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'Chaos' Climaxes Kurosawa's Career

The Emperor's Rounds Out His Life's Work With Ran

By MAYO ISSOBE

Ran, the long-awaited latest work of Akira Kurosawa, didn't quite make it in time for Cannes this spring. Instead, it will premier in Japan's first international-scale film festival, the Tokyo International Film Festival, opening on May 31, not as a prize contestant but in a category of the world's most talked-about

The 75-year-old director, known in Japanese filmdom as "the Emperor" because of his artistic temperament, is the epitome of Japan's film art in the eyes of the rest of the world Ran is the 27th film of Kurosawa's long career, which began with Sugata Sanshiro in 1943.

Kurosawa has commented repeatedly that Ran was "to round out my life's work in films." For that, he said, "I will put all my remaining energy into it." When asked what he thought was his best movle, Kurosawa has always answered, "the next one," but in recent years he has switched his reply to simply, "Ran."

Although known as a director who shuns the press, Kurosawa held press conferences for both Japanese and foreign reporters and invited them to his

Ace)

during the course of this production.

Having estimated the film would cost 12.4 billion, a record for a Japanese film, Kurosawa was for some time unable to find financial backing for the ambitious project. Finally in December 1983, when funding was assured by Herald Ace of Japan and the noted French producer Serge Silberman of Green-

wich Film Production Co., it was officially announced that Ran would be made. Then came nine months of shooting, which began in Kurosawa's studio i Yokohama in June 1984.

Tatsuya Nakadai, who starred also in Kurosawa's 1980 Cannes Grand Prix winner Kagemusha, leads the cast of contemporary well known faces including Akira Terao, Jinpachi Nezu, Daisuke Oka, popular Mieko Harada and Yoshiko Miyazaki.



¥400 million up in smoke: The most talked-about scene from the two-hour-forty-minute movie is the burning of the castle, which had taken the crew three months to build. (Herald Ace)

Kurosawa old-timers. Cinematography was done by Takao Saito, Masaharu Ueda and Choichi Nakai, and art was in the hands of Yoshiro Muraki, who has worked with the director since Norainu

The shooting was completed in February this year, a month behind schedule. Yet for the perfectionist director whose career abounds with many legends about his prolonged shooting when he would spend a whole day getting the precise ef-

Much talked about aiready is the scene--

built at the cost of 1400 million just to be burned down.

Horses play an important role, as they did in Kagemusha. For Ran. Kurosawa used 15,000 horses, of which 50 quarter horses were specially imported from the U.S. For the panoramic masses of people, he used some 120,000 extras.

Costumes, all of them woven and dyed

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in Kyoto on special order, replicate the 16th-century period. They were designed by Emi Wada, who spent three years on them, beginning long before the project was confirmed. The cost of 1,200 costumes came to 1600 million.

The total cost of the movie, according to Herald Ace, was 12.6 billion, an overrun of '¥200 million. Silberman, the · French producer, shouldered 1800 million. Masato Hara, the producer on the Japanese side, commented that while it was the most expensive production in Japanese film history, "it was not enormous compared with the time and money spent by foreign directors." Hara added that it was actually remarkable that a movie on such a scale as Ran could be made with such limited time and money. "It was only because it was made in the Japanese way," he offered in explanation. Given the usual cost levels in this country, there is more striving for efficiency and economy in film productions.

Many similarities can be seen between Kurosawa's latest work and the 1980 Kagemusha (Shadow Warrior), his previous film. Both feature samurai themes and are filled with battle scenes with lots of horses, armor, conflagration, and scenes whose visual impact depends crucially on weather effects. Kurosawa readily admits not only the similarities but a conscious relationship. He once told a

press conference that while shooting Kagemusha, he had Ran in mind all along. He said he made the other film first to prove that this type of Japanese periodpiece would be internationally accepted.

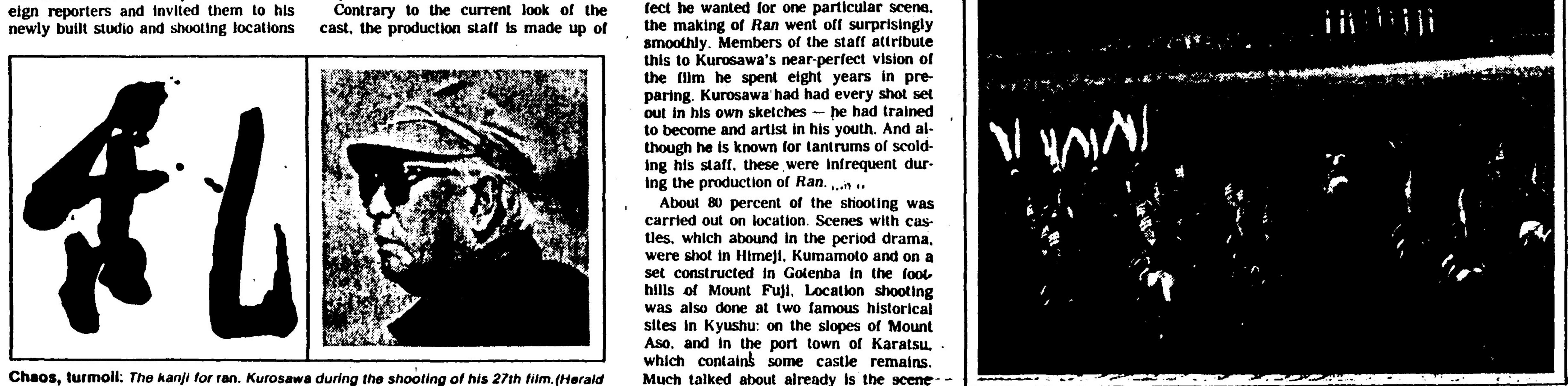
However, if Kagemusha can be described as a depiction of worldly events seen by one individual. Kurosawa suggested, Ran would be human deeds as viewed from heaven. "Ran" literally means "chaos" or "turmoil." The title was conceived by Kurosawa when he was engaged in the Soviet production Dersu Uzala in 1975. He was obsessed with the idea of a film to climax his career, but it took eight years before he was able to find the financial backing required. As it turned out, Kurosawa said, it was good to have that long period for preparation. in which he rewrote the script and condensed the story. But the final touches to the script were mostly done on the spot during shooting, the veteran director's usual method.

Although some have referred to Ran as a rendition of Shakespeare's King Lear. It is basically a Japanese story set in the 16th-century period of feudal turmoil. The tale of warlord Mori Hidetora's three sons is what first inspired Kurosawa. The legend goes that Hidetora, in trying to impress upon his sons the importance of fraternal solidarity, told them, "A single arrow is easily broken, but when three arrows are tied together they cannot be broken." He counseled the three brothers to stay bound together like the three arrows in order to enjoy invincible strength.

Kurosawa explained that from that he began wondering what would have happened if Hidetora's sons had not turned out so fine and instead broke their bond. "And then the story of King Lear overlapped," he said.

llis famed Kumonosujo (Throne of Blood) (1957) was an adaptation of Shakespeare's Macbeth, also set in 16thcentury Japan. In fact, of the master director's 27 films, 10 or so have had such a period setting, the first being Tora no o o Fumu Otoko (The Man Who Steps on a Tiger's Tail), in 1945.

Ran, the rounding out of his life's work. may bring satisfaction to the septuagenarian film artist. But it will also bring sad memories, for during the nine-month shooting Kurosawa saw the death of his wife:Kiyo, and of his longtime collaborators Ryu Kuze, 76, choreographer of fight scenes, and Fumio Yanoguchi, 67, of his recording staff.



done in Gotenba, for which a castle was Equine expenses: 15,000 horses were used for Ran. (Herald Ace)