

# Konban-wa, Ozu-san

By David Bordwell

There he was, large as life, if not as lively. Ozu sat cross-legged, bent toward his camera and studying the final shot of Chishu Ryu in *Tokyo Story*. The Mitchell camera was real, as was the low-level tripod, and he had his trusty cigarettes in easy reach. But he, like Ryu, was only an effigy in a theme park. He was the first wax-works film director I'd ever seen.

In fall of 1995, while visiting Tokyo to do research, I took the train out to the suburb of Kamakura. It was Ozu's home for many years, but it was also the site of the Ōfuna studio of the powerful Shochiku motion picture company. Shochiku had recently turned part of its grounds into a theme park devoted to movies. Inside, there were several "zones," mall-like areas consisting of shops and snack bars. An air of vacuous opportunism hung over the place. The American zone contained a CNN store and a scaled-down drive-in, with several convertibles sunk into the concrete floor and pointed toward a video screen. The Japanese zone consisted of a replica of Tora-san's neighborhood, some sets for swordplay films, and a large room devoted to Ozu. Photos from all his films decorated the walls, and at one end was the display that I couldn't leave alone. On the left was a replica of his study, with pipes and sake bottles carefully arrayed on his work table. On the right, there was the tableau of him directing Ryu.

I loved it, but it also made me sad. Shochiku had fallen on hard times. Attendance had slumped, the studio had missed the anime boom, and its characteristically old-fashioned films hadn't found acceptance. Unlike Toho, which had an endlessly marketable commodity in Godzilla, Shochiku held a library of little appeal to modern taste. Its only branded items were Tora-San and Ozu, both sustained chiefly through nostalgia. Hence the company's desperate effort to exploit this director, whose films were unknown to most young people, came off as simply embarrassing. The effigy didn't even look much like him.

Kamakura Cinema World, as the place was called, closed in 1998 after only three years of operation. Shochiku continued to lose out at the box office to thrusting companies tied to TV, advertising agencies, and other conglomerates. Today it's but a shadow of the mighty firm that had ruled local film in the 1930s and 1940s.



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I still think of that theme-park exhibition whenever I turn back to *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*. I think about the fragility of tradition, the confusions and miscalculations of the film business, and the fact that even through hucksterism Ozu retains a place in the wildly unpredictable popular culture of Japan. I'm sure the exhibition would have given him a good laugh.



### Making the Book

In 1974, I saw my first Ozu film, *Tokyo Story* in a PBS broadcast. Having no TV, Kristin Thompson and I, along with Edward Branigan, gathered to watch it in a departmental lounge. It so overwhelmed me, even on a little Trinitron, that I started to show 16mm Ozu prints in my courses. New Yorker Films had just acquired several titles and the copies, particularly of the color films, were superb. We well remember seeing our first graphic match in *Ohayo*, the red shirt on the line matching the red lampshade, when projecting the print in a tiny seminar room. In 1976 Kristin, Ed, and I would write essays on Ozu for the British journal *Screen*.<sup>1</sup>

That same year, Kristin and I went to London and spent a couple of weeks watching the BFI's prints of Ozu items they had acquired. The result was another essay by Kristin.<sup>2</sup> Ozu lingered with us. We wrote an analysis of *Tokyo Story* for our textbook, *Film Art: An Introduction*, and eventually Kristin composed a detailed study of *Late Spring* for her book, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (1988). I kept teaching Ozu films and taking notes on them, asking at every archive I visited what Ozu titles they had in store.

In 1982, I finished my contribution to a book co-written with Kristin and Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. While we were getting the manuscript accepted and published, I wrote *Narration in the Fiction Film*, published in 1985, the same year that *CHC* finally appeared. Both those books were centrally about conventions. Hollywood cinema seems fairly simple, but the more we looked, the more we found that it harbored storytelling strategies that turned out to be fairly complex. In *NiFF*, I tried to tease out conventions of Hollywood narrative, along with traditions of storytelling in the "art cinema" and what I called "historical-materialist" cinema. So I came to the Ozu project having studied the conventions of the conventional and some conventions of the unconventional. Where did Ozu fit in?

I signed a contract for *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* in 1982. After about four years of research, I wrote the bulk of it in the first eight months of 1986. It was published by the British Film Institute in spring of 1988 and by Princeton University Press in fall of the same year. A brief account of the process can be found here.

I had asked the BFI to arrange a copublication with Princeton because I noticed that some BFI books went out of print rather quickly, whereas Princeton usually kept books in print for a long time. (My prototype was Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*, which had been in print since 1947.) My apprehensions were justified. The BFI declared *Ozu* out of print four years after its release. There's some amusing correspondence with the editor in answer to my requests to transfer all rights to Princeton:

Letter of 27 October 1992 begins: "Sorry not to have replied before . . ."

Letter of 5 January 1993 begins: "Sorry not to have replied before. Somehow Christmas got in the way . . ."

Letter of 25 March 1993 begins: "Sorry not to have been in touch before. I just seem to have got swallowed up since I returned from . . ."

Since computers were starting to become widely used at this point, maybe my editor had discovered the usefulness of macros.

Princeton agreed to keep the book going if I would take \$0 royalties. I did. But then the press ran out of copies and wanted to declare the title out of print. I had acquired the preprint materials from the BFI (big cellulose sheets) and paid for them to be cleaned so that Princeton could print from them. The stock that they printed lasted until 2002, when the press's editors decided to let the book fall out of print. (They didn't tell me about the decision until I asked if they had enough copies for Ozu's 2003 centenary.) I made the rounds of publishers without success, since no one wanted to take a risk on this fat, heavily illustrated monster. Then I approached Professor Markus Nornes, who had initiated a series of classic books on Japanese film with the University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies. Bruce Willoughby, executive editor for the series, accepted the challenge and the Center scanned the book and posted an online pdf version in the fall of 2006.

But the pictures in the pdf posting came out pretty coarse and contrasty, and so Markus and his colleagues agreed to replace them. I hired a student, Kristi Gehring, to digitize all the illustrations, and Markus kindly handled the digitizing of the color frames. What you have now is in some ways better than a hard copy: the stills are sharp and bright, many are in color, and the frame enlargements can be blown up for further study. I'm very grateful to Markus, Bruce, and Terry Geitgey of Michigan for going the extra mile with the book. The results confirm my view that online publication harbors great advantages for scholarly work.

### Understanding Ozu

I called the book *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* because I wanted it to have two layers, like a cake. The first layer is about Ozu—his films, their relation to broader trends in Japanese cinema, their place in the local industry, and their roles in popular culture of his era. The second layer of the book aimed to illustrate the value of thinking about cinema from the standpoint of a poetics.

Earlier work on Ozu in English had approached him from three angles. Paul Schrader's *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (1972) constructed a cohort of directors who sought to take film beyond mundane realism through finding transcendence in the everyday. For Schrader, Ozu captured a kind of spirituality on film, as Dreyer and Bresson did, but without adherence to their Christian world views. Donald Richie's monograph, *Ozu* (1974), was a more comprehensive study, arguing that Ozu was "the most Japanese" of filmmakers.<sup>3</sup> His distinctively Japanese quality emerges from his characteristic subject matter, the dissolution of the family, and his quiet technique, which evoked *mu* (nothingness) and *mono no aware* ("the pathos of things"). A very different approach was seen in Noël Burch's *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (1979; available elsewhere on this site).

Whereas Schrader and Richie had emphasized Ozu's postwar work, Burch dismissed it as mannered and argued that the vital phase of his career was much earlier, in the 1930s and early 1940s. Burch argued that Ozu created a stylistic system that was firmly opposed to the Western mode of cinematic representation. Ozu flaunted his characteristic visual devices in a manner recalling Bertolt Brecht's "alienation effect" and premises of classic Japanese art. While Richie situated Ozu within a broad, pan-historical Japaneseness, Burch tied him to specific but distant artistic practices, like kabuki theatre and *renga* verse. Thus for Burch, Ozu's shots of isolated objects at the beginnings and ends of scenes were like the "pillow words" packing out a poetic line.

My central question overlapped with the work of these authors: What were Ozu's distinctive artistic contributions to cinema? In framing an answer, I had the advantage of a resurgence in Ozu studies in his native country. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Hasumi Shiguéhiko, Satō Tadao, and other scholars had devoted books to his work. Several of his screenplays were published, and there were memoirs by figures like Miyagawa Kazuo. I also had time rethink some claims Kristin and I had made in our 1976 essay. Influenced by Roland Barthes' *S/Z* and by some resemblances of Ozu's work to Robbe-Grillet, I had argued that Ozu was a "modernist" filmmaker. But this was to understand modernism in a very ahistorical sense. While our descriptive and

analytical account of his work was valid as far as it went, I failed to offer a convincing causal account of its historical sources and premises. For the book, I wanted to correct my mistake and supply something no earlier writer had proposed: a sense of his proximate cultural context.

Fortunately for me, scholars in Japanese history were beginning to study this context. Aided by my Wisconsin colleague John Dower (now at MIT), a historian par excellence of modern Japan, I began to see that Ozu participated in the booming popular culture of the Shōwa era, and his films bear the traces of many current fads and fashions. In addition, I read English-language newspapers of the 1920s-1940s, chiefly *The Japan Times* and *The Japan Advertiser*, to get a sense of what was current in the Tokyo life that Ozu's films chronicle. Readers who know my criticisms of "the modernity thesis" in *On the History of Film Style* (1997) and *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (2005) will be surprised to find that, in 1988, I argued that Ozu owes a great deal to iconography of modern life in visual culture of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>4</sup>

I think that this part of the book remains mostly successful, and subsequent work on Japanese modernity in the 1920s has supported it. I also sought to show that traditions invoked by Richie and Burch weren't simply borrowed by filmmakers; they could be revised in fresh ways. For example, given a Japanese artistic tradition emphasizing impermanence and ephemerality, Ozu could apply that to the modern city through imagery of smoke, water, and changes from daylight to dusk. He went on to develop these as lyrical asides through his unique insistence on fine-grained cinematic pattern-making.

At the same time that I studied the cultural context of Ozu's work, I concentrated anew on the films. In the book I argue that his work doesn't simply oppose classical American film style, as Burch suggests, but rather it accepts its functional premises and turns them askew. Kristin Thompson and I had already worked on this problem in the mid-1970s, as had Ed Branigan. Returning to Ozu after studying the classical Hollywood cinema and trying to figure out cinematic narration, I was able to refine and expand these ideas about Ozu's style. In addition, several lengthy visits to the Library of Congress in Washington, where scores of pre-1945 Japanese films are preserved, allowed me to tease out trends threading through film style of his epoch. This research enabled me to mount a finer-grained account of his distinctiveness.

Ozu is one of the few directors to create a systematic alternative to Hollywood continuity cinema, but he does so by changing only a few premises. By creating a 360-degree space and a consistently low camera height, Ozu radically alters all the tactics of American technique. He creates his own version of shot/re-

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verse-shot, of eyeline matching, of matches on action, and so on. By refusing the dissolve (after his early films), he forces himself to find ways to ease the viewer out of one scene and into another. As a result we get those visually experimental transitions that engage the viewer in a play of graphic space and linked objects. Ozu's development of his style was enabled by both the artistic experiments going on around him in interwar Japanese cinema and by some unique features of the filmmaking institution he inhabited, the Shochiku studio and its genre structure. He also learned lessons from American filmmakers, especially Lubitsch and Harold Lloyd, and the book was able to show that several aspects of his style imaginatively recast some of their cinematic ideas.

Ozu set constraints on his style, as many great artists have, in order to force it to reveal nuances not achieved otherwise. He did something comparable with his narratives, reiterating a narrative arc that fits into a broader mythos of youth, adulthood, maturity, and old age. He also devised a distinctively elliptical cinematic narration, suited to the stories of social adjustment and private disappointments he developed. Richie had noticed that Ozu characters can surprise us; I suggested that he achieved this by artfully shifting our point-of-view attachment from character to character. Just when we think we know everything, we learn something that casts a new light on the situation. Sometimes as well Ozu completely suppresses key narrative elements—the identity of a suitor, a wedding to which everyone has been looking forward—the better to highlight characters' reactions to the offscreen events.

In sum, I took Ozu to be an innovative, even experimental filmmaker, but one working in an utterly commercial context. This conclusion supports an idea to which I keep clinging. Rather than denounce mass-audience filmmaking as mindless or manipulative, we have to be alert for those moments and those films that are subtly altering received forms and formulas. These changes aren't "deviations" from norms but revisions or transformations of them, sometimes, as in Ozu's case, wholesale alternatives to them. Once a student called me perverse: "You look for the innovative parts of conventional films and the conventional parts of innovative films." Not the complete truth, but a good part of it, I must admit.

Above all, of course, in writing this book I wanted to understand more intimately a filmmaker whose view of cinema and of human life chimed with my own.

### **Particulars and Principles**

So this is what people in film studies call an auteur study. Originally, the auteur approach to criticism showed that directors



working in a highly commercial context could create works that bore a personal stamp. By that criterion, Ozu counts as an auteur. But now the term seems simply to suggest the study of a single director. Many scholars think that such a project is necessarily easy, old-fashioned, or blind to the social circumstances of filmmaking. We should, many say, concentrate on cinema's broadest cultural context, and instead of examining filmmakers we should be trying to understand audiences.

On the charge of focusing on a creative individual, I plead guilty. But I've already suggested that the book tries to show how many of the features of Ozu's work emerge from his place in the film industry and the industry's place in the culture of Taishō and Shōwa Japan. So context isn't neglected here. As for audiences, we are unlikely, I think, to come up with many insights into films' artistic design by studying them via the sort of social and cultural history common in media studies today. Of course many researchers into audiences don't care about the artistic dimensions of films, or indeed the films themselves; if all the world's film copies evaporated tomorrow, these research projects wouldn't be affected. That's no sin, because there are many important questions about cinema that don't require us to examine films. But if we want to know how films are made to fulfill particular purposes, then it's natural to ask about strong creators, filmmakers who have worked in unusual ways. We ask, in effect: How do the creative choices made by distinctive film artists seek to achieve certain ends?

This idea leads me to the book's second layer. The aim is to find both causal and functional explanations of an artist's accomplishments, and for this purpose, something like a poetics of film affords a lot of help. I sketch the idea of a poetics in the Introduction and flesh it out on the fly in succeeding chapters. A more theoretical account of the project can be found in the opening essay of my collection *Poetics of Cinema*. Most of the pieces there look at broader trends, involving work by many directors. The Ozu book is an effort to show how the approach can be brought to bear on a single director's oeuvre.

Through the lens of poetics we can systematically study a director's subjects, themes, formal strategies, and stylistic strategies, taken in relation to the norm-driven practices of his period and place. The poetics framework is historical, because it mounts causal explanations of the movies' distinctive qualities. It's also analytical, because it asks us to scrutinize choices made by the director. Ozu proved ideal for my research program exactly because he has a unique approach to filmmaking, and his artistic decisions transmute some commonplace thematic and dramatic materials into rich aesthetic experiences.

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At the same time, a poetics-based approach allows us to explore the broader resources of cinematic expression. By studying a director's idiosyncratic choices, we necessarily become aware of the paths not taken, the possibilities that lie waiting for someone else to explore. In Ozu's case, his unusual choices are themselves glimpses of another cinema, one quite different from the one we know.

How to study these things systematically? On page 17 I propose a concentric-circle model of inquiry. Put the films at the center. When we want to determine causal and functional explanations for certain features of them, look for the most proximate factors impinging on them. I argue that the most proximate forces are the creator, his colleagues, and their concrete craft practices. These factors are in turn nested within the wider circumstances of filmmaking: the institutions, trends, and traditions that structure the current creative options. Further out lie all the broader cultural forces that make themselves felt in the practice of filmmaking.

At one level this is simply a methodological choice, but theoretical considerations lie underneath it. The key assumption is that the films don't necessarily transmit social forces evenly or faithfully. The norms and practices of filmmaking, as well as the concrete choices involved in making a particular film, will filter, tweak, and transform cultural inputs to one degree or another. So, for instance, Ozu's early films play on the "I ..., but" formulation circulating in Tokyo vernacular, but they give it a new significance through the modern trappings of the Shochiku college comedy and the playfulness and melancholy of Ozu's emerging style.

The book's structure falls out from my effort to consider urban culture, the film industry, and artistic accomplishment in a single view. Chapters 1 and 2 fill in some relevant contextual factors: Ozu's biography, the state of Japanese filmmaking when he entered, and the local practices of cinematic storytelling. (Since then I've dealt in more detail with those practices in two essays in *Poetics of Cinema*.<sup>5</sup> You can get a little of the flavor of those essays here.)

Chapter 3 deals with themes and subjects that were circulating in Ozu's milieu. In Chapter 4 I focus on narrative, using analytical concepts like *fabula*, *syuzhet*, and *narrational patterning*. Chapters 5-6 concentrate on style, with Chapter 7 considering the relation of Ozu's style to various traditions of Japanese art and western cinema.

Before this book I'm not aware that anyone had tried to mount such a comprehensive and detailed account of the artistic accomplishment of a single filmmaker. If this be *auteurism*, make the most of it.



At the same time, I aimed to show that a poetics could answer questions about a filmmaker's place in broader social history. At the time the book was written, there was a lot of debate about the political implications of film. In Chapter 8 I try to show how the analyses proposed in earlier chapters can help explain how films transmit political ideology. I don't claim to have solved the problem in general, but I think my typology of approaches to ideology in film holds up reasonably well. In particular, symptomatic reading has resurfaced under other names, but the strategy itself remains a common choice. I still think that the idea that a rational-agent model of creativity remains the most fruitful methodological point of entry in explaining how films transmit meanings, even when they go beyond the intentions of the makers. After I had finished this book, I went on to write *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, which explored this idea at greater length. There I treat critics as rational agents, solving problems within constraints laid down by institutions . . . just as filmmakers do.

By tackling these problems from the standpoint of poetics, we can learn not only about Ozu but about the capacities of cinematic expression in general. Chapters 4 through 7 in particular, I believe, propose some novel discoveries about what cinema can do, and for this Kristin and I had to invent some terms, such as piece-meal *découpage*, graphic-match cutting, staggered staging, acting in unison, hypersituated objects, and the like. This isn't showing off, merely an effort to find descriptive labels for artistic opportunities that film artists have seized but that we researchers haven't yet detected or explained. Ozu, like many directors, can enlarge our sense of what movies can do, and a poetics-based approach forces us to turn our discoveries about his achievement into analytical tools for understanding other films.<sup>6</sup>

Filmmakers know more than they say or can say. They have secrets, some of which they don't know they know. Let's try to bring their tacit knowledge to light; let's expose their secrets. Will that dispel the mysteries we cherish? Only if we cherish mysteries for their own sake. Knowledge of how artists both rely upon and surpass their craft won't diminish our admiration or dilute our experience. It's illuminating to learn that Rembrandt starts from the portraitist's standard schema for rendering eye sockets but then by applying looser brushwork conjures up a flickering glance.<sup>7</sup> What seems an alchemist's lair becomes a kitchen, where recipes are transformed by trial and error and spontaneous flair. Creation is demystified, and the knowledge increases our appreciation and enjoyment

Originally, *Ozu and The Poetics of Cinema* was going to consist only of the first part you have here. However, I wanted to show

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that the poetics approach could not only bring to light broad tendencies—norms, strategies and tactics, regularities of theme, form, and style—but also show how these informed a single film. So, with the somewhat stunned agreement of my editors, I went on to discuss every film in chronological order. Because there could be no question of analyzing and interpreting each film fully, I decided to pick one or two issues, of theme or technique or storytelling, that I thought the film threw into relief. Once again, the purpose was twofold: To do justice to Ozu's artistic accomplishment and to suggest the particular advantages of a poetics-based approach.

I find that this book, like most of my work, gets criticized from two directions. Traditionalists find it too fancy and far-fetched. They suggest that a poetics-based approach is too abstract, too far from the sensuous surface of the work. Some traditionalists think that all these terms and concepts get in the way of simple appreciation of the artist's achievement. The exercise seems mechanical and reductive. Most critics in this vein also reject the idea of situating the artist within craft traditions and thereby reconstructing the range of choices available to him or her. Art, they will suggest, owes little to craft.

Alternatively, adherents of Grand Theory find this book and my others too meat-and-potatoes. I'm told that poetics is just glorified common sense, that it is "empiricist," that it is "undertheorized." I just don't appreciate the ever more subtle undercurrents in thinking about cinema that have been revealed by Lacan, Deleuze, Virilio, Benjamin, Žižek, or whomever the theorist prefers.

Ever since Kristin's and my first work on Ozu was published, I've been aware of these poles of reaction. To claim that I plug along untouched by trends in contemporary film studies would contradict my concern that artists' work be studied in relation to norms. So I try to be explicit about my debts to and departures from both interpretive criticism and High Theory. While most of my critics have responded to my initiatives with curt, often uncomprehending, dismissals, I have responded to both lines of criticism throughout other publications, so here I will say only a couple of things.

An attentive reader of *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* will find that at many points I assimilate what I think is useful in both traditional humanist approaches and structuralist and post-structuralist positions. At other points I take pains to explain why I can't accept certain tenets of a position. I think that a reader who engages with the book's arguments will find that it isn't really vulnerable to critiques of the sort I've mentioned. My analysis doesn't stray too far from the films' texture; it tries to deepen our awareness of it. I don't reduce the films to a set of impersonal systems; I try to

bring out Ozu's playfulness, his sense of backing away from his own machinery in order to achieve humor and surprise.

Similarly, I can't consider revealing middle-level dynamics of style and story to be mere common sense, if only because in volumes of critical commentary no one had noticed them before. My enterprise is "undertheorized" only if you think that every conceptual argument has to spell out bedrock principles, ontology, or ultimate world views. I try to provide only as much "theory" as is necessary to solve the midrange problems I've tackled. The fewer theoretical presuppositions you hold, and the more you appeal to intersubjectively accessible evidence, the stronger your argument gets. In sum, I think that the book, in its breadth and depth, read by someone with an open mind, emerges largely unscathed from the sorts of objections I've indicated.

More positively, these criticisms puzzle me. In many respects, I'm simply doing what musicologists and art historians have done for centuries in other arts: study form, style, and theme from a functional standpoint, bringing in contextual factors as plausible causal inputs. Perhaps this very orthodoxy makes people impatient. Still, since most ambitious humanist academics think of themselves as outlaws, they should be gratified to see somebody pursuing a line of inquiry that remains a highly nonconformist option in film studies. Perhaps as well the problem is that I want to generalize a bit beyond the individual case. I try to draw inductive and deductive inferences about artistic trends, and I look for methodological implications that might transfer from one case to another. Like another David, "I am uneasy to think I approve of one object, and disapprove of another; call one thing beautiful, and another deform'd; decide concerning truth and falsehood, reason and folly, without knowing upon what principles I proceed."<sup>8</sup> For me, the operative word in Hume's passage is *principles*. Poetics is concerned with both particulars and principles, and *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* tries to balance the two.

### Envoi

Despite the critiques I've already mentioned, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* was mostly well-received. It has probably changed some people's conception of the director's work. Many of the stylistic strategies that Kristin and I pointed out in 1976 and that I develop in the pages that follow are now taken for granted and commonly noted without reference to us—a sign that an idea has become commonplace.<sup>9</sup> The book is a standard reference in studies of Japanese cinema in English and in other languages.

I'm told by one unsympathetic commentator that specialists in Japanese film nowadays ignore the book because I don't speak Japanese. I'm given confidence, though, by the fact that the book

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was translated into Japanese in 1992 and that I've been invited to conferences and festivals concerning Japanese cinema. We should remember that being a professor of Japanese literature and culture doesn't automatically confer knowledge of film history or film analysis, any more than knowing Italian literature allows a scholar to understand the musical logic of a Verdi opera. I welcome all well-founded observations that any researcher can bring to the table, but it should go without saying that scholars trained in film studies have unique contributions to make to understanding any national cinema.

When the book was published, it was quite hard for ordinary viewers to see most of Ozu's work. Some circulated on videotape in Japan, but early video versions from Shochiku were TV prints that were, unbelievable as it sounds, cut in various ways. (Transitional shots were especially likely to be lopped out.) During the 1970s, touring programs sponsored by the Japan Film Library Council brought many Ozu films to urban centers and universities, and Shochiku occasionally arranged for retrospectives. Not until the arrival of DVDs did Ozu's work become widely available. Shochiku produced a boxed set (including many poor-quality transfers), and US, UK, and French companies followed suit with somewhat better editions. We may expect more, and I hope better, video editions of Ozu films in the future. Still, Ozu is perhaps today more widely seen and admired than he has been at any point in history.

Looking over this book, I see many things I'd like to change. One of my editors, perhaps under the influence of Adorno, habitually merged several paragraphs into a mammoth one, so I've paged through my battered copy retrieving them; you can do the same. Yet most of the mistakes are mine. Too many sentences stumble. Today I'd try to write more cleanly and sharply, pruning the quotation marks and italics. I decided to eliminate macrons and give Japanese names in western order—both conventions of nonspecialist books on Japan at the time—but today I regret both those choices. Some of my transliterations are shaky and many ideas and judgments need nuancing. I'm not aware of any errors of fact, but as corrections are pointed out to me I'll maintain an errata list on my website, [www.davidbordwell.net](http://www.davidbordwell.net).

All the book's faults, sequestered for years on shadowy library shelves, now stand naked on the Net. Nevertheless, I hope that readers will be aroused and enlightened by an effort that was, despite too many touches of dry rationality, meant as a heartfelt tribute to the nonchalant, unpretentious artist I regard as the greatest filmmaker in the history of cinema.



### Further Reading

It would be impossible to review the expansion of English-language research on Ozu and the culture of his period. In writing I've done since 1988 I've cited some of this work, so for more recent references, see the endnotes in *On the History of Film Style, Figures Traced in Light*, and my updated essays on Japanese film style in *Poetics of Cinema* (2007; endnote 4 below). Below I list other significant material on Ozu, Japanese cinema, and the culture of his period.

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### Endnotes

1. Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu," *Screen* 17, 2 (Summer 1976), 41-73; Edward Branigan, "The Space of *Equinox Flower*," *Screen* 17, 2 (Summer 1976), 74-105.
2. Kristin Thompson, "Notes on the Spatial System of Ozu's Early Films," *Wide Angle* 1, 4 (1977), 8-17.
3. Richie develops a similar argument in his *Japanese Cinema: Film Style and National Character*, where he nominates Ozu "spokesman of the Japanese tradition." See page 69 of the book, which appears in this electronic reprint series.
4. My objections to the modernity thesis center on appealing to it as an overarching explanation for *stylistic* change and continuity, as well as its claims about changes in human perceptual capacities.
5. See "Visual Style in Japanese Cinema, 1925-1945" and "A Cinema of Flourishes," in *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 337-74, 375-93.
6. I've found this fruitful in other projects, as when learning about the "visual pyramid" that guided 1910s filmmakers yielded a critical tool for studying ensemble staging in modern directors like Theo Angelopoulos and Hou Hsiao-hsien. See *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
7. See Ernst van de Wetering, *Rembrandt: The Painter at Work* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997), 170-73.
8. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40; New York: BiblioBazaar, 2006), 254.
9. Unfortunately, sometimes the terms are used mistakenly; many introductory textbooks botch their explanations of the graphic match.