

# Ozu's lag in overseas popularity: Slowness and the “Japanese style”

Kensuke MASAKIYO

In contrast to Japanese directors Akira Kurosawa and Kenji Mizoguchi, who had their films exported to Europe at the beginning of the 1950s, the films of Yasujiro Ozu required an additional ten years before they were able to become popular overseas. This paper explores the cause of this delay through an examination of the expression “Japanese” in film criticism.

One conceivable reason for the lag is the fact that Ozu's films were not in the *jidaigeki* (historical drama) genre, a genre popular with foreign audiences. Instead of this reason, however, this paper focuses on the criticism that Ozu's films were “slow”. The slow pace of Ozu's films had been identified, and regarded as a problem, by several Japanese film critics from before World War II. In 1952, film critic Juzaburo Futaba attempted to explain this slowness by referring to the “Japanese style”, and argued that Ozu's films were unattractive to non-Japanese audiences for the very reason that his films were “Japanese”.

In the mid-1950s, the relatively slower pace of all Japanese films began to be regarded as a hindrance to their promotion overseas. Slowness, and Futaba's conception of the “Japanese style”, changed from being a purely critical complaint into an export problem involving the Japanese film industry. The especially slow pace and “Japanese style” of Ozu's films were surely the prime cause of his lag in overseas popularity.