

Document Citation

Title	Detective story from Japan
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Source	<i>New York Herald Tribune</i>
Date	
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Tengoku to jigoku (High and low), Kurosawa, Akira, 1963

Detective Story From Japan

"HIGH AND LOW"

TOHO CINEMA

A screenplay by Ryuzo Kikushima, Eimiro Hisaoka and Akira Kurosawa; adapted from Ed McBain's "King's Ransom," directed by Mr. Kurosawa, produced by Toho Company, Ltd. in Japanese with English subtitles. Running time: Two Hours and 23 minutes. With the following cast:

Gondo.....	Toshiro Mifune
Gondo's wife.....	Kyoko Kagawa
Tokura.....	Tatsuya Nakadai
Kawanishi.....	Tatsuya Mihashi
Aoki.....	Yutaka Sada
Taguchi.....	Kenjiro Ishiyama
Criminal.....	Tsutomu Yamazaki

Having shown his mastery of the classic western, samurai style, Akira Kurosawa has now turned to the 87th Precinct and made it his own in a contemporary detection-suspense film to delight mystery addicts and Kurosawa-cultists alike.

For "High and Low" the Japanese film-maker has used only the initial question posed in Ed McBain's "King's Ransom," given it a completely different answer from the one the American writer devised and gone from there into a detailed and painstaking story of a manhunt in the course of which all the suspense of the case is underlined with a probing of motivations, of social and individual morality, of crime and punishment.

Like McBain's King, Kurosawa's Gondo is a wealthy executive who has just staked his every penny on a stock deal to oust crooks within his shoe company. A sudden phone call: his son has been kidnaped and is being held for 5 million yen. The sum would wipe him out, but the executive is ready to pay. And then he learns that his own child is safe and his chauffeur's son has been taken by mistake. But the kidnaper holds to the terms. Will the executive ruin himself and his family to save another man's child?

McBain's executive refused

to and the 87th Precinct boys took it from there. But Gondo, portrayed with fierce authority by Toshiro Mifune, finally comes to an opposite conclusion and the ransom is paid in a thrilling sequence, with the child saved, the crime perfect and Gondo ruined. But for Kurosawa and his cops, who are indeed latter-day samurais in their devotion to the cause, this is only the beginning. They are determined not only to get back the ransom but also to wreak total vengeance on the kidnaper: "A kidnaper gets only 15 years—but Gondo is serving a life term for his good deed."

Detection begins, with not a detail omitted of the frustrations as well as the triumphs. Seldom has plodding police work been so carefully depicted so that the viewer's empathy at success or failure borders on the painful. And the pendulum of emotion swings "High and Low," from the modern mansion on the hill, where Gondo discovers humility in the re-assessment of his personal values, to the slum hovel below, where the kidnaper, a psychopathic young intern crazed by envy, watches—by telescope—the writhings of his victim.

The detectives are indeed the same the whole world over, from Tokura, the smooth, cool-headed strategist, to Taguchi, the bald, perspiring "intuitive" plodder who despises rich people but grudgingly yields to Gondo's human qualities. An almost miraculous meshing of clues suddenly makes the going easy—but only corpses are found in the hideout; even when the identity of the criminal is fixed the final

solution is not at hand. There is a constant renewal of tension and suspense throughout the almost two and a half hours of the film as Kurosawa, with his brilliant eye for the atmosphere and the incident, leads us through Yokohama and its environs to a final gripping sequence on the waterfront, in a steamy, vice-encrusted saloon, through the horrors of a dope den and finally into the death cell.

This is a far cry from the black-and-white superficials of the average American mystery or crime film. For every character emerges with clarity: Gondo's business protege whose eye is on his own chance; Gondo's wife, burdened by the knowledge of her influence on her husband's decision; the chauffeur, filled with self-loathing for his groveling pleas to save his child but driven to repay him by amateur detection—and the criminal, a twisted soul behind the glittering surface of his sun glasses, holding frantically to his hatred as a reason for living.

"High and Low" is as absorbing, as harrowing and as satisfying as a first-class mystery novel and sets a new high for the suspense-detection film. JUDITH CRIST.