



***Entotsu no mieru basho* (Where Chimneys Are Seen a.k.a. Four Chimneys) is a February, 2024 LVCA dvd accession to the Hugh Stoupe Library of the Heritage Methodist Church in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd.**

**16 of a total 20 points = a minor classic**

**Key: \*= outstanding technical achievement or performance**

**(j) = juvenile performer**

**Japan 1953 black-and-white 107 minutes subtitled live action feature  
dramedy Shintoho Film Distribution Committee / Studio Eight**

**Producer: Yoshishige Uchiyama Imagica Entertainment Media Services dvd**

**Points:**

- 2 Direction: Heinosuke Gosho\***
- 2 Editing: Shin Osada**
- 2 Cinematography: Mitsuo Miura\***
- 0 Lighting: Aizô Kôno (Restoration is badly needed!)**
- 2 Screenplay: Hideo Oguni\* and Rinzo Shiina\* based on Shiina's novel**
- 1 Music: Yashushi Akutagawa**
- 2 Art Direction: Tomoo Shimogawara**
- 2 Sound: Yûji Dôgen**
- 2 Acting**

## 1 Creativity

16 total points

Cast: Kinuyo Tanaka\* (Hiroko Ogata), Ken Uehara (Ryukichi Ogata), Hideko Takamine\* (Senko Azuma), Hiroshi Akutagawa\* (Kenzo Kubo), Chieko Seki (Yukiko Ikeda), Ranko Hanai (Katsuko Ishihashi), Takeshi Sakamoto (Tokuji Kawamura), Haryo Tanaka\* (Chuji Tsukahara), Eiko Miyoshi (Ranko), Kumeko Urabe (Kayo Nojima), Michiyo Yoshimoto (j) (infant), others

Heinosuke Gosho directed a trio of notable films in the 1950s. One was *Entotsu no mieru basho* (*Where Chimneys Are Seen / Four Chimneys*). By the time of its release in 1953, Gosho had become a veteran stalwart of the Japanese movie industry, having directed his inaugural outing in 1925. With release of *Madamu to nyōbō* (*The Neighbor's Wife and Mine*) in 1931, the first feature-length sound film in Japan, Gosho swept into the progressive mainstream of world cinema. He would ultimately pilot approximately one hundred films in a career spanning nearly five decades. Between 1964 and 1980, this trailblazer served as President of the Directors Guild of Japan.

His command of sound recording and speedy, Hollywood-style editing are very much evident in *Entotsu no mieru basho*. Other trademarks are displayed here as well: scenes where the atmosphere induces simultaneous laughter and tears in the audience – a novelty dubbed Goshoism — extreme close-ups, multi-tiered wide shots, aerial photographs, frequent low-angle point-of-view compositions.

Breaking one of literature's sacred cow mandates, the screenplay keeps shifting personal narratives from one key performer to another. Thus making for a communal story rather than some conventional tale of protagonist versus antagonist. In Gosho's eyes, there were only human beings, not heroes or villains. He wanted viewers to identify with all characters.

Translating that universal empathy into screen manifestations meant repeated views of chimneys visible from Tokyo's Shenju slum where most of the narrative's action is set. Depending where a character was situated at the time, he or she saw one, two, three, or four factory chimneys. That was no optical illusion.

As events unfold and complications abound, individual judgments about each character undergo continual revision, paralleling shifting perspectives on the actual quartet of chimneys. Indeed, the screenplay itself focusses mainly on a quartet of individuals: landlord Ryukichi Ogata, his wife Hiroko, and two upstairs renters. As available information increases about their motivations premature conclusions must be modified. Sometimes drastically. It's also essential for each one to adapt as disclosures occur about members of a secondary trio comprised of irresponsible alcoholic Chuji, Chuji's current mistress, and Senko's flippant co-worker, Yukiko.

Gosho had no use for set prejudices, being a lifelong social liberal preaching tolerance and adaptability. His mouthpiece in the film, tax collector Kenzo Kubo, is of limited job effectiveness due to empathy for small businessmen unable to both feed their families and simultaneously meet payment demands from the government. Indeed, at one point in the film a shopkeeper in exasperation offers Kubo the youngest member of his family – a baby – in lieu of money.

“Life is what you do with it” could be cited as the moral of Rinzo Shiina's novel which served as basis for Hideo Oguni's script. How you perceive life and respond to it is every bit as important as what life brings your way.

Undertaking to illustrate this, Oguni and Shiina introduce seven characters mentioned above whose lives intertwine during the course of a couple days in postwar Tokyo. Two of them, Hiroko and Ryukichi, are contentedly married.

Their bliss is fleeting, however. As soon as Ryukichi learns his spouse is earning money from a side business at a cycling track, he accuses her of acting independently without consulting him. Something he believes to be ethically wrong. There can only be one decisive household head: Ryukichi himself. Hiroko disagrees, taking the position of rugged individualism. She's in charge of her own life and always has been. Take that, hubby.

Matters soon worsen for them. Hiroko's painful tooth continues bothering her, eliciting irritation rather than consolation from Ryukichi. Then a person unknown leaves a baby at their residence while Hiroko is off working at the cycle stadium. That infant's surprise arrival confuses her mate. When an accompanying note is found and read, it unravels the less-than-candid Mrs. Ogata's carefully reconstructed postwar life.

Hiroko confesses she had mentally disassociated herself from Husband Number One, incorrectly assuming Chuji Tsukahara was killed in a World War II

bombing. Apparently he himself had been content to let such misperception dissolve their marriage. In fact, though not on paper. He was disinclined to seek diligently for a missing better half. In his case, absence didn't make the heart grow fonder.

Claiming war widowhood, Hiroko married Ryukichi for love. The sock salesman was certainly no prosperous bachelor.

Returning to present dilemma, the Ogatas find an officially signed and stamped document affirming Hiroki to be legal spouse to Chuji. It also listed her as mother of infant girl Shigeko, Chuji's otherwise unannounced gift to the Ogata couple.

This only reinforces Ryukichi's nagging suspicion of marital infidelity on the part of Hiroko. He insists Shigeko is solely the concern of Lady Businesswoman, who must have been consorting on the sly with a former significant other. But when frantic fumbling through drawers in their living area discloses a separate testimonial to the Ogatas conjugal status, a spectre of bigamy appears. All the fault of Hiroko, of course, according to Husband Number Two.

Now what? All choices lead in seemingly disastrous directions.

Meanwhile, constant crying by Shigeko disturbs lives of neighbors, particularly those renting space from Ryukichi upstairs and next door. Kenzo and Senko, located in separate rooms immediately above the Ogatas, cannot escape overhearing argument and wailing below due to extremely thin partitioning of the building all four share. Due to narrowness of walking space between two rundown structures, the devoutly religious couple renting next door from the now-turbulent Ogatas experience the same hubbub.

Such an unaccustomed din reminds Senko of wartime trauma during which she failed to keep alive, despite heroic efforts, an orphaned nephew. Because of that she shies away from marriage and children, despite the appeal of both for Kenzo. Her job announcing daily special store sales on the radio isn't particularly fulfilling. But Senko's not economically in a position to leave it. Unlike her unflappable fellow worker who briefly enters into alliance with an older, gambling-addicted loser inclined towards alcohol and suicide.

On the other side of a sliding door is Kenzo's rat-infested single-room apartment. Though the homemade trap he constructs to bring rodent relief proves effective, its occupant is permitted eventual release, a visual metaphor

for equally charitable disentanglement occurring as each individual introduced learns more about other folks in the community.

Investigation, undertaken by Kenzo after saving a distraught Hiroko from suicide in a river flowing within convenient strolling distance from their residence, reveals, after much exhausting footwork, that Shigeko was abandoned because Chuji's current partner desired to compel that wastrel to accept paternal responsibility.

Her ploy backfired when Chuji instead passed their child along furtively to unsuspecting Ogatas.

So now who will volunteer to nurse an ailing, suddenly silent baby? Ryukichi, whose newly won pachinko profits are whetting a heretofore unknown appetite for gambling? Hiroko, who feels betrayed into a situation exposing her chaotic and rather selfish past? The unmarried, evasively non-committal twosome of Kenzo and Senko? Fashionable homeless Yukiko, entirely dependent upon charity from others? The drum-pounding, chanting, incense-burning duo who pour out a flood of prayers for their troubled neighbors? A reform-minded natural mother, who actually may love her daughter despite appearances?

Watch the rest of the movie to find out how this complicated game of parental transfer and obligation ends.

Notable performances are Kinuyo Tanaka's heartrending Hiroko, Hideko Takamine's flirtatious Senko, Haryo Tanaka's pathetic Chuji, and Hiroshi Akutagawa's morally upright Kenzo. The latter received a Mainichi Best Supporting Actor Award for his splendid work in this film. Tokyo critics and writers elected to shower Blue Ribbon Awards for Best Cinematography and Best Music on Gosho's picture as well. It also won the prize of the City of Berlin at the 1953 Berlinale.

*Entotsu no mieru basho* is suitable fare for teen and adult audiences. There's a single scene of plot-justified profanity.

Clearly one masterwork of Japanese cinema, this dramedy richly rewards discriminating film fans seeking a memorable and humane story garnished with top-notch performances buoyed by a literate, coherent screenplay. Highly recommended by Kino Ken.

Kino Ken wishes to extend gratitude for Kyoko Hirano's online review of this film at [www.filmreference.com](http://www.filmreference.com). He also acknowledges indebtedness for some plot clarifications to the July 7, 2016 review of Gosho's classic at

<https://windowsonworlds> and to the anonymous June 25, 2019 online review to be found at [www.japanonfilm.com](http://www.japanonfilm.com).