

小津安二郎ありき

Ozu Yasujirō Retrospective at Yale University

September 19 – November 13, 2008

Presented by the Council on East Asian Studies at Yale University
and the Cinema at the Whitney

Early Summer

Bakushū 麦秋

Shōchiku 松竹, released October 3, 1951

124 minutes

Director: Ozu Yasujirō

Script: Noda Kōgo

Cinematography: Atsuta Yoshiyasu

Cast:

Noriko: Hara Setsuko

Koichi: Ryu Chishu

Fumiko: Miyake Kuniko

Shukichi: Sugai Ichirō

Winner of the Kinema Junpo Award for Best Film in 1952, *Early Summer* has long been regarded as one of Ozu's finest achievements. From *Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family* (1941) onwards, Ozu frequently employed large ensemble narrative, but never more successfully than here, where he juggles the actions of nineteen on-screen characters, each with their own personalities, with characteristic equanimity and humor. The plot becomes increasingly elliptical and while other Ozu titles are equally moving, few are as perfectly calibrated, with every shot and gesture matched to both the particular psychological trajectory of the on-screen characters and the overall arc of the film. The second in a loose "trilogy" of films featuring unmarried daughters named Noriko (played by Setsuko Hara), *Early Summer* is, like *Late Spring* (1949) and *Tokyo Story* (1953), as much about the gradual dissolution of traditional family networks as it is about culturally specific customs like arranged marriage. Like them, it is also, in a subtle but deep sense, a postwar film, as manifested through things like the Coca-Cola bottles prominently displayed in several scenes and a park bench reference to a son who is missing in action. There are no flashbacks in *Early Summer*, but the past is continually working its way into the present, and while the film is both witty and charming, there is an undercurrent of loss that quietly builds in poignancy. Rather than allowing these feelings to spill over into sentimentality or melodrama, however, Ozu instead redirects them in scenes where characters contemplate cyclical nature, most markedly in a perfectly perpendicular movement that situates two key characters against an immense expanse of sand, a beautiful exercise in spatial and emotional geometry that is also the only crane shot in Ozu's extant body of work. At moments like these, the characters realize the pettiness of their concerns, but Ozu is careful to avoid ponderousness by deftly moving between serious and humorous episodes, keeping everything tonally balanced without ever losing sight of the relentlessness of time.

—Richard Suchenski