upon. The time required for all of the characters to make up their minds and the cultural framework in which these characters do so, is the primary narrative component of what can only be called, an *overwhelmingly* rich filmography.

Upon writing this study and inspecting what had already been written about Ozu, it became evident to me that no one will ever write the *definitive* book about this director, a further testament to the power of his works. Yoshida Kiju has, in the conclusions of his own book, compared Ozu to a mirage that moves further away as we come closer, luring us to pursue further.⁸⁶⁴ The metaphor is not without its merit and I would add that even when we think we have successfully captured the mirage, the chances are, that it appears in a different form to other people. The cunningly ambiguous nature of his works, as well as Ozu's detailed way of crafting characters, engages viewers on a very intimate level, inviting them to interpret the narratives through their own personality and focus on different elements. Donald Richie commented that while he and Joseph Anderson were attempting to define Japanese humanism, they were actually drawing their 'own portraits as well as those Japanese filmmakers' they were writing about.⁸⁶⁵ A core element of art is that by consuming it, we not only learn about the topics chosen by the artist, but also about ourselves. For modern audiences, Ozu's films present a time and place that we cannot reach physically: the Japan depicted in them has long since transformed its visual identity to a point of being unrecognisable. However, the inter-familiar conflicts and the emphasis placed on kindness, civility, and sympathy for different people have proven themselves timeless in their appeal. Through their subject matter and the humane way it is approached, these works transcend the Japan they depict, and continue to resonate with new international audiences, whose backgrounds affect the way they are viewed. Not only is Ozu a tofu maker, but a matchmaker of sorts as well: pairing unique characters with unique audiences and establishing a shared moment of solidarity between individuals.

⁸⁶⁴ Yoshida (1998) 2003, 147.

⁸⁶⁵ Richie 2000, xvii. Richie says this in connection with the title of the Helen Mears book, *Mirror for Americans: Japan* (1948).

Sources and literature

Post-war filmography of Ozu Yasujirô

Record of a Tenement Gentleman (Nagaya shinshiroku). Screenplay by Ikeda Tadao & Ozu Yasujirô. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Sugihara Yoshi. Music by Saitô Ichirô. Sound Department: Saitô Rokusaburô & Senoo Yoshisaburô. Starring: Iida Chôko (Otane), Aoki Hôhi (Kohei), Ozawa Eitarô (Kohei's father), Yoshikawa Mitsuko (Kikuko), Kawamura Reikichi (Tamekichi), Mimura Hideko (Okiku), Ryû Chishû (Tashiro), Sakamoto Takeshi (Kihachi), Takamatsu Eiko (Tome), Tonoyama Taiji (Photographer). Produced by Shochiku Eiga / Kubô Mitsuzo. Release date: 20.5.1947 (Japan). Duration: 71 minutes.

A Hen in the Wind (Kaze no naka no mendori). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Saitô Ryôsuke. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Hamamura Yoshiyasu. Music by Itô Senji. Sound editing by Senoo Yoshisaburô. Starring: Tanaka Kinuyo (Tokiko), Sano Shûji (Shuichi), Murata Chieko (Akiko), Ryû Chishû (Satake Kazuichiro), Minakami Reiko (Orie). Produced by Shochiku Eiga / Kubô Mitsuzo & Watanabe Dai. Release date: 17.9.1948 (Japan). Duration: 84 minutes.

Late Spring (Banshun). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo based on the novel *Chichi to musume* by Hirotsu Kazuo. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Hamamura Yoshiyasu. Music by Itô Senji. Sound editing by Sasaki Hidetaka. Starring: Ryû Chishû (Professor Somiya), Hara Setsuko (Somiya Noriko), Tsukioka Yumeji (Kitagawa Aya), Sugimura Haruko (Taguchi Masa), Aoki Hôhi (Katsuyoshi), Usami Jun (Hattori Shoichi), Miyake Kuniko (Miwa Akiko), Mishima Masao (Onodera Jo). Produced by Shochiku Eiga / Yamamoto Takeshi. Release date: 13.9.1949 (Japan). Duration: 108 minutes.

The Munekata Sisters (Munekata kyôdai, 1950). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo based on a serial story by Osaragi Jirô. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Ohara Jôji. Film editing by Gotô Toshio. Music by Saitô Ichirô. Sound editing by Kamiya Masakazu. Starring: Tanaka Kinuyo (Munekata Setsuko), Takamine Hideko (Munekata Mariko), Uehara Ken (Tashiro Hiroshi), Takasugi Sanae (Mashita Yoriko), Ryû Chishû (Munekata Tadachika), Yamamura Sô (Mimura Ryosuke), Hori Yûji (Maejima), Saitô Tatsuo (Uchida Jou), Fujiwara Kamatari (Sangin's master). Produced by Shinto Film Distribution Committee / Higo Hiroshi, Koe Eisei, Koi Hideo. Release date: 25.8.1950 (Japan). Duration: 112 minutes.

Early Summer (Bakushû, 1951). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Hamamura Yoshiyasu. Music by Itô Senji. Sound department: Hori Yoshiomi, Senoo Yoshisaburô, Usami Hayao. Starring: Hara Setsuko (Mamiya Noriko), Ryû Chishû (Mamiya Koichi), Awashima Chikage (Tamura Aya), Miyake Kuniko (Mamiya Fumiko), Sugai Ichirô (Mamiya Shukichi), Higashiyama Chieko (Mamiya Shige), Sugimura Haruko (Yabe Tami), Igawa Kuniko (Takako), Nihon'yanagi Hiroshi (Yabe Kenkichi), Sano Shûji (Satake Sotaro), Takahashi Toyo (Tamura Nobu). Produced by Shochiku / Yamamoto Takeshi. Release date: 3.10.1951 (Japan). Duration: 125 minutes.

The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice (Ochazuke no aji, 1952). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Hamamura

- Yoshiyasu. Music by Saitô Ichirô. Sound department: Hori Yoshiomi, Senoo Yoshisaburô, Uzawa Katsumi. Starring: Saburi Shin (Satake Mokichi), Kogure Michiyo (Satake Taeko) Tsuruta Kôji (Okada Noboru), Ryû Chishû (Hirayama Sadao), Awashima Chikage (Amamiya Aya), Tsushima Keiko (Yamauchi Setsuko), Miyake Kuniko (Yamauchi Chizu), Yanagi Eijirô (Yamauchi Naosuke), Toake Hisao (Amamiya Toichiro), Mochizuki Yûko (Hirayama Shige), Shitara Kôji (Yamauchi Koji). Produced by Shochiku / Yamamoto Takeshi. Release date: 1.10.1952 (Japan). Duration: 116 minutes.
- Tokyo Story* (Tôkyô monogatari). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Hamamura Yoshiyasu. Music by Saitô Takanobu. Sound department: Hori Yoshiomi, Senoo Yoshisaburô, Kaneko Mitsuru. Starring: Ryû Chishû (Hirayama Shukichi), Higashiyama Chieko (Hirayama Tomi), Hara Setsuko (Hirayama Noriko), Sugimura Haruko (Kaneko Shige), Yamamura Sô (Hirayama Koichi), Miyake Kuniko (Hirayama Fumiko), Kagawa Kyôko (Hirayama Kyôko), Tonô Eijirô (Numata Sanpei), Nakamura Nobuo (Kaneko Kurazo), Ôsaka Shirô (Hirayama Keizo), Toake Hisao (Hattori Osamu), Nagaoka Teruko (Hattori Yone). Produced by Shochiku / Yamamoto Takeshi. Release date: 3.11.1953 (Japan). Duration: 136 minutes.
- Early Spring* (Sôshun, 1956). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Hamamura Yoshiyasu. Music by Saitô Takanobu. Sound department: Hori Yoshiomi, Senoo Yoshisaburô, Horikawa Shûzô. Starring: Awashima Chikage (Sugiyama Masako), Ikebe Ryô (Sugiyama Shôji), Kishi Keiko (Aoki Taizô, 'Goldfish'), Ryû Chishû (Onodera Kiichi), Yamamura Sô (Kawai Yutaka), Fujino Takako (Aoki Terumi), Taura Masami (Kitagawa Kôichi), Sugimura Haruko (Tamura Tamako), Urabe Kumeko (Kitagawa Shige), Miyake Kuniko (Kawai Yukiko), Tonô Eijirô (Hattori Tokichi), Mitsui Kôji (Hirayama), Katô Daisuke (Sakamoto), Nakamura Nobuo (Arakawa), Masuda Junji (Miura Yuzo). Produced by Shochiku / Yamanouchi Shizuo. Release date: 29.1.1956 (Japan). Duration: 145 minutes.
- Tokyo Twilight* (Tôkyô boshoku, 1957). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Hamamura Yoshiyasu. Music by Saitô Takanobu. Sound department: Senoo Yoshisaburô. Starring: Hara Setsuko (Numata Takako), Arima Ineko (Sugiyama Akiko), Ryû Chishû (Sugiyama Shûkichi), Yamada Isuzu (Aijima Kisako), Takahashi Teiji (Kawaguchi Noboro), Taura Masami (Kimura Kenji), Sugimura Haruko (Takeuchi Shigeiko), Yamamura Sô (Sekiguchi Seki), Shin Kinzô (Numata Yasuo), Fujiwara Kamatari (Shimomura Gihei), Nakamura Nobuo (Aiba Sakae), Miyaguchi Seiji (Policeman). Produced by Shochiku / Yamanouchi Shizuo. Release date: 30.4.1957 (Japan). Duration: 140 minutes.
- Equinox Flower* (Higanbana, 1958). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo based on an original story by Satomi Ton. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Hamamura Yoshiyasu. Music by Saitô Takanobu. Sound department: Senoo Yoshisaburô, Itô Akiyuki, Kaneko Mitsuru. Starring: Saburi Shin (Hirayama Wataru), Tanaka Kinuyo (Hirayama Kiyoko), Arima Ineko (Hirayama Setsuko), Kuga Yoshiko (Mikami Fumiko), Sada Keiji (Taniguchi Masahiko), Takahashi Teiji (Kondo Shotaro), Kuwano Miyuki (Hirayama Hisano), Ryû Chishû (Mikami Shukichi), Naniwa Chieko (Sasaki Hatsuo), Yamamoto Fujiko (Sasaki Yukiko). Produced by Shochiku / Yamanouchi Shizuo. Release date: 7.9.1958 (Japan). Duration: 118 minutes.
- Good Morning* (Ohayô, 1959). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Hamamura Yoshiyasu. Music by Mayuzumi Toshirô. Sound department: Senoo Yoshisaburô. Starring: Sada Keiji (Fukui Heiichirô), Kuga Yoshiko (Arita Setsuko), Ryû Chishû (Hayashi Keitarô), Miyake Kuniko (Hayashi Tamiko), Sugimura Haruko (Haraguchi Kikue), Shitara Kôji (Hayashi Minoru), Shimazu Masahiko (Hayashi Isamu), Izumi Kyokô (Maruyama Midori), Takahashi Toyo (Ôkubo Shige). Produced by Shochiku / Yamanouchi Shizuo. Release date: 12.5.1959 (Japan). Duration: 94 minutes.

Floating Weeds (Ukikusa, 1959). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo based on an earlier screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô and Ikeda Tadao (uncredited). Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Miyagawa Kazuo. Film editing by Suzuki Toyo. Music by Saitô Takanobu. Sound department: Suda Takeo. Starring: Nakamura Ganjirô (Arashi Komajuro), Kyô Machiko (Sumiko), Wakao Ayako (Kayo), Kawaguchi Hiroshi (Homma Kiyoshi), Sugimura Haruko (Oyoshi), Nozoe Hitomi (Aiko), Ryû Chishû (Theatre Owner), Mitsui Kôji (Kinnosuke), Tanaka Haruo (Yatazo), Urabe Kumeko (Shige). Produced by Daiei / Nagata Masaichi. Release date: 17.11.1959 (Japan). Duration: 119 minutes.

Late Autumn (Akibiyori, 1959). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo based on a novel by Satomi Ton. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Hamamura Yoshiyasu. Music by Saitô Takanobu. Sound department: Kaneko Mitsuru, Kurosawa Fumio, Senoo Yoshisaburô. Starring: Hara Setsuko (Miwa Akiko), Tsukasa Yôko (Miwa Ayako), Okada Mariko (Sasaki Yuriko), Sada Keiji (Goto Shotaru), Kuwano Miyuki (Michiko), Mikami Shin'ichirô (Koichi), Saburi Shin (Mamiya Soichi), Ryû Chishû (Miwa Shukichi), Nakamura Nobuo (Taguchi Shuzo), Miyake Kuniko (Nobuko), Sawamura Sadako (Fumiko), Kita Ryûji (Hirayama Seiichiro). Produced by Shochiku / Yamanouchi Shizuo. Release date: 13.11.1960 (Japan). Duration: 128 minutes.

The End of Summer (Kohayagawa-ke no aki, 1961). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Nakai Asakazu. Film editing by Iwashita Kôichi. Music by Mayuzumi Toshirô. Sound department: Nakagawa Kôichi, Shimonaga Hisashi. Starring: Nakamura Ganjirô (Kohayagawa Manbei), Hara Setsuko (Akiko), Tsukasa Yôko (Noriko), Aratama Michiyo (Fumiko), Kobayashi Keiju (Hisao), Shimazu Masahiko (Masao), Morishige Hisaya (Isomura Eijiro), Naniwa Chieko (Sasaki Tsune), Dan Reiko (Yuriko), Sugimura Haruko (Katou Shige), Katô Daisuke (Kitagawa Yanosuke), Ryû Chishû (farmer). Produced by Toho Company, Takarazaka Productions / Fujimoto Sanezumi, Kaneko Masakatsu, Teramoto Tadahiro. Release date: 29.10.1961 (Japan). Duration: 103 minutes.

An Autumn Afternoon (Sanma no aji, 1962). Screenplay by Ozu Yasujirô & Noda Kôgo. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Cinematography by Atsuta Yûharu. Film editing by Hamamura Yoshiyasu. Music by Saitô Takanobu. Sound department: Senoo Yoshisaburô, Ishii Ichiro, Hori Yoshiomi. Starring: Ryû Chishû (Hirayama Shuhei), Iwashita Shima (Hirayama Michiko), Sada Keiji (Koichi), Okada Mariko (Akiko), Yoshida Teruo (Miura Yutaka), Maki Noriko (Taguchi Fusako), Mikami Shin'ichirô (Kazuo), Nakamura Nobuo (Kawai Shuzo), Tonô Eijirô (Sakuma, 'The Gourd'), Miyake Kuniko (Nobuko), Katô Daisuke (Sakamoto Yoshitaro), Sugimura Haruko (Tomoko). Produced by Shochiku / Yamanouchi Shizuo. Release date: 18.11.1962 (Japan). Duration: 113 minutes.

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Anzukko (Little Peach, JAP 1958). Produced by Toho Company. Directed by Naruse Mikio. Release date: 13.5.1958 (Japan).

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The Barretts of Wimpole Street (1957). Produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer British Studios (MGM). Directed by Sidney Franklin. Release date: 16.1.1957 (United States).

Chichi ariki (There Was a Father, JAP 1942). Produced by Shochiku. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Release date: 1.4.1942 (Japan).

Chokoreeto to heitai (Chocolate and Soldiers, JAP 1938). Produced by Toho. Directed by Sato Takeshi. Release date: 30.11.1938 (Japan).

- Civilization* (USA 1915). Produced by Thomas H. Ince Corporation. Directed by Thomas H. Ince, Reginald Barker & Raymond B. West. Release date: 31.12.1915 (United States).
- Daikon to ninjin* (Radishes and Carrots, JAP 1965). Produced by Shochiku. Directed by Shibuya Minoru. Release date: 7.5.1965 (Japan).
- Eiga joyû* (The Actress, JAP 1987). Produced by Toho Company. Directed by Ichikawa Kon. Release date: 17.1.1987 (Japan).
- Fantasia* (USA 1940). Produced by Walt Disney Productions. Directed by James Algar, Samuel Armstrong, Ford Beebe Jr., Norman Ferguson, David Hand, Jim Handley, T. Hee, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske, Bill Roberts, Paul Satterfield, Ben Sharpsteen. Release date: 13.11.1940 (USA).
- Fûfu* (Husband and Wife, JAP 1953). Produced by Toho Company. Directed by Naruse Mikio. Release date: 22.1.1953 (Japan).
- Gonin no sekkôhei* (Five Scouts, JAP 1938). Produced by Nikkatsu. Directed by Tasaka Tomotaka. Release date: 7.1.1938 (Japan).
- Hakai* (The Outcast / The Broken Commandment, JAP 1962). Produced by Daiei Studios. Directed by Ichikawa Kon. Release date: 6.4.1962 (Japan).
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- Josei no shôri* (The Victory of Women, JAP 1946). Produced by Shochiku. Directed by Mizoguchi Kenji. Release date: 18.4.1946.
- Kagamijishi* (The Lion Dance, JAP 1936). Produced by Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai and Shochiku. Directed by Ozu Yasujirô. Release date: 29.6.1936 (Japan).
- Kaze no naka no kodomo* (Children of the Wind, JAP 1937). Produced by Shochiku. Directed by Shimizu Hiroshi. Release date: 11.11.1937.
- The Kid* (1921, USA). Produced by Charles Chaplin Productions. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Release date: 16.1.1921 (USA).
- Kiroi karasu* (Yellow Crow / Behold Thy Son, JAP 1957). Produced by Kabukiza Eiga. Directed by Gosho Heinosuke. Release date: 27.2.1957 (Japan).
- Kiku to Isamu* (Kiku and Isamu, JAP 1959). Produced by Daito Kogyo Company. Directed by Imai Tadashi. Release date: 29.3.1959 (Japan).
- Kôhî jikô* (Café Lumière, JAP-TAI 2003). Produced by Shochiku, Asahi Shimbun and Sumitomo Corporation. Directed by Hou Hsiao-Hsien. Release date: 11.9.2004 (Japan).
- Koibumi* (Love Letter, 1953). Produced by Shintoho. Directed by Tanaka Kinuyo. Release date: 13.12.1953 (Japan).
- Kôjô no tsuki* (Moon Over the Ruins, JAP 1937). Produced by Shochiku. Directed by Sasaki Kôjirô. Release date: 4.2.1937 (Japan).
- Kotan no kuchibue* (A Whistle in My Heart, JAP 1959). Produced by Toho. Directed by Naruse Mikio. Release date: 29.3.1959 (Japan).
- Kuroi ame* (Black Rain, JAP 1989). Produced by Hayashibara Group, Imamura Productions, Tohokushinsa Film Corporation. Directed by Imamura Shôhei. Release date: 13.5.1989 (Japan).
- Make Way for Tomorrow* (USA 1937). Produced by Paramount Pictures. Directed by Leo McCarey. Release date: 30.4.1937 (United States).
- Meshi* (Repast, JAP 1951). Produced by Toho Company. Directed by Naruse Mikio. Release date: 23.11.1951 (Japan).
- Musume tsuma haha* (Daughters, Wives and a Mother, JAP 1960). Produced by Toho Company. Directed by Naruse Mikio. Release date: 28.5.1960 (Japan).

- Namonaku mazushiku utsukushiku* (Our Happiness Alone, JAP 1961). Produced by Toho. Directed by Matsuyama Zenzô. Release date: 15.1.1961 (Japan).
- Naniwa ereji* (Osaka Elegy, JAP 1936). Produced by Daiichi eiga. Directed by Mizoguchi Kenji. Release date: 28.5.1936 (Japan).
- Nihon no higeki* (A Japanese Tragedy, 1953). Produced by Shochiku. Directed by Kinoshita Keisuke. Release date: 17.6.1953 (Japan).
- Nise daigakusei* (A False Student, JAP 1960). Produced by Daiei studios. Directed by Masumura Yasuzô. Release date: 8.10.1960 (Japan).
- Niskavuoren naiset* (The Women of Niskavuori, FIN 1938). Produced by Suomi-Filmi. Directed by Valentin Vaala. Release date: 16.1.1938 (Finland).
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- Ojôsan kanpai* (Here's to the Lady, JAP 1949). Produced by Shochiku. Directed by Kinoshita Keisuke. Release date: 9.3.1949 (Japan).
- Orizuru Osen* (The Downfall of Osen, JAP 1934). Produced by Daiichi Eiga. Directed by Mizoguchi Kenji. Release date: 20.1.1934 (Japan).
- Paisà* (Paisan, ITA 1946). Produced by Organizzazione Film Internazionali & Foreign Film Productions. Directed by Roberto Rossellini. Release date: 18.9.1946 (Italy).
- Paris, Texas* (DEU-FRA 1984). Produced by Anatole Dauman, Pascale Dauman, Don Guest and Chris Sievernich. Directed by Wim Wenders. Release date: 19.5.1984 (France).
- Rashômon* (Rashomon, JAP 1950). Produced by Daiei. Directed by Kurosawa Akira. Release date: 26.8.1950 (Japan).
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