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Shichinin no samurai (Seven samurai), Kurosawa, Akira, 1954

Dodes'ka-den, Kurosawa, Akira, 1970

Rashomon, Kurosawa, Akira, 1950

Tsubaki Sanjuro (Sanjuro), Kurosawa, Akira, 1962

Hakuchi (The idiot), Kurosawa, Akira, 1951

Tengoku to jigoku (High and low), Kurosawa, Akira, 1963

Ikiru (To live), Kurosawa, Akira, 1952

Donzoko (The lower depths), Kurosawa, Akira, 1957

Yojimbo, Kurosawa, Akira, 1961

Ikimono no koroku (I live in fear), Kurosawa, Akira, 1956

Sugata Sanshiro (Sanshiro Sugata), Kurosawa, Akira, 1943

Akahige (Red beard), Kurosawa, Akira, 1965

Yoidore tenshi (Drunken angel), Kurosawa, Akira, 1948

Kakushi toride no san-akunin (The hidden fortress), Kurosawa, Akira, 1958

Warui yatsu hodo nemuru (The bad sleep well), Kurosawa, Akira, 1960

TLA CINEMA

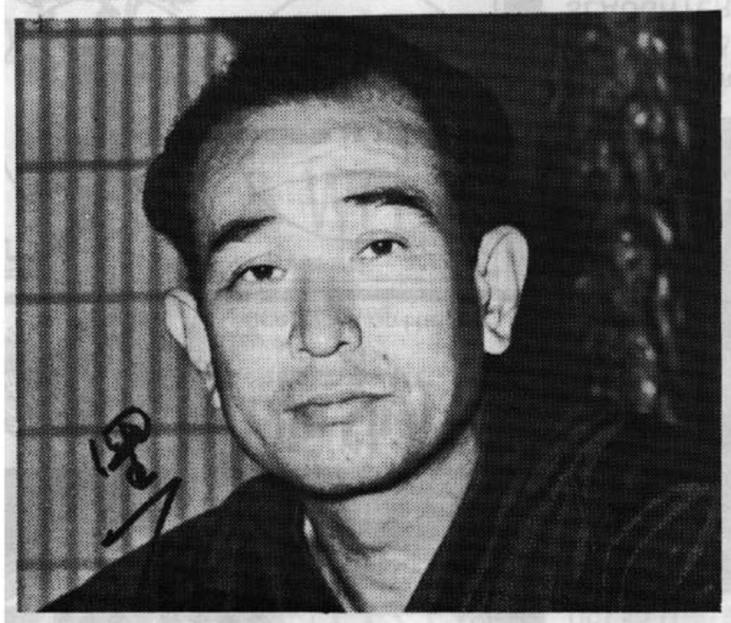
FALL 1973 FILM SCHEDULE

THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA COVER: YOJIMBO

KUROSAWA

We are proud to announce that beginning Wednesday, November 28th, TLA Cinema will present the theatrical premiere of Akira Kurosawa's DODES'KA-DEN. As a prelude to this event, we have devoted part of our fall schedule to a retrospective of his work. Of the twenty-four films Kurosawa made prior to DODES'KA-DEN, sixteen — including all of his major films — will be shown in the retrospective.

The notes which follow are neither a study nor an analysis of Kurosawa. Rather, they are an objective, and hopefully informative, introduction to a great director and his films.



Akira Kurosawa was born in Tokyo in 1910 into a family of the samural class. His father, first an army officer then a physical education instructor, was one of the last of the old military educators. Accordingly, Kurosawa received some military education as a child. He was, among other things, good at *kendo,* and seems to have been a leader among his peers from the time he was a boy. He studied painting and worked for a while as a painter and commercial illustrator.

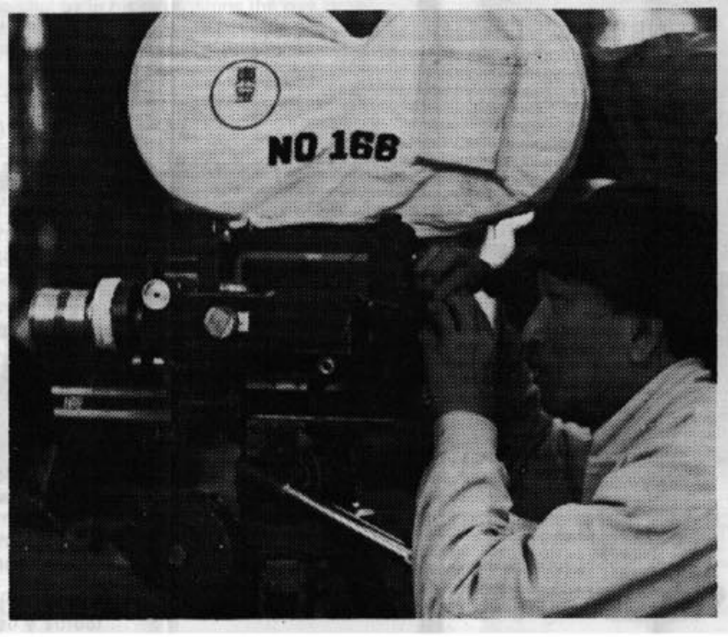
As a student Kurosawa read a great deal and was strongly attracted to 19th century Russian literature, especially to the novels of Dostoevsky. In fact, Dostoevsky was perhaps the strongest influence on his developing creativity. It was from Dostoevsky that he learned about human psychology and the compassion an artist can have for human suffering. Out of these lessons grew the artistic humanism that characterizes Kurosawa's work.

In 1936, not out of a desire to make films his career but rather simply to support himself, Kurosawa went to work for P.C.L. Studios (forerunner of Toho). Under the apprentice system operating in the Japanese film industry, a director would function as a master artist and teacher, supervising the learning process of those who were new to the craft. Kurosawa was assigned to Kajiro Yamamoto who had a great influence on him. Yamamoto meticulously instructed his assistant in the various details of making films, and it was during this period that Kurosawa decided to devote his life to film making. Much later, as Kurosawa had been apprenticed to Yamamoto, so two more recent Japanese directors of note, Kobayashi and Horikawa, would be apprenticed as assistants to Kurosawa.

Kurosawa was a brilliant pupil, learning everything readily and thoroughly. He had the discipline — the same discipline that would later reveal itself in the rigorous construction of his films — both to learn from working and to teach himself even more. He spent seven years as an assistant director, during which time he wrote many scripts and yearned to direct on his own. The uncompromising and often inspired work that he did for Yamamoto indicated the scope of his talent and promised a great future. When finally he had the opportunity to direct his own film, this promise was realized; and since then his stature as an artist has continually increased.

Tradition is very strong in Japanese cinema as it is throughout Japanese culture. The typical Japanese film has the quality of artless simplicity that is widely held to be the proper approach to art. It is a quality that has occasionally produced greatness, as in the films of Ozu and Mizoguchi; but far more often it has lead to impersonal, imitative and standardized films. And the typical Japanese director functions as the chairman of a creative committee, freely accepting the advice of his subordinates, and working within the artistic and financial limitations dictated by the studio which employs him.

Not so Kurosawa. From the beginning he has been a radical director, discontent with observing a convention for the sake of the convention itself. Consequently he is considered in Japan to be the "least Japanese" of directors, and his critics attack him for being too "Western." Yet it was Kurosawa who was the first Japanese director to be recognized abroad and who established, almost alone, the reputation of post-war Japanese cinema. Also, Kurosawa always knows what he wants and insists upon getting it. This strong self will does not conform to what many Japanese consider to be "correct," and his detractors refer to him as Kurosawa Tenno, Emperor Kurosawa. His associates, however, have a seemingly unbounded admiration for him, and the same people continue to work with him again and again. When working he is very close to his cast and crew; indeed, his only true friends may be found among his collaborators.



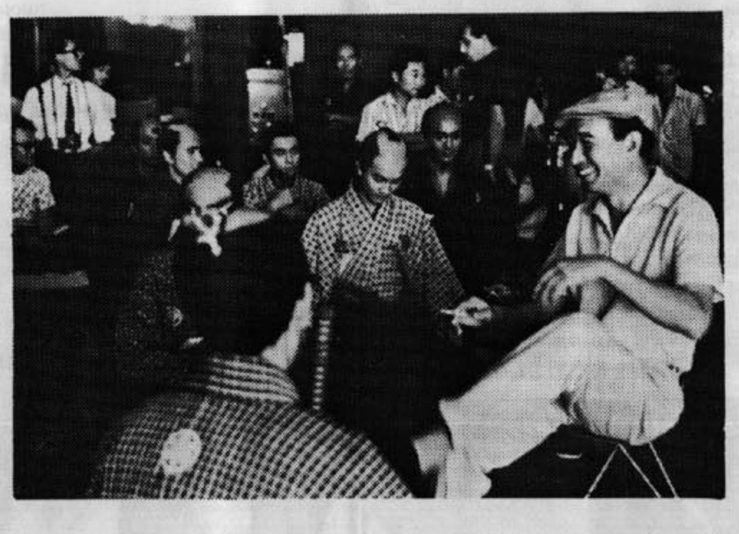
The most conspicuous aspect of Kurosawa's work is his craftsmanship: everything is made to work in a Kurosawa film. This is partly a result of his personal discipline and his perfectionism. But it is also because he takes an utterly pragmatic approach to making a film, more so perhaps than any other major director in the world. He does not bring a preconceived concept of cinematic style to his material. Instead, he lets the material determine how the film will be made.

Kurosawa is in complete control of his material. He develops an idea for a film, he writes it jointly with his scriptwriters, he does the casting, directs the actors, personally checks every camera shot, supervises and decides on the music, and finally he does the editing himself. However, with all this power and control he never falls into the trap of stylistic egomania but always keeps the basic idea of a given film uppermost in his mind. Every decision Kurosawa makes is for the purpose of conveying the psychological truth of that idea.

In order to achieve his ends, he uses every cinematic device: slow motion, fast motion, stop motion; wipes, fades, dissolves; pans, tracks, cuts, montages; a variety of lenses, especially long-distance lenses; even, on one occasion, tinted film. Unlike most major directors, Kurosawa does not do what he thinks is aesthetically correct; he does what he thinks will work. He pays incredible attention to the physical aspects of detail, to their appearance of reality. In the actual shooting, he is very functional. He shoots a specific subject according to how it looks. There are usually several lightweight, easily moveable cameras in operation at any given time. Kurosawa's normal shooting ratio is 10:1, and he has been known to double it. But he gets what he wants, and his films justify the careful, painstaking work and his complete disregard for budgets and shooting schedules.

Kurosawa, indeed Japanese cinema, came to the attention of the West when RASHOMON won the Grand Prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1950. Since then he has generally been considered in the West primarily to be a director of period films, but this is a misconception. The Japanese consider films to be divided into two categories: *gendai-geki,* or films with contemporary subjects, and *jidai-geki,* or costume films, the dividing line between the two being 1868. Kurosawa's films fall about equally into each category.

He has scripted or co-scripted all his own films but one, and has, in addition, written eighteen scripts that have been filmed by other directors and six more that have not been filmed. His first film, SANSHIRO SUGATA, has been remade twice in Japan, with Kurosawa himself editing the second remake. Three of his films, RASHOMON, SEVEN SAMURAI and YOJIMBO, have been remade abroad.

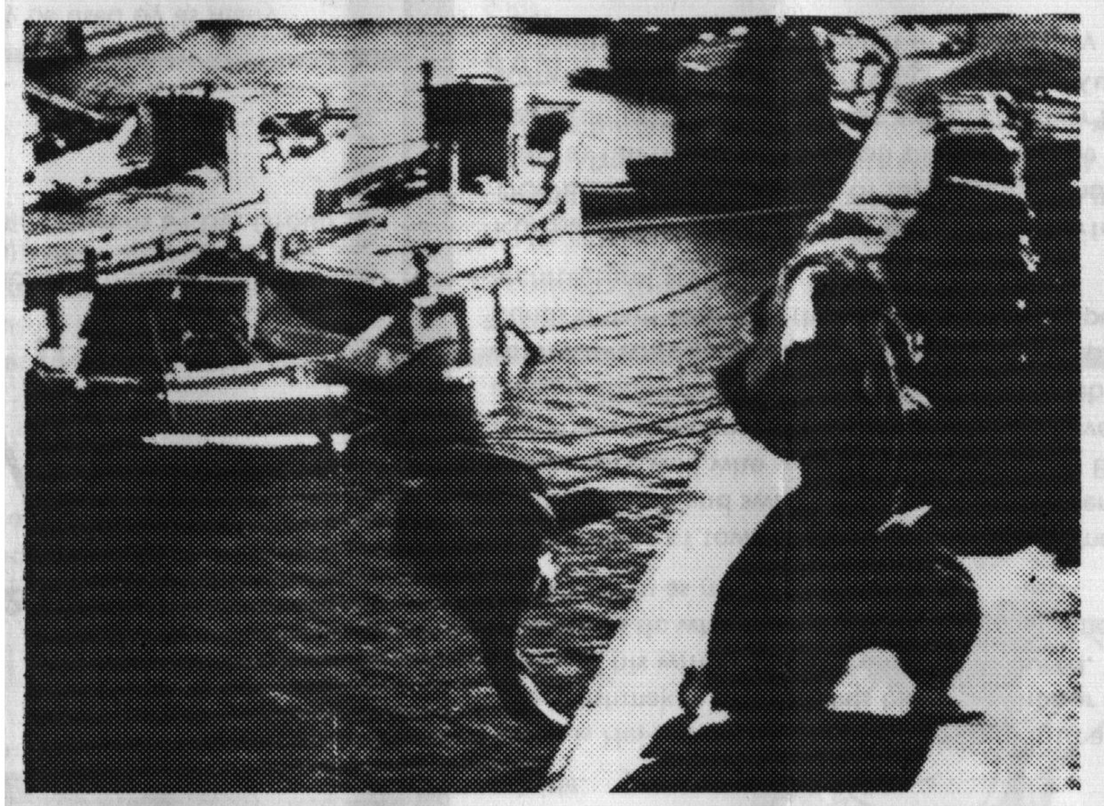


Kurosawa is more interested in technique than in style. He is concerned not with his own philosophy of cinema, but rather with his own method of filmmaking, with how to go about solving the problems of making a film. It is how one confronts a situation that is important: and it is by what one chooses to do, both in life and in art, that one's character is revealed. Just as the samurai in YOJIMBO and SANJURO continually practices and perfects his skill in order to survive in a hostile world, so Kurosawa has perfected his cinematic technique in order to overcome the obstacles in his path. As Donald Richie, the director's biographer, has suggested: Kurosawa is the last samurai.

THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA

SANSHIRO SUGATA

SUGATA SANSHIRO. 1943. 80 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Keiji Matsuzaki. Scenario by Akira Kurosawa, after the novel by Tsuneo Tomita. Photographed by Akira Mimura. Music by Seichi Suzuki. Edited by Toshio Goto and Akira Kurosawa. Principal cast: Susumu Fujita, Denjiro Okochi, Takashi Shimura, Yukiko Todoroki.



Kurosawa's film debut as a director is ostensibly about the conflict between judo and jujitsu, between the new martial art and the traditional one. It is a radical film and the form emphasizes the radical implications in the content. The subject matter is a perfect metaphor for Kurosawa's approach to making films: just as judo is challenging the conventions of jujitsu, so the new director is challenging the conventions of traditional filmmaking. It is as if Kurosawa were commenting with prescience on his own future: stating that here was a young, raw, inexperienced filmmaker challenging traditional Japanese cinema, that he will have difficulties but will persevere and succeed.

The project had the ingredients necessary to be an entertainment film, which made it a safe venture during World War II. "The information bureau was being extremely troublesome, saying you can't film this and you can't shoot that. All the directors had to make films in accordance with national policy. Back then everyone was saying that the real Japanese-style film should be as simple as possible. I disagreed and got away with disagreeing — that much I could say. I decided that, since I couldn't say anything very much, I would make a really movie-like movie."

The story begins in 1882, when the followers of jujitsu were resisting the rise of judo, a variant and more spirtual form of self-defense. After witnessing a demonstration of the superiority of the new over the old, Sugata offers himself to a judo master as his disciple. Although he masters the art very quickly, he is slower to grasp the spiritual overtones implicit in its way of life. While frequently referring to Sugata's increasing prowess, Kurosawa focuses on his education. It is only by developing his inner, spiritual strength that Sugata is finally able to use judo properly, not as a weapon but as a discipline by means of which to conduct his life.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL

ICHIBAN UTSUKUSHIKU, 1944. 85 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Motohiko Ito. Scenario by Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Joji Ohara. Music by Seichi Suzuki. Principal cast: Takashi Shimura, Ichiro Sugai, Yoko Yaguchi.

A fictional film done in the style of a documentary and set in a production factory during World War II. The structure is episodic, as the story follows events in the lives of several of the young women who work in the factory. No prints of this film were available for the retrospective.

SANSHIRO SUGATA — PART TWO

ZOKU SUGATA SANSHIRO. 1945. 83 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Motohiko Ito. Scenario by Akira Kurosawa, after the novel by Tsuneo Tomita. Photographed by Hiroshi Suzuki. Music by Seichi Suzuki. Principal cast: Susumu Fujita, Denjiro Okachi, Aritake Kono.

A sequel to Kurosawa's brilliant first film which he had no desire to make and no liking for after it was made. The story follows the original chronologically and has the same characters, but it has no philosophical ambition and little cinematic inspiration. No prints of this film were available for the retrospective.

THE MEN WHO TREAD ON THE TIGER'S TAIL

TORA NO O O FUMU OTOKOTACHI. 1945. 58 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Motohiko Ito. Scenario by Akira Kurosawa, after the Kabuki Kanjincho. *Photographed by Takeo Ito. Music by Tadashi Hattori. Principal cast: Denjiro Okochi, Susumu Fujita, Masayuki Mori, Kenichi Enomoto, Takashi Shimura, Aritake Kono.*

There is a medieval Japanese story about a general fleeing from his brother. In order to escape he and his men, disguised as priests, have to pass through a checkpoint that is in enemy hands. They are almost found out, but the guile of one of the general's retainers enables them to get away. This story is the source of classics of both *Noh* and *Kabuki,* and it is upon these two plays and the original that Kurosawa's film is based. He reportedly wrote the script for it in one night. The film is faithful to its sources in the use of adapted material and in the mood created by incorporating *Noh* and *Kabuki* music. However, Kurosawa, not content to do things in the expected way, invented a comic porter and thus transformed the story.

The budget allowed for only one set and Kurosawa was further limited by the lack of physical action inherent in the plot. He compensated by freely using his interloping porter and by relying upon the basic strength of the story. Because of the considerable dialogue, much of the film was carried by the brilliant acting of the cast. Kurosawa also employed his camera imaginatively, varying the angle so as to alter the viewpoint and avoid a sense of confinement.

THOSE WHO MAKE TOMORROW

ASU O TSUKURU HITOBITO. 1946. 81 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Ryo Takei, Sojiro Motoki, Keiji Matsuzaki, and Tomoyuki Tanaka. Scenario by Yusaku Yamagata and Kajiro Yamamoto. Photographed by Takeo Ito, Mitsui Miura, and Taiichi Kankura. Directed by Kajiro Yamamoto, Hideo Sekigawa and Akira Kurosawa. Principal cast: Kenji Suskida, Chieko Takehisa, Masayuki Mori, Takashi Shimura.

A piece of union propaganda commissioned and controlled by the Japan Motion Picture and Drama Employees Union. There is apparently nothing in it that is recognizable as Kurosawa's work. No print of this film could be obtained for the retrospective.

Continued

NO REGRETS FOR OUR YOUTH

WAGA SEISHUN NI KUINASHI. 1946. 110 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Keiji Matsuzaki. Scenario by Eijiro Hisaita and Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Asakazu Nakai. Music by Tadashi Hattori. Principal cast: Denjiro Okochi, Eiko Miyoshi, Setsuko Hara, Susumu Fujita, Aritaka Kono, Takashi Shimura.

Based on true events about a professor who was dismissed from Kyoto University in the 30's for his "Communistic thought" and one of his pupils who was subsequently executed for being a spy. Kurosawa is concerned with the effect of persecution and death upon the life of someone whose involvement in these events is personal rather than political. No prints of this film could be obtained for the retrospective.

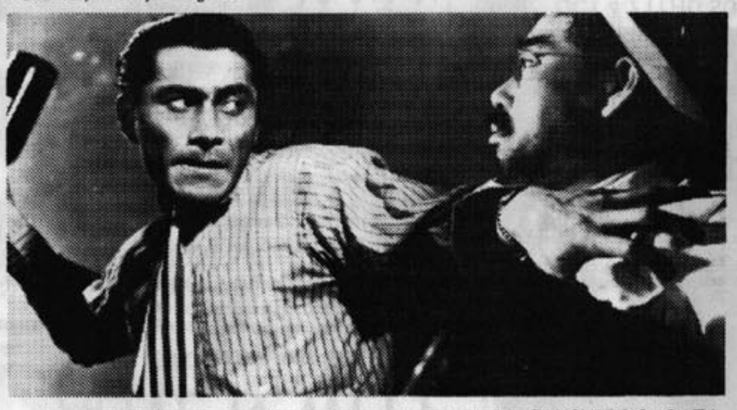
ONE WONDERFUL SUNDAY

SUBARASHIKI NICHIYOBI. 1947. 108 minutes. Produced by Sojiro Motoki. Scenario by Keinsosuke Uegusa and Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Asakazu Nakai. Music by Tadashi Hattori. Principal cast: Isao Numasaki, Chieko Nokakita.

A light film about a young man and woman who spend a Sunday together with very little money between them. Presumably influenced by a number of American films of the period, it is alternately serious and whimiscal, with an elaborate use of music. It is a very atypical film for Kurosawa. No prints of this film could be obtained for the retrospective.

DRUNKEN ANGEL

YOIDORE TENSHI. 1948. 98 minutes; original unreleased version 150 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Sojiro Motoki. Scenario by Keinosuki Uegusa and Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Takeo Ito. Music by Fumio Hayasaka. Principal cast: Takashi Shimura, Toshiro Mifune, Reisaburo Yamamoto, Chieko Nakakita, Michiyo Kogure.



It was in this film that the directorial promise revealed in SANSHIRO SUGATA was fulfilled. It is a completely controlled, fully realized depiction of a microcosm of postwar Japanese society. A slum rising from the banks of a filthy sump is run by cheap hoodlums, one of whom is portrayed by Toshiro Mifune. Takashi Shimura is an alcoholic doctor who resists the menace of the local gang. Similarly, Mifune resists Shimura's attempts to reform him. The doctor's efforts are focused on treating the gangster as a victim of tuberculosis. The disease is analagous, as is the sump around which the action takes place. As the struggle between the two men shifts back and forth, never being satisfactorily resolved, the film itself shifts on its axis between the two poles of crime and disease, the necessary coexisting elements of any slum.

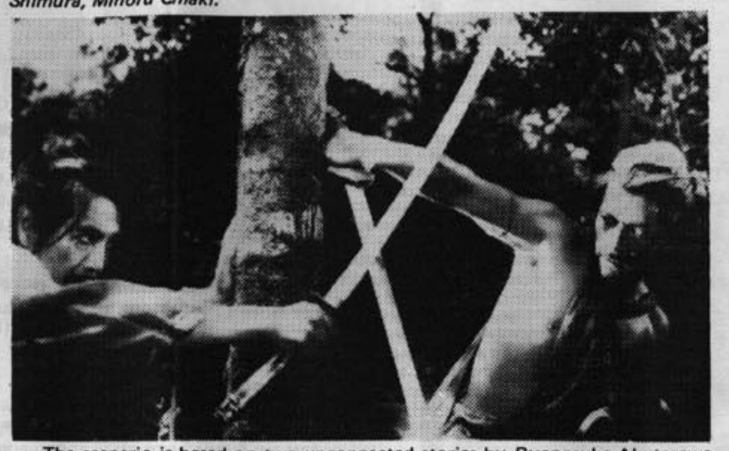
This is Kurosawa's first complex film, the kind of film that was to become typical of him. Like its successors it is a film of somewhat novelistic structure, but with a sustained dramatic intensity. In this sense DRUNKEN ANGEL is the first true Kurosawa film.

THE QUIET DUEL

SHIZUKANARU KETTO. 1949. 95 minutes. A Daiei Production. Produced by Sojiro Motoki and Hisao Ichikawa. Scenario by Senkichi Taniguchi and Akira Kurosawa, after a play by Kazuo Kikuta. Photographed by Shoichi Aisaka. Music by Akira Ifukube. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura, Miki Sorjo, Kenjiro Uemura, Chieko Nakakita.

RASHOMON

RASHOMON. 1950. 88 minutes. A Daiei Production. Produced by Jingo Minoru. Scenario by Shinobu Hashimoto and Akira Kurosawa, after two stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa. Photographed by Kazuo Miyagawa. Music by Fumio Hayasaka. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Masayuki Mori, Machiko Kyo, Takashi Shimura, Minoru Chiaki.



The scenario is based on two unconnected stories by Ryonosuke Akutagawa, with major additions by Kurosawa. Set in the 12th century, it concerns a samurai and his wife traveling through the woods near Kyoto. They are stopped by a bandit, the wife is raped, the husband is killed. Different versions of the story are told (to the camera) by the participants and by a woodcutter who witnessed the incident. Each description is, of course, fundamentally different from all the others. What actually happened is never made clear, and the film has become recognized as a comment on the nature of reality and illusion. This view, arresting though it be, was not sufficient for Kurosawa; and he placed it in a larger and more social context by placing the retellings of the attack within the framework of the dialogues of the woodcutter, a priest, and a cynical commoner who take refuge beneath the Rashomon gate.

THE IDIOT

HAKUCHI. 1951. 166 minutes; original unreleased version 166 minutes. A Shochiku Production. Produced by Takashi Koide. Scenario by Eijiro Hisaita and Akira Kurosawa, after the novel by Dosteovsky. Photographed by Toshio Ubukata. Music by Fumio Hayasaka. Principal cast: Masayuki Mori, Toshiro Mifune, Setsuko Hara, Takashi Shimura, Yoshiko Kuga.

When Kurosawa made RASHOMON he had considerable difficulty with Daiei. The studio first didn't want to make the film, then didn't want to send it to festivals, and only claimed credit for it after it had become an international prize-winner. But this difficulty was nothing compared with the problems Kurosawa had at Shochiku over THE IDIOT. What was to have been a two-part, four-hour-plus adaptation of Dostoevsky's novel was so truncated by the studio, which cut an hour and forty minutes from it, that the director became enraged. Nevertheless, the experience of making THE IDIOT seems to have been a profitable one for Kurosawa. "If I do say so myself, I think that after making this picture my own powers increased considerably." Certainly it is true that from the ashes of THE IDIOT rose two of his greatest achievements, I KIRU and SEVEN SAMURAI.

In terms of pure spectacle, SEVEN SAMURAI is Kurosawa's most ambitious film, and the production of it was a long and arduous task. Kurosawa insisted upon shooting entirely on location, and this, coupled with his habitual perfectionism, drove the budget upward at an astronomical rate. Twice money ran out and shooting was halted. Each time Kurosawa decided to wait out the studio, and each time he was successful. The necessary money arrived, the film was completed, became the most expensive film ever produced in Japan, and was a great commercial success. Not until recently, however, was the complete, uncut version available to the public. It has subsequently come to be recognized as a milestone in the history of cinema.

The basic plot situation is simple. A small village is attacked yearly by marauding bandits. One year the farmers decide that they have had enough and set about hiring masterless samurai to defend them from the bandits. Since they have nothing to offer in payment, their task is extremely difficult. But they are fortunate in recruiting Kambei (Takashi Shimura), an older, experienced samurai whose nobility of character attracts other samurai to the cause. They are jointed by Kikuchiyo (Toshiro Mifune), a brash, uncouth young warrior who is the son of a farmer. In scenes of surpassing beauty, the seven undertake to train the farmers, fight the bandits and save the village. They are successful, but in the end it is the farmers who have won. They have their village, their crop and a certain future. The samurai have lost four of their number and face no future at all except more fighting.

I LIVE IN FEAR

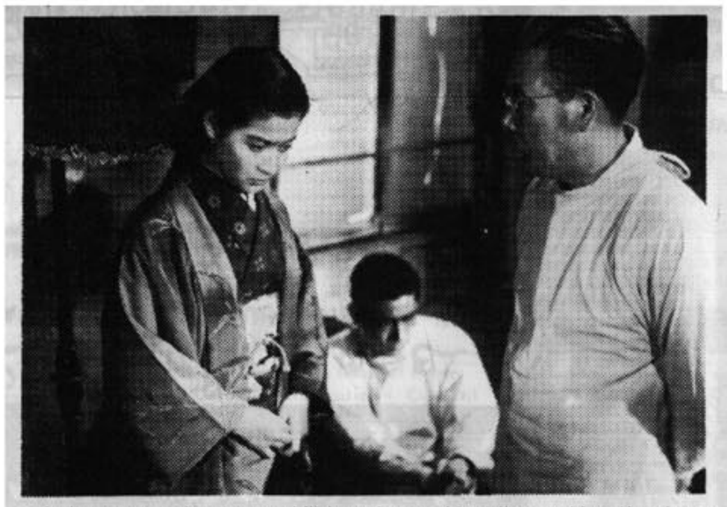
IKIMONO NO KIROKU. 1955. 113 minutes; U.S. version 104 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Shojiro Motoki. Scenario by Shinobu Hashimoto, Hideo Oguni and Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Asakazu Nakai. Music by Fumio Hayasaka and Masaru Sato. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Eiko Miyoshi, Yutaka Sada, Minoru Chiaki, Haruko Togo, Kyoko Aoyama, Akemi Negishi, Takashi Shimura.

Toshiro Mifune — at thirty-five portraying a man of sixty — is a foundry owner convinced that he is in constant danger of atomic annihilation. He tries to persuade his family to emigrate to Brazil, but they respond by getting the court to judge him incompetent. In a desperate act, he sets fire to his foundry and then is consumed by guilt at having put his employees out of work. It is this guilt which pushes him over the brink of sanity.

Throughout the film Kurosawa uses a sun-heat image as a symbol of the impending disaster of a holocaust: the hot summer weather, the fire of the foundry, the shining sun, people perspiring in the streets, etc. At the end, in a mental institution, he finds a kind of peace thinking he has escaped the earth to a safe place. Upon seeing the setting sun he exclaims, "Oh, my god. It is burning. The earth is burning. Burning. At last, finally, it is burning."

THRONE OF BLOOD

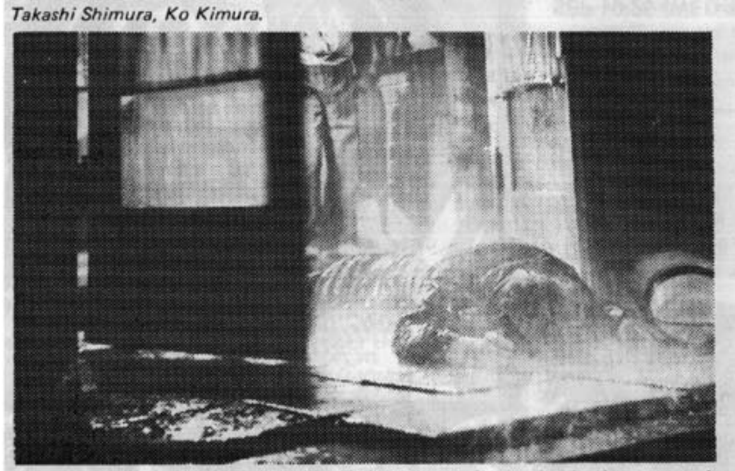
KUMONOSU-JO. 1957. 110 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Shojiro Motoki and Akira Kurosawa. Scenario by Shinobu Hashimoto, Ryuzo Kikushima, Hideo Oguni and Akira Kurosawa, after Shakespeare's Macbeth. *Photographed by Asakazu Nakai. Music by Masaru Sato. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Isuzu Yamada, Minoru Chiaki, Akira Kubo.*



A doctor operating on a syphilitic patient accidentally cuts himself and contracts the disease, which was far more serious before the development of penicillin than it is today. After various plot convolutions the doctor, played by Mifune, was supposed to have gone mad. Kurosawa was prevented from using this ending by the opinions of various Japanese doctors as well as the Medical Section of the American Occupation Forces, which reasoned that this ending would frighten people into not seeking medical aid. Since much of Kurosawa's interest had centered on the character of the doctor and his subsequent fate, the extent of his emotional involvement may have been diminished by the change in the story's outcome.

STRAY DOG

NORA INU. 1949. 122 minutes. A Shintoho Production. Produced by Sojiro Motoki. Scenario by Ryuzo Kikushima and Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Asakazu Nakai. Music by Fumio Hayasaka. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura, Ko Kimura.



Kurosawa's tendency toward novelistic structure is revealed in the source of this film. Having learned about a true incident in which a detective lost his service pistol, Kurosawa expanded the story and wrote a novel about it. Since this was still during the time of the American Occupation, when the manufacture and import of firearms was rigidly controlled, it was a serious matter for a detective to lose a pistol. In the finished film the detective, played by Mifune, is afraid he will lose his job. With some help from his superior, played by Takashi Shimura, he undertakes the seemingly impossible task of finding the pistol. He explores the notorious Shinjuku and Shibuza sections of Tokyo, moving from clue to clue, from person to person, obsessively searching for his pistol, his manhood, his lost identity. Finally, against overwhelming odds, he catches the thief and recovers the weapon.

SCANDAL

SHUBUN. 1950. 104 minutes. A Shochiku Production. Produced by Takashi Koide. Scenario by Ryuzo Kikushima and Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Toshio Ubukata. Music by Fumio Hayasake. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Yoshiko Yamaguchi, Takashi Shimura, Yoko Katsuragi.

An attack on the yellow journalism which erupted in Japan at the end of the Occupation. Kurosawa was personally involved in a scandalous story at this time, and his motivation for making the film may have been somewhat personal. The story involves a painter (Toshiro Mifune) who is slandered and his lawyer (Takashi Shimura) who almost ruins him. No prints of this film could be obtained for the retrospective.

THE IDIOT has never been critically popular; and, with more than a third of the intended film missing, it is difficult to tell how close Kurosawa came to realizing his vision. He himself has said that he was mainly satisfied with the results, but that it was the most difficult film he had ever made and that he would never undertake anything so difficult again.

IKIRU

IKIRU. 1952. 143 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Shojiro Motoki, Scenario by Shinobu Hashimoto, Hideo Oguni and Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Asakazu Nakai. Music by Fumio Hayasaka. Principal cast: Takashi Shimura, Nobuo Kaneko, Kyoko Seki, Makoto Kobori, Kumeko Urabe, Yoshie Minimi, Miki Odagiri, Nobuo Nakamura, Kazuo Abe, Masao Shimizu, Ko Kimura.

This film was very important for Kurosawa, being both an ambitious picture of contemporary Japan and his own personal meditation on the nature of death. To contemplate death on a serious level — as Kurosawa does — is to examine the meaning of life, to determine what it is in a person's life that justifies his being able to die. For Kurosawa to live is to act. It is the act that one chooses to perform and how one acts that gives meaning to one's life and, consequently, defines one's death.

In IKIRU a minor government official learns that he has cancer and is going to die in six months. The official, Watanabe (Takashi Shimura), is profoundly shaken by this knowledge and begins to reject his past life and the unquestioning acquiesence with which he accepted his previous fate. Gradually he begins to realize that he must act — that he must do something before he dies — in order to give significance to what is left of his life. Quietly, patiently, and with incredible strength of will he engages in a struggle with the bureaucracy that has engulfed him for the past twenty-five years. He takes a forgotten proposal for a public park and single-handedly forces it through to completion.

SEVEN SAMURAI

SHICHININ NO SAMURAI. 1954. 200 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Shojiro Motoki. Scenario by Shinobu Hashimoto, Hideo Oguni and Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Asakazu Nakai. Music by Fumio Hayasaka. Assistant Director — Hiromichi Horikawa. Principal cast: Takashi Shimura, Toshiro Mifune, Yoshio Inaba, Seiji MIyaguchi, Minoru Chiaki, Daisuke Kato, Ko Kimura, Kamatari Fujiwara, Bokuzen Hidari, Yoshio Tsuchiya, Yasuhisa Tsutsumi, Toranosuke Ogowa.

The story is adapted from Shakespeare's MACBETH. Other than the basic changes that were necessary to make the plot convincing to a Japanese audience, Kurosawa made one significant alteration. He changed the nature of the protagonist to negate the tragic dimensions of his character and emphasize the fundamental pettiness of his avarice. Kurosawa perceives greed and avarice as small emotions, small drives, that are distinct from ambition. Consequently, the person driven by these motives does not possess the stature, the nobility of character, to become a tragic figure.

Kurosawa's quest for absolute realism is revealed in his approach to the scene in which Mifune is killed. The arrows that appear to be shot into him are, of course, faked; but the arrows that just barely miss him were actually shot at Mifune by archers just out of camera range. The result is a scene of awesome power: hundreds of men participating in the execution of a solitary being who, his body shot full of arrows, violently struggles against death. Here, in the final act of his life, the dimension of his character is increased by the sheer number of his antagonists.

THE LOWER DEPTHS

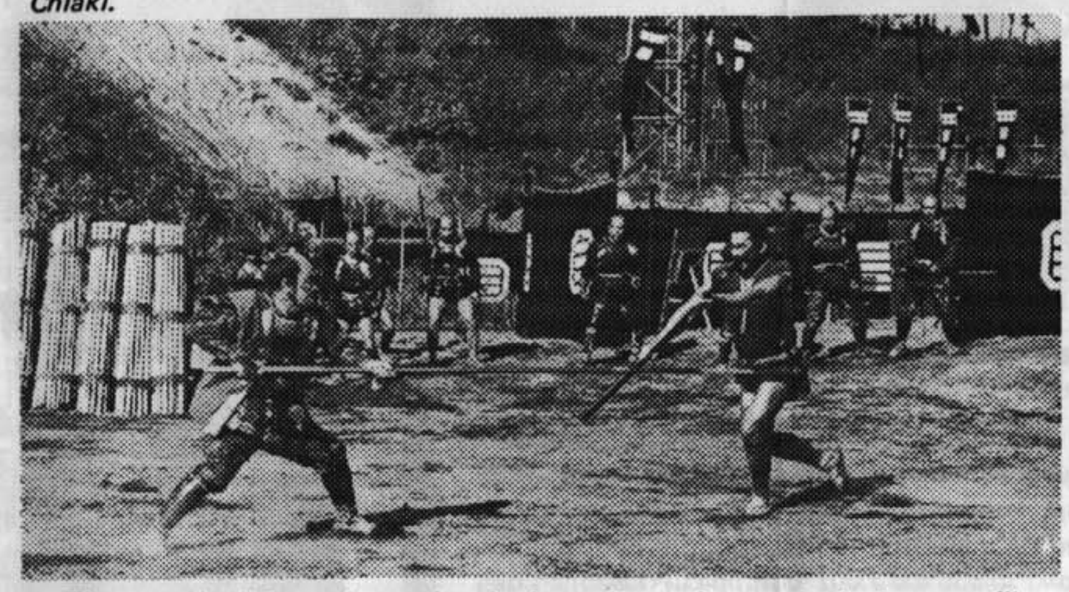
DONZOKO. 1957. 137 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Shojiro Motoki and Akira Kurosawa. Scenario by Hideo Oguni and Akira Kurosawa, based on the play by Maxim Gorky. Photographed by Kazuo Yamasaki. Music by Masaru Sato. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Isuzu Yamada, Ganjiro Nakamura, Kyoko Kagawa, Bokuzen Hidari, Minoru Chiaki, Kamatari Fujiwara.

Kurosawa's adaptation of Gorky's play is both literal and theatrical. Little of the original was changed and the approach is that of filming a play, though Kurosawa's innate cinematic sense enables him to avoid the look of a play-on-film. In the confined, depressing place that is the only setting for the action, the camera seems to be everywhere, not so much photographing a set as examining an environment and its inhabitants. The characters — thief, landlady, gambler, priest, samurai, prostitute, actor, and the others — represent various ways of life. What they have in common is that they have all come to grief; what's more, they all believe their fate to be different from what it is.

Kurosawa sees their predicament as both miserable and ridiculous. Their lives are without real hope; they exist on the lowest level of society. At the same time they manage to ignore their reality and to sustain delusions about themselves that are often laughable. Kurosawa's troupe of actors perform brilliantly, creating characters at once pathetic and comic.

THE HIDDEN FORTRESS

KAKUSHI TORIDE NO SAN-AKUNIN. 1958. 139 minutes; U.S. version 126 minutes. A Toho Production. Produced by Masumi Fujimoto and Akira Kurosawa. Scenario by Shinobu Hashimoto, Ryuzo Kikushima, Hideo Oguni and Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Kazuo Yamasaki. Music by Masaru Sato. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Misa Vehara, Takashi Shimura, Susumu Fujita, Minori Chiaki.

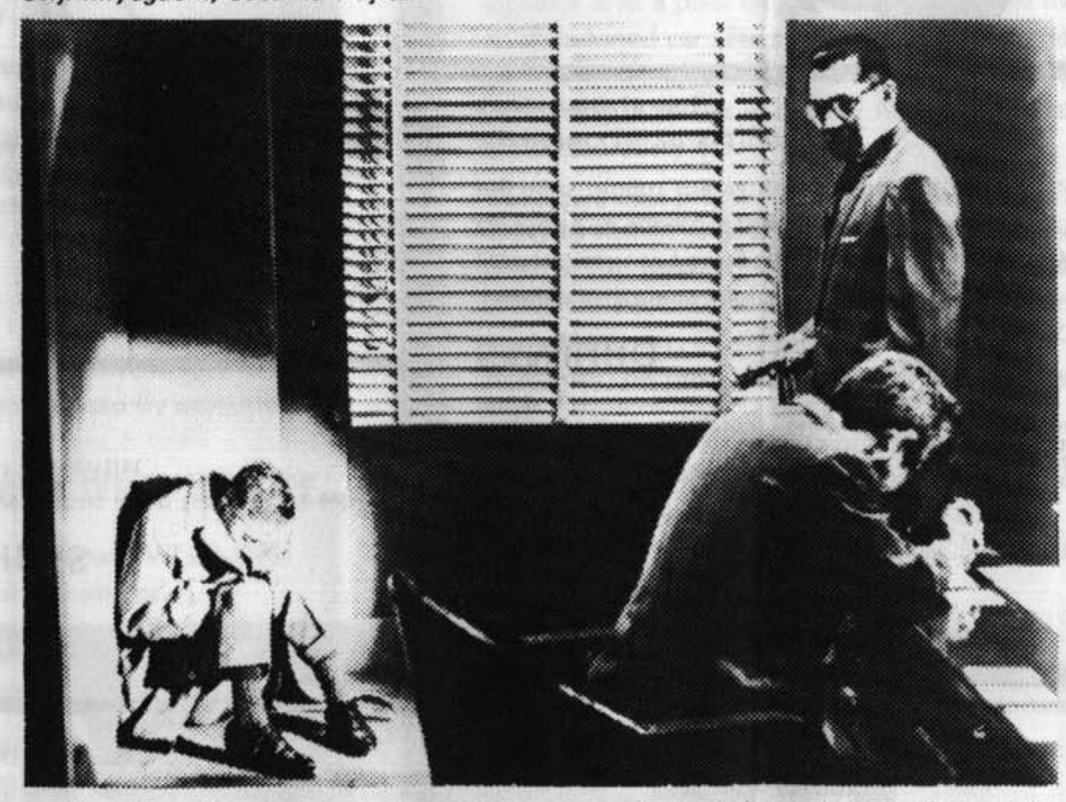


The story is slight and contains the ingredients of a standard adventure film: pursuit, a beautiful princess, a powerful warrior, a treasure in gold, broad comedy, fights, chases, escape. But Kurosawa, far from being embarrassed by his material, approaches it straight on and brings it off. His usual attention to the convincing reality of physical details makes what could have been an implausible picture quite believable.

It was the first of six consecutive films that Kurosawa was to make in the extreme wide-screen, or anamorphic, process. The change from a conventional size image seems to have had an exhilarating effect on him. The form of the film is very open, with dramatically composed shots and a free and daring use of lateral camera movements. Perhaps this is the reason why THE HIDDEN FORTRESS began a period of heightened creativity for Kurosawa. The films which follow it may constitute the most sustained level of work in his career.

THE BAD SLEEP WELL

WARUI YATSU HODO YOKU NEMURU. 1960. 151 minutes. A Kurosawa Films Production. Produced by Tomoyuki Tanaka and Akira Kurosawa. Scenario by Shinobu Hashimoto, Hideo Oguni, Ryuzo Kikushima, Eijiro Hisaita and Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Yuzuru Aizawa. Music by Masaru Sato. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Takeshi Kato, Masayuki Mori, Takashi Shimura, Kyoko Kegawa, Seiji Miyaguchi, Susumu Fujita.



The title refers to the complacency and comfort of the truly evil, the people who accept their crimes with such equanamity that their sleep is never disturbed. Kurosawa is concerned here with exposing the total unscrupulousness of corporate intrigue. The secretary (Toshiro Mifune) to a corporate president marries the lame daughter of his boss in an attempt to be at a better vantage point to expose the cruelty of his father-in-law. He is secretly the son of a man murdered by his father-in-law, and the film takes on overtones of *Hamlet* as he pursues his revenges. He becomes ensnared by conflicting emotions, by his unexpected and deeply felt love for his wife, and he is ultimately destroyed.

The early part of the film is developed brilliantly, but Kurosawa has suggested that the dramatic force of his social argument was softened by the lack of complete freedom of expression in Japan.

In SANJURO the wandering samurai decides to help a group of earnest, clean-cut, immaculately attired young samurai in a struggle against corrupt local officials. Along the way he teaches them something of the ways of the world. Together they rescue a chamberlain's wife and daughter. The wife is a dignified lady who chides Sanjuro on his ready and eager use of his sword. The cynical warrior again uses deception to accomplish his ends. He pretends to be hired by the enemies of the people he is helping in order to facilitate the progress of events. Having deceived their enemies, he and his companions free the captive chamberlain. Sanjuro kills the principal villain and, with a stern admonition to the young samurai, saunters off just as he did at the end of YOJIMBO.

HIGH AND LOW

TENGOKU TO JIGOKU. 1963. 143 minutes. A Kurosawa Films Production. Produced by Tomoyuki Tanaka and Ryuzo Kikushima. Scenario by Ryuzo Kikishima, Hideo Oguni and Akira Kurosawa, after the novel King's Ransom by *Ed McBain. Photographed by Asakazu Nakai. Music by Masaru Sato, Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Kyoko Kagawa, Yutaka Sada, Tatsuya Nakadai, Takashi Shimura, Kenjiro Ishiyama, Ko Kimura, Tsytomu Yamazaki.*

A man named Gondo (Toshiro Mifune) has risen from humble beginnings as a shoemaker to the vice-presidency of a large shoe manufacturing company. He has now staked everything he owns on acquiring enough stock to take over the company. At precisely this point he receives a telephone call informing him that his son has been kidnapped and demanding an enormous ransom. To pay the ransom will ruin him financially, but he does not hesitate. Then it is discovered that the kidnapper is holding not his son but his chauffeur's son. However, the kidnapper insists that Gondo pay the ransom anyway or the boy will be killed. Gondo must choose between the life of this boy and the future of himself and his family. The choice that he makes both defines his own morality and sets in motion the rest of the film.

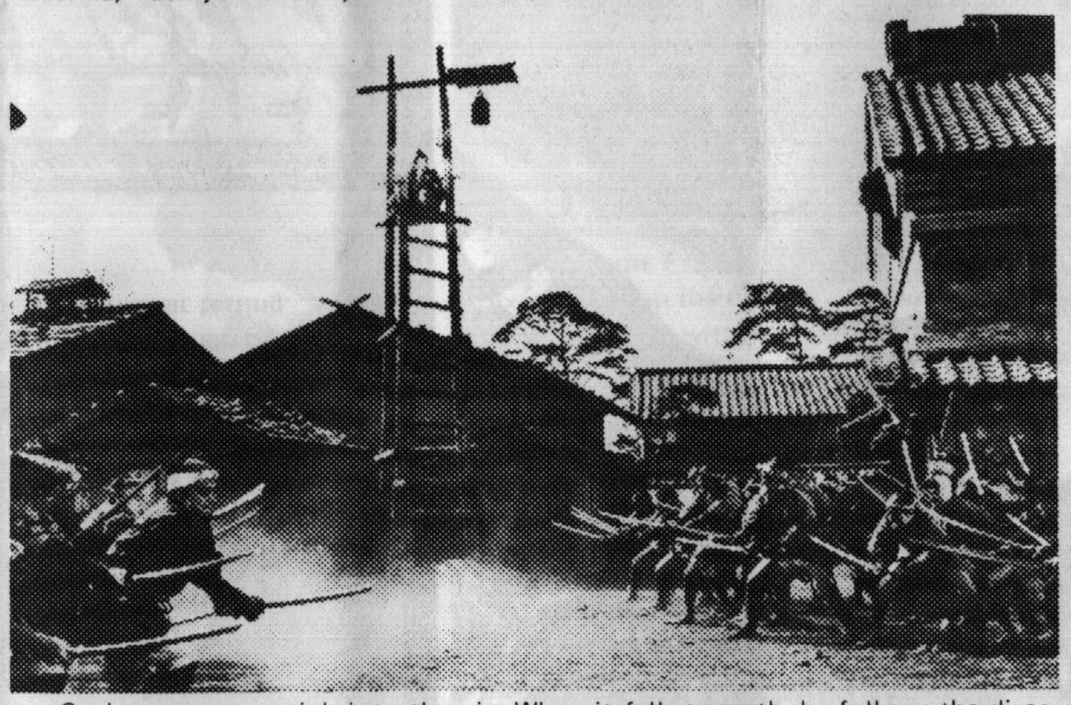
There follows a thorough, meticulously detailed account of the police investigation of the kidnapping. Much of this investigation takes place on the sweltering streets of a squalid Yokahama slum. High above the streets, perched on a hill, far from the noise and the filth, is Gondo's house. Now the police observe the view that the kidnapper has long had of this aloof and arrogant symbol of wealth.

RED BEARD

AKAHIGE. 1965. 185 minutes. A Kurosawa Films Production. Produced by Ryuzo Kikushima and Tomoyuki Tanaka. Scenario by Ryuzo Kikushima, Hideo Oguni, Masato Ide and Akira Kurosawa, after the novel by Shugoro Yamamoto. Photographed by Asakazu Nakai and Takao Saito. Music by Masaru Sato. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Yuzo Kayama, Yoshio Tsuchiya, Kyoko Kagawa, Takashi Shimura.

YOJIMBO

YOJIMBO. 1961. 110 minutes. A Kurosawa Films Production. Produced by Tomoyuki Tanaka and Ryuzo Kikushima. Scenario by Ryuzo Kikushima and Akira Kurosawa. Photographed by Kazuo Miyagawa. Music by Masaru Sato. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Eijiro Tono, Seizaburo Kawazu, Isuzu Yamamada, Kyu Sazanka, Tatsuya Nakadai, Daisuke Kato, Takashi Shimura.

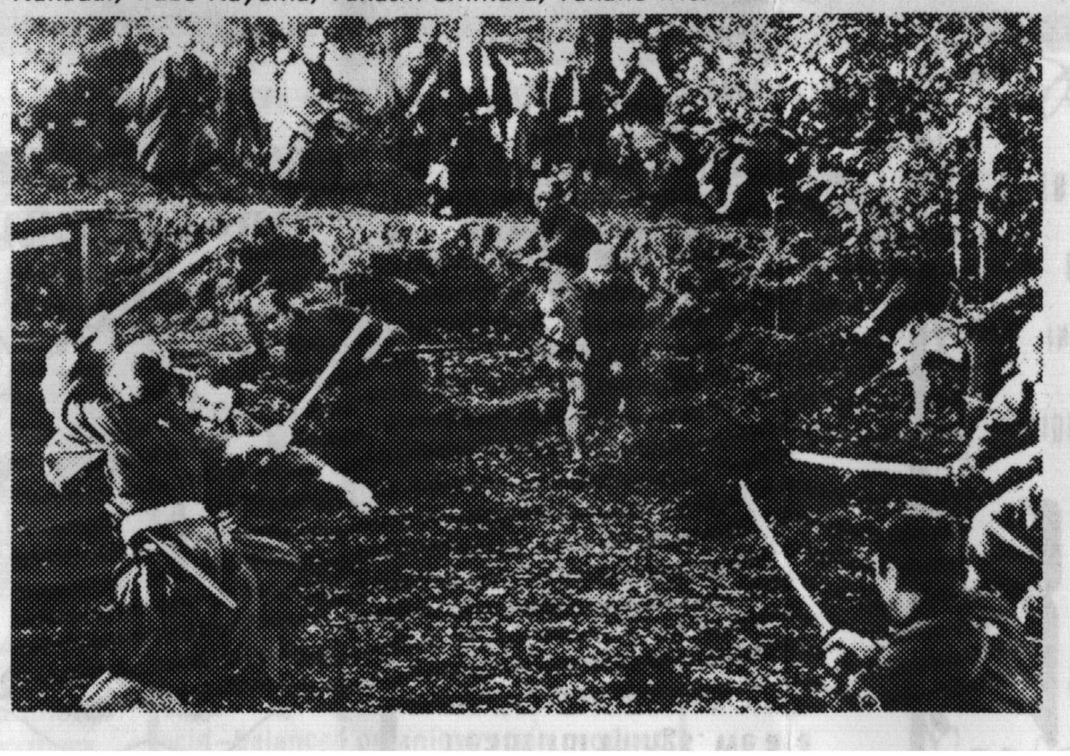


Sanjuro tosses a stick into the air. When it falls to earth, he follows the direction in which it points and walks into an extraordinary adventure. A small town is divided into opposing factions which are at war; the townspeople either join sides or cower in fear. But Sanjuro, a masterless samurai played by Toshiro Mifune in his best-known role, decides to get rid of both sides and make a little money in the bargain. He hires himself first to one group and then the other as a *yojimbo* (bodyguard), encouraging them to kill each other off and helping out a bit himself. In the end, only Sanjuro and the people who did not choose sides are alive.

If this were all there were to YOJIMBO, Kurosawa would have succeeded in making a highly entertaining film. It has been a great popular success throughout the world, and in this country has often been described as a "Japanese western." But there is something more to YOJIMBO; there is a resonance that a mere sword film could not possess. The comedy is brilliantly conceived. The characters, even the most grotesque and two-dimensional, are carefully drawn. The photography and editing are superb. But the most important element of the film is the convincing realism that Kurosawa has created. Everything has an authentic look to it and so the extravagances of the comedy are solidly rooted.

SANJURO

TSUBAKI SANJURO. 1962. 92 minutes. A Kurosawa Films Production. Produced by Tomoyuki Tanaka and Ryuzo Kikushima. Scenario by Ryuzo Kikushima, Hido Oguni and Akira Kurosawa, after the novel by Shugoro Yamamoto. Photographed by Fukuzo Koizumi. Music by Masaru Sato. Principal cast: Toshiro Mifune, Tatsuya Nakadai, Yuzo Kayama, Takashi Shimura, Takako Irie.



This long episodic film was the culmination of all Kurosawa's previous work. In it he summed up everything – visually and thematically – that he had developed in more than twenty years of making films. As if to emphasize this climax, he was not to make another film for five years. Kurosawa was consciously attempting to create a truly magnificent film, magnificent not only in its artistry but in its humanism. RED BEARD is a positive work, a strong affirmation of life.

The story concerns a young doctor (Yuzo Kayama) who, having just been educated at Dutch medical schools, is indignant at finding himself assigned to a public clinic. He struggles against his responsibilities and against the influence of Red Beard (Toshiro Mifune), the clinic's director. Eventually he settles down and begins to function as a doctor. Here, as in a number of his films from SANSHIRO SUGATA on, Kurosawa is concerned with the process of education and initiation. As the young doctor acquires knowledge and learns medicine at the direction of Red Beard, so does he, later, cure and help a young girl whom the two men have found in a brothel. She, in her turn, helps and teaches an even younger boy. And so, the practicing of medicine itself becomes a symbol of life – of curing and helping and passing on knowledge.

DODES'KA-DEN

DODES'KA-DEN. 1970. 140 minutes. A Kurosawa Films Production. Produced by Yoichi Matsue and Akira Kurosawa. Scenario by Hideo Oguni, Shinobu Hashimoto and Akira Kurosawa, after The Town Without Seasons *by Shugoro Yamamoto. Photographed by Takao Saito and Yasumichi Fukuzawa. Music by Toru Takemitsu. Principal cast: Yoshitaka Zushi, Junzaburo Ban, Kiyoko Tange, Tomoko Yamazaki, Tatsuo Matsumura, Noboru Mitsutahi, Hiroyuki Kawase.*

Several years before making his first color film, Kurosawa observed: "Color film isn't good enough to take Japanese colors . . . at present the degree of color transparency is too high. Japan's colors are all dull colors, dense colors, and if I did a color film I would want to bring this out.

IN DODES'KA-DEN Kurosawa has finally used color and used it in an unusual way. When Kurosawa was shooting he knew exactly how he wanted everything to look, and would simply spray paint roads, garbage heaps, etc., to get what he wanted. The effect is of an oddly sunny world that is purely photographic; the sun is never seen. The entire shanty-town has a look of subtle harmony that unites it with the content.

It is an unusual film for Kurosawa, a radical departure from the films he made in the 'fifties and 'sixties. The structure is very episodic as he follows the inhabitants of these ramshackle huts. However wretched their fate may seem, the film never becomes mawkish or sentimental. When pathos or tragedy are about to dominate, comic relief is always on hand. When sorrow overtakes a character, Kurosawa does not look away in embarrassment, but openly accepts the sorrow as he would happiness. Kurosawa views these people, even the most doomed among them, not with pity but with compassion.

The source material for these program notes consists of various books on Japanese cinema, magazine articles on Japanese cinema and on Kurosawa, and production notes and press material on individual Kurosawa films. The one source that deserves individual mention is The Films of Akira Kurosawa *by Donald Richie, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965. It is the only book in English devoted exclusively to Kurosawa, and is a first rate enterprise. While any inaccuracies in these program notes should not be attributed to Mr. Richie's book,* TLA Cinema *must express its gratitude to him because without that book these notes would have been far more difficult to write, and far less accurate and complete.*

334 South St.
Phila. Pa. 19147
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