



## Like father, like son

**Director:** Hirokazu Kore-eda

**Country:** Japan

**Date:** 2013

*A review by Mark Kermode for The Guardian:*

Hirokazu Kore-eda's previous feature, *I Wish*, was a jewel of a film; a tale of two young brothers torn apart by their parents' separation who put their faith in a mythical vortex created by the passing of speeding bullet trains. The original title of that film was *Kiseki* – the Japanese word for miracle – which perfectly captured its transcendent, humanist charm.

Kore-eda returns to the subject of parents and children in this beautiful, melancholic paean to paternity, which sifts through issues of nature and nurture as gently as a hand passing through drifting sand. The story is an old one – two babies, accidentally swapped at birth, raised by families of differing social status, now faced with the heartbreaking prospect of having to exchange their six-year-olds in whom each family has invested so much energy, ambition and love. Masaharu Fukuyama is the affluent workaholic whose initial sideswiped reaction ("Now it makes sense ...") masks more complex inner turmoil; his aversion to the ramshackle family in which his biological son has been raised inevitably gives way to a realisation that he has been an absent father and husband – repeating the patterns of previous generations.



While the adults attempt to sort through the conflicting bonds of blood and water, the children flow from family to family like intermingling streams of effervescent life. As before, Kore-eda's facility for casting and directing young performers is spine-tingling; watching these children as they watch their parents is utterly mesmerising, reminiscent of the finest work of the Dardenne brothers; unobtrusive, intuitive, instinctive. Equally impressive is the refusal to reduce any of the adults to

stereotypes – while a clichéd contrast between wealth and austerity beckons, Kore-eda invests his characters with believable flaws and strengths, regardless of class and situation. Even the nominal "villain" of the piece (the nurse responsible for the switch) is given a sympathetic hearing – a lost soul with her own parental issues. The result is a deceptively rich and rewarding drama, small of gesture, huge of heart.

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