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| Mizoguchi, Kenji (1898-1956) |
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| Mizoguchi Kenji (16 May, 1898-24 August, 1956) was a Japanese film director, considered to be one of the three greatest directors of Japan’s golden age of cinema, along with Ozu Yasujiro and Kurosawa Akira. Mizoguchi was born in Tokyo into poverty, and was eventually given work and supported by his older sister, who had achieved a degree of stability after being sold as a geisha. Mizoguchi started with the production company Nikkatsu in 1920, and after the Great Kanto Earthquake destroyed Tokyo in 1923, he moved to the production studios in Kyoto, where he would spend the majority of his career.  After directing a number of early films set in the Meiji period, in 1936 Mizoguchi filmed a pair of critical successes set in contemporary Osaka and Kyoto: *Osaka erejii* [*Osaka Elegy*] and *Gion no kyōdai* [*Sisters of the Gion*]. Both films exhibit Mizoguchi’s most common theme: the struggle of women at the mercy of the often callous men around them. The former film represents the start of Mizoguchi’s long association with screenwriter Yoda Yoshikata, while the latter opens with one of Mizoguchi’s famous long takes, a dolly shot in which the camera glides through a bankrupt merchant’s house, past an auction and a group of creditors to the merchant’s family itself. |
| Mizoguchi Kenji (16 May, 1898-24 August, 1956) was a Japanese film director, considered to be one of the three greatest directors of Japan’s golden age of cinema, along with Ozu Yasujiro and Kurosawa Akira. Mizoguchi was born in Tokyo into poverty, and was eventually given work and supported by his older sister, who had achieved a degree of stability after being sold as a geisha. Mizoguchi started with the production company Nikkatsu in 1920, and after the Great Kanto Earthquake destroyed Tokyo in 1923, he moved to the production studios in Kyoto, where he would spend the majority of his career.  After directing a number of early films set in the Meiji period, in 1936 Mizoguchi filmed a pair of critical successes set in contemporary Osaka and Kyoto: *Osaka erejii* [*Osaka Elegy*] and *Gion no kyōdai* [*Sisters of the Gion*]. Both films exhibit Mizoguchi’s most common theme: the struggle of women at the mercy of the often callous men around them. The former film represents the start of Mizoguchi’s long association with screenwriter Yoda Yoshikata, while the latter opens with one of Mizoguchi’s famous long takes, a dolly shot in which the camera glides through a bankrupt merchant’s house, past an auction and a group of creditors to the merchant’s family itself. Mizoguchi’s ‘one scene, one take’ approach reached its apex with two subsequent films for the Shōchiku studio: *Zangiku monogatari* [*The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum*] (1939) and *Genroku chushingura* [*The Loyal 47 Ronin*] (1941-1942). The latter film is three hours, thirty-five minutes long and arranged in two parts, and cinema critic Sato Tadao counted approximately 160 shots, averaging out to 80 seconds per shot. Mizoguchi’s long takes are reflective of what Darrell William Davis has called ‘monumental style’, a resistance to the classical Hollywood cinema style that utilized ‘long takes and long shots, very slow camera movements, and a highly ceremonial manner of blocking, acting, and set design’ (6).  After the end of the Second World War, Mizoguchi made a series of films, which capitalised on the spirit of postwar liberation by depicting women resisting oppression across time in *Josei no shori* [*The Victory of Women*] (1946), *Joyu Sumako no koi* [*The Love of Sumako the Actress*] (1947), *Yoru no onnatachi* [*Women of the Night*] (1948), and *Waga koi wa moenu* [*My Love Has Been Burning*] (1949). Following another group of films based on contemporary novels, three Mizoguchi films based on classic literary works brought him worldwide acclaim in the last three years of his life. *Saikaku ichidai onna* [*The Life of Oharu*] (1952), *Ugetsu monogatari* [*Ugetsu*] (1953), and *Sansho dayu* [*Sansho the Bailiff*] (1954) all won prizes at the Venice Film Festival. The three films show women suffering under feudal systems in historical Japan, but all bear signs of the times in which they were produced; *Ugetsu*, in particular, with its depictions of war profiteers, echoes the economic recovery in Japan made possible by supplying materiel for the Korean War.  Another film highly regarded by film scholars, *Chikamatsu monogatari* [*The Crucified Lovers*] (1954), was based on a puppet play by the eighteenth-century playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon. In March of 1956, Mizoguchi released his last film, *Akasen chitai* [*Street of Shame*], centring on a group of contemporary prostitutes in the fading traditional pleasure quarters. He died of leukaemia later that same year. Mizoguchi’s influence can be felt among the French New Wave directors as well as in the films of contemporary long-take Japanese directors such as Koreeda Hirokazu. List of Works: *Osaka erejii* [*Osaka Elegy*] (1936)  *Gion no kyodai* [*Sisters of the Gion*] (1936)  *Zangiku monogatari* [*The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum*] (1939)  *Genroku chushingura* [*The Loyal 47 Ronin*] (1941-1942)  *Josei no shōri* [*The Victory of Women*] (1946)  *Joyū Sumako no koi* [*The Love of Sumako the Actress*] (1947)  *Yoru no onnatachi* [*Women of the Night*] (1948)  *Waga koi wa moenu* [*My Love Has Been Burning*] (1949)  *Saikaku ichidai onna* [*The Life of Oharu*] (1952)  *Ugetsu monogatari* [*Ugetsu*] (1953)  *Sansho dayu* [*Sansho the Bailiff*] (1954)  *Chikamatsu monogatari* [*The Crucified Lovers*] (1954)  *Akasen chitai* [*Street of Shame*] (1956) |
| Further reading:  (Davis)  (Kirihara)  (McDonald) |