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Document Citation

Title	**Kurosawa: a retrospective**
Author(s)	David Owens Peter Grilli
Source	*Japan Society*
Date	
Type	program
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	84
Subjects	Kurosawa, Akira (1910-1998), Omori, Tokyo, Japan
Film Subjects	Kagemusha, Kurosawa, Akira, 1980 Shubun (Scandal), Kurosawa, Akira, 1950 Shizukanaru ketto (The quiet duel), Kurosawa, Akira, 1949 Nora inu (Stray dog), Kurosawa, Akira, 1949 Subarashiki nichiyobi (One wonderful Sunday), Kurosawa, Akira, 1947 Waga seishun ni kuinashi (No regrets for our youth), Kurosawa, Akira, 1946 Kumonosu-jo (Throne of blood), Kurosawa, Akira, 1957 Tora no o o fumu otokotachi (The men who tread on the tiger's tail), Kurosawa, Akira, 1945

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Ichiban utsukushiku (The most beautiful), Kurosawa, Akira, 1944

Zoku Sugata Sanshiro (Sanshiro Sugata, Part 2), Kurosawa, Akira, 1945

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

Dersu uzala, Kurosawa, Akira, 1975

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

The Japan Film Center Presents

KUROSAWA

A RETROSPECTIVE

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In 1981-82 the Japan Society is celebrating its 75th Anniversary.
To commemorate this Anniversary, as well as the richness and vitality
of the Japan-United States relationship,
the Society has scheduled a year-long series of special public affairs programs
and cultural events to take place in the United States and Japan.

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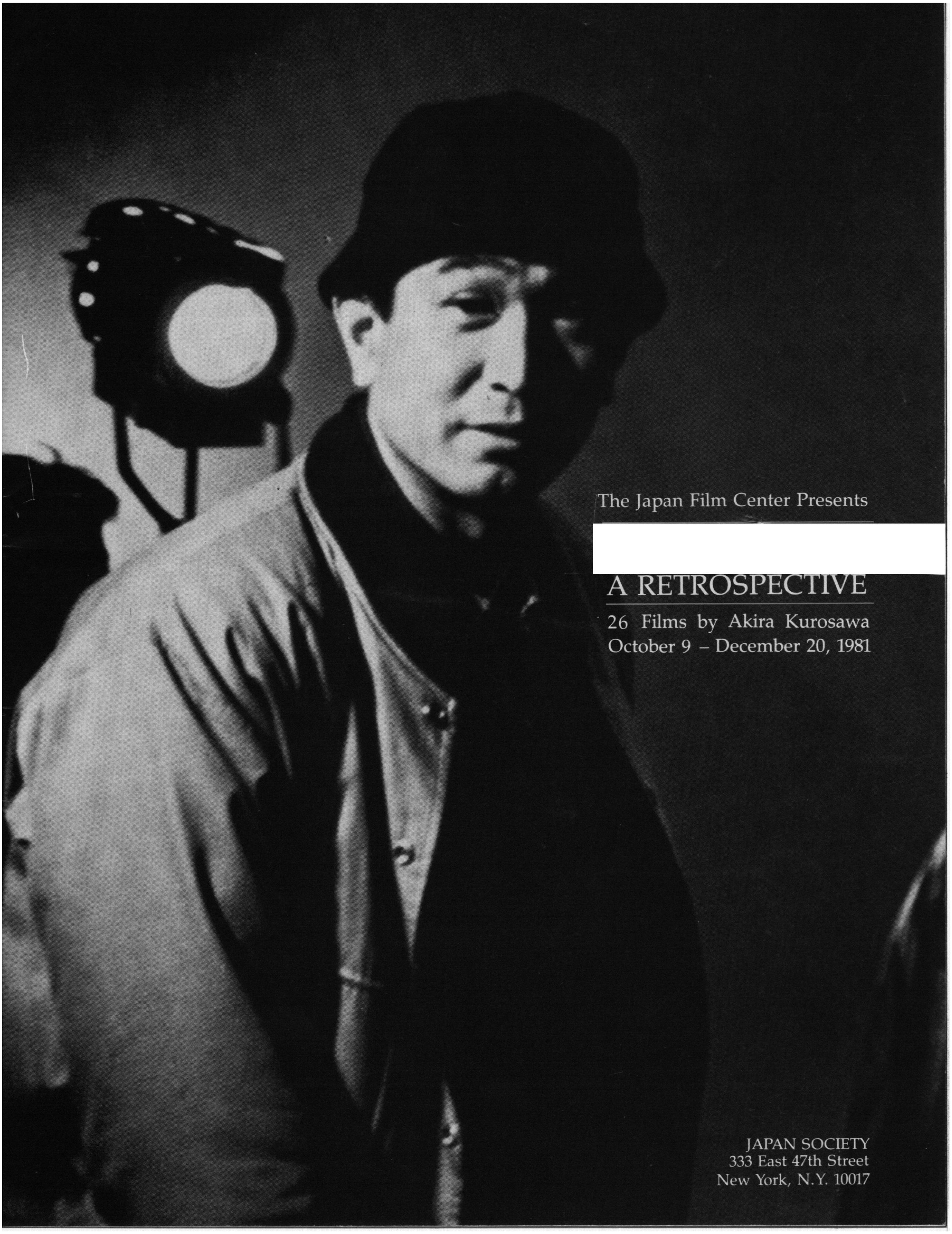

The Japan Film Center Presents

A RETROSPECTIVE

26 Films by Akira Kurosawa

October 9 – December 20, 1981

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 East 47th Street
New York, N.Y. 10017

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Fri Oct 9	7:30	**YOJIMBO** 110 MIN.
	10:00	**YOJIMBO** 110 MIN.
Sat Oct 10	2:00	**IKIRU** 143 MIN.
	7:30	**THRONE OF BLOOD** 110 MIN.
Sun Oct 11	2:00	**RASHOMON** 88 MIN.
	7:30	**SANJURO** 96 MIN.
Wed Oct 14	7:30	**NO REGRETS FOR OUR YOUTH** 110 MIN.
Fri Oct 16	7:30	**IKIRU** 143 MIN.
Sat Oct 17	2:00	**THE LOWER DEPTHS** 125 MIN.
	7:30	**THE IDIOT** 166 MIN.
Sun Oct 18	2:00	**NO REGRETS FOR OUR YOUTH** 110 MIN.
	7:30	**STRAY DOG** 122 MIN.
Wed Oct 21	7:30	**THE IDIOT** 166 MIN.
Fri Oct 23	7:30	**THE LOWER DEPTHS** 125 MIN.
Sat Oct 24	2:00	**THE QUIET DUEL** 95 MIN.
	7:30	**RED BEARD** 185 MIN.
Sun Oct 25	2:00	**SCANDAL** 104 MIN.
		DEPTHS 125 MIN.
		35 MIN.
Fri Oct 30	7:30	**THE QUIET DUEL** 95 MIN.
Sat Oct 31	2:00	**THRONE OF BLOOD** 110 MIN.
	7:30	**RASHOMON** 88 MIN.
Sun Nov 1	2:00	**THE QUIET DUEL** 95 MIN.
	7:30	**THE HIDDEN FORTRESS** 126 MIN.
Wed Nov 4	7:30	**THE HIDDEN FORTRESS** 126 MIN.
Fri Nov 6	7:30	**STRAY DOG** 122 MIN.
Sat Nov 7	2:00	**YOJIMBO** 110 MIN.
	7:30	**SANJURO** 96 MIN.
Sun Nov 8	2:00	**STRAY DOG** 122 MIN.
	7:30	**THE BAD SLEEP WELL** 135 MIN.
Wed Nov 11	7:30	**SCANDAL** 104 MIN.
Fri Nov 13	7:30	**I LIVE IN FEAR** 104 MIN.
Sat Nov 14	2:00	**THE BAD SLEEP WELL** 135 MIN.
	7:30	**SCANDAL** 104 MIN.
Sun Nov 15	2:00	**SEVEN SAMURAI** 200 MIN.
	7:30	**DRUNKEN ANGEL** 98 MIN.
Wed Nov 18	7:30	**DRUNKEN ANGEL** 98 MIN.
Fri Nov 20	7:30	**THE BAD SLEEP WELL** 135 MIN.
Sat Nov 21	2:00	**DRUNKEN ANGEL** 98 MIN.
	7:30	**SEVEN SAMURAI** 200 MIN.
Sun Nov 22	2:00	**I LIVE IN FEAR** 104 MIN.
	7:30	**HIGH AND LOW** 143 MIN.
Wed Nov 25	7:30	**HIGH AND LOW** 143 MIN.
Wed Dec 2	7:30	**DERSU UZALA** 137 MIN.
Fri Dec 4	7:30	**ONE WONDERFUL SUNDAY** 108 MIN.
Sat Dec 5	2:00	**THE MOST BEAUTIFUL & MEN WHO TREAD ON THE TIGER'S TAIL** 143 MIN.
	7:30	**SANSHIRO SUGATA, PART I** 80 MIN.
Sun Dec 6	2:00	**SANSHIRO SUGATA, PART II** 83 MIN.
	7:30	**DODESKADEN** 140 MIN.
Wed Dec 9	7:30	**SANSHIRO SUGATA, PART I** 80 MIN.
Fri Dec 11	7:30	**SANSHIRO SUGATA, PART II** 83 MIN.
Sat Dec 12	2:00	**DODESKADEN** 140 MIN.
	7:30	**ONE WONDERFUL SUNDAY** 108 MIN.
Sun Dec 13	2:00	**THE MOST BEAUTIFUL & MEN WHO TREAD ON THE TIGER'S TAIL** 143 MIN.
	7:30	**DERSU UZALA** 137 MIN.
Wed Dec 16	7:30	**KAGEMUSHA** 159 MIN.
Fri Dec 18	7:30	**THE MOST BEAUTIFUL & MEN WHO TREAD ON THE TIGER'S TAIL** 143 MIN.
Sat Dec 19	2:00	**SANSHIRO SUGATA, PART I** 80 MIN.
	7:30	**SANSHIRO SUGATA, PART II** 83 MIN.
Sun Dec 20	2:00	**ONE WONDERFUL SUNDAY** 108 MIN.
	7:30	**KAGEMUSHA** 159 MIN.

TICKET INFORMATION

Japan Society members: Opening night, $5.00; All other screenings, $3.00
Nonmembers: Opening night, $7.50; All other screenings, $4.00
Tickets will be sold on a first-come-first-served basis beginning at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays and at 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. Japan Society members will receive preference in purchasing tickets when demand is especially high. Telephone reservations not accepted. No refunds or exchanges.

All films are shown in Japanese with English subtitles. Program subject to change without notice.

All screenings at Japan House, 333 East 47th Street, New York

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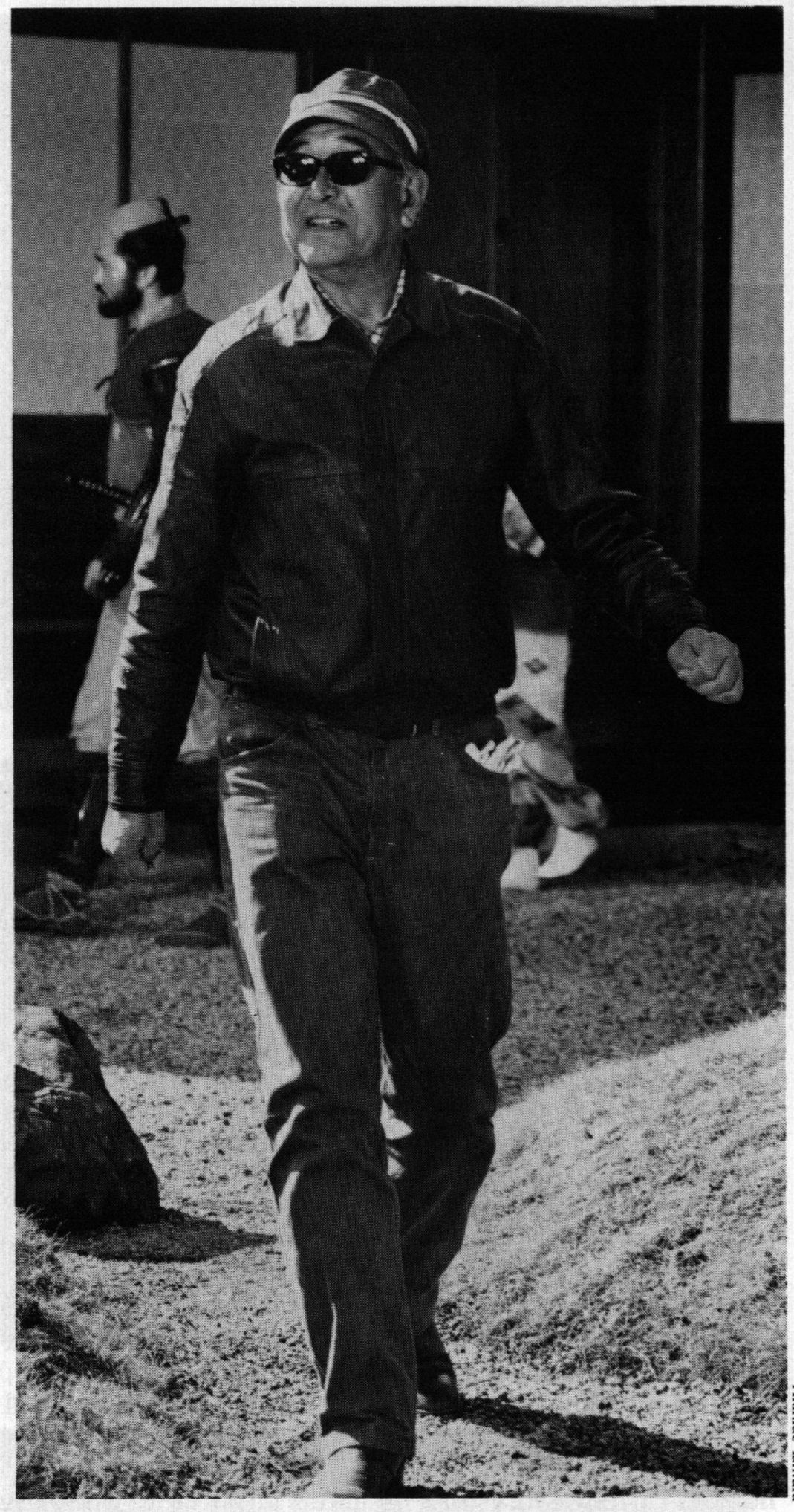
Introduction

When considering what the Japan Film Center's contribution to the 75th Anniversary Celebration of the Japan Society should be, several subjects for film series were suggested, but there was really only one choice. It had to be Kurosawa—a full retrospective of his films, all twenty-six of them, gathered together and presented as a unified body of work. Surprisingly, it had never been done before outside Japan. Although Kurosawa is unquestionably the best-known Japanese director and many of his films are familiar to American viewers, a number of them remain virtually unknown. Making his rarely seen early films available to a wide audience (including the translating and subtitling of films that previously had been available only in Japanese) seemed an enterprise that was not only highly worthwhile but long overdue. Even more, the opportunity to re-view all of this master-director's films in a concentrated time-period and in close juxtaposition to one another was too exciting to resist.

Kurosawa is a giant—artistically, morally, even physically. Standing taller than six feet, he towers over most of his countrymen. At work on a film set his is a dominating presence, looming over even the larger-than-life figures of actors costumed for a period film in the majestic armor of medieval warriors. The stature of Kurosawa's reputation in the film world is similary impressive. He is no longer merely the best-known *Japanese* director—his name is frequently listed by critics alongside that of D.W. Griffiths, John Ford, Ingmar Bergman, Luis Buñuel as one of the greatest directors of *world* cinema. A film by Kurosawa commands special attention. Whenever a new one is announced—all too seldom during the past decade or so—a special ripple of excitement runs through the film world. The press besieges Kurosawa with requests for new interviews and international film festivals make ready their awards and scramble to invite him to introduce the new movie.

Kurosawa's twenty-six films, as a life's work, carry a moral force, an intellectual seriousness, and an artistic weight that few other film directors can rival. One must look elsewhere, beyond the realm of film, for suitable comparisons—to the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Dickens or Dostoyevsky, the operas of Verdi, or the symphonies of Beethoven. All of these great creators fashioned an entire world in their works, a vision of mankind not limited by the fears and compromises of lesser men. Each in his own art defied all conventional wisdom regarding form and style, transcending old standards to establish new ones. Each created works that—decades or centuries later—strike with an impact that neither time nor repeated analysis can diminish. Finally, each has addressed himself to a universal audience of common men, speaking forcefully and directly, without concern for cultural boundaries or relative levels of education or literacy. To this small group of supremely creative artists one may add the name of Akira Kurosawa.

It is a familiar cliché that the arts of Japan are esoteric, bound by cultural values to which few non-Japanese can fully respond and judged by standards that few can comprehend. If any Japanese art can break through such limiting notions, however, it is the Japanese cinema. And if any film director can lay such clichés finally to rest it is Kurosawa. Although his materials—his stories, his actors,



Akihide Tamura

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his settings—are Japanese, his messages are for everyone, everywhere. If one looks beyond the cultural patterns on the surfaces of his films, beneath the costumes that identify his actors as Japanese, the themes that lie within are neither arcane nor esoteric: man's struggle for fulfillment and self-perfection, the illusions of reality that disguise truth, conflicts of good and evil. What other subjects can there be for an artist whose real subject is man? In film after film, Kurosawa returns to these themes, shifting the premises slightly, altering historical periods, changing the costumes of his actors but never their souls. Sometimes the actors on Kurosawa's stage are Hamlets disguised as modern businessmen or Macbeths occupying medieval Japanese castles, and sometimes they are cowboys in kimono or Everyman as a petty Japanese bureaucrat. But their identities are not difficult to recognize and the passions that motivate them are familiar to all of us.

It is for these reasons of universal validity—along with his unchallenged mastery of film technique (curiously, one almost takes this for granted in considering his films)—that Kurosawa stands apart from other Japanese filmmakers, his stature as a philosopher-artist extended to colossal proportions.

There are other reasons, too, why Kurosawa should be the filmmaker singled out for special attention at a time when Japanese-American relations are being celebrated in the Japan Society's anniversary. In a sense, America owes him thanks for helping us think more seriously about film and for teaching us much. Not many American filmmakers have met him, but there are few who would not acknowledge a sense of debt to Kurosawa. Watching his films, other directors have marvelled and learned new ways to use cameras and lights, to order narrative, to move actors, and to cut and edit their film-dramas. But Kurosawa's would be a small audience, indeed, if it were limited to only a select society of fellow filmmakers. His films are made for all of us to see and to be moved by. One need know nothing about the craft of filmmaking to emerge from *Seven Samurai* tingling with excitement, or from *Ikiru* with a sense of being cleansed. No one walks out of a Kurosawa picture the same person who entered. We have all learned from his films and have been somehow changed by them. We learn a great deal about Japan, of course, because his films convey—as only cinema can—the visual appearance of the culture as well as the tensions and dilemmas of modern Japanese society or the beauties and horrors of its history. But far more important, we learn from Kurosawa about ourselves as human beings.

Finally, both his own country and the rest of the world should join in thanking Kurosawa for guiding Japanese cinema out of its remote isolation into the spotlight of international attention. That was never his intent, of course. His sole concern has simply been to make good films. But it was Kurosawa's *Rashomon* in 1951 that startled audiences at the Venice Film Festival into "discovering" in Japan a national cinema of extraordinary artistry and sophistication. Following that first awakening, the West looked to Japan for other fine movies, and was quick to find such great film-artists as Kenji Mizoguchi and Yasujiro Ozu. And Kurosawa, with one masterpiece after another—*Ikiru, Seven Samurai, Throne of Blood, Yojimbo, High and Low, Kagemusha*—has continued up to the present to remind the world of the splendor that can be achieved in film. The obstacles to making great movies have certainly not lessened in his lifetime; each new film has been harder for him to finance, to cast, to direct. But Kurosawa's energy and dedication have not diminished. At seventy-one he stands tall as ever, ready to offer us new masterpieces. His next project is an adaptation to medieval Japan of *King Lear.* Kurosawa, Shakespeare, and Lear—can we endure the anticipation till this next film appears?

Acknowledgements

any different organizations and individuals have cooperated in developing and presenting this film series. Akira Kurosawa himself gave this undertaking his blessing; though his deepest satisfaction comes from making films, rather than from publicizing himself, he graciously consented to take time away from his work schedule to come to New York to open this Retrospective. Three individuals, close associates of Kurosawa's, deserve very special thanks for their assistance: Teruyo Nogami, Kurosawa's production assistant on all his films since *Rashomon,* was tireless in her encouragement and attention to the minutest details in preparing this project; Audie Bock, assistant producer of the international version of *Kagemusha* and translator of Kurosawa's forthcoming autobiography, provided much of the material for this program booklet as well as valuable liaison with Mr. Kurosawa over the past several years; Donald Richie, author of *The Films of Akira Kurosawa* and much other superb writing on the Japanese cinema, has been a constant and steadfast source of inspiration, guidance, and practical support—no finer *sensei* is there for the serious student of Japanese film, or for that matter, of Japan.

Mme. Kashiko Kawakita and Mr. Akira Shimizu, Director and General Secretary respectively of the Japan Film Library Council, were genuinely forthcoming with their recommendations and constantly helpful in securing film prints and informational details. At the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Charles Silver generously made available the Film Studies Center's files on Kurosawa, and Mary Corliss of the Film Stills Department provided many of the photographs for this booklet.

It is essential in presenting a film series of this type that the best possible prints of the films be screened. We are particularly indebted both to the Toho Company, producer of most of Kurosawa's films, and to MacMillan Films, the American distributor of many of them, for preparing new prints of a number of the films. At Toho, Mr. Isao Matsuoka, President of Toho Company Ltd., and Mr. Kazuto Ohira, Mr. Tetsuzo Ueda, and Ms. Lucille Carra, all of Toho International (U.S.A.) deserve our special thanks. At MacMillan, equal gratitude is due Mr. Jeffrey Jacobs, Director of Theatrical Sales and Marketing.

I am grateful to the distinguished Japanese film critics Tadao Sato and Akira Iwasaki for contributing essays on Kurosawa to this booklet. Personal comments on the director and his films was also provided by directors George Lucas, Francis Coppola, and Arthur Penn; critics Pauline Kael, Stanley Kauffmann, and Andrew Sarris; actors To-

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shiro Mifune and Tatsuya Nakadai; cinematographer Kazuo Miyagawa; screenwriter Shinobu Hashimoto; and art director Yoshiro Muraki. We are grateful to the following publishers for permission to reprint excerpts from their books: The University of California Press (*The Films of Akira Kurosawa* by Donald Richie), Harper & Row (*A World on Film* by Stanley Kauffmann), and the Atlantic Monthly Press (*I Lost It At The Movies* by Pauline Kael).

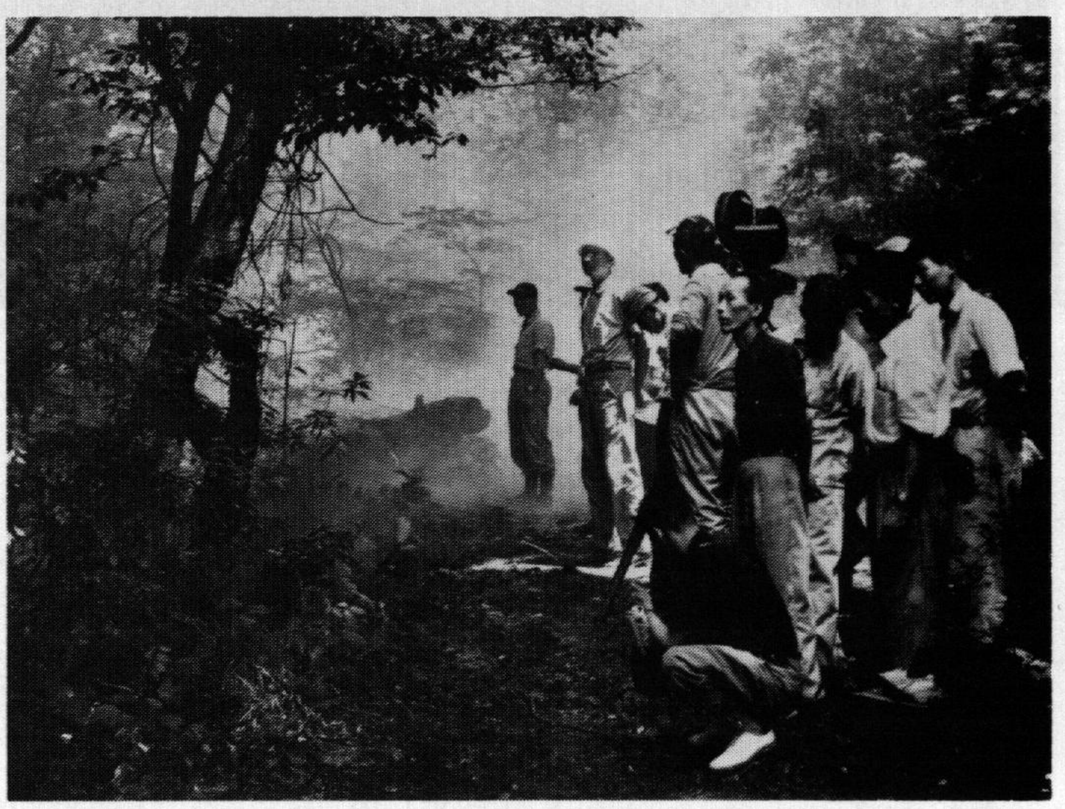
The efforts of many other individuals, more directly affiliated with the Japan Society, have been instrumental in making possible this uniquely rewarding, but unusually complicated, film series. The Friends of the Japanese Film is a group of dedicated film-lovers who, over the past few years, have been steadfast in their support of the programs of the Japan Film Center. The Center's Film Advisory Committee, under the leadership of Dorothy Cullman, has offered valuable guidance in carrying forward all film-related activities. The Honorable Robert S. Ingersoll, Chairman of the Japan Society, its President David MacEachron, and its Vice President John K. Wheeler have provided constant and enthusiastic leadership. Martha Redfield Wallace, chairman of the 75th Anniversary Fund Committee, assisted by Barbara Fox, has been exceptionally generous with time and energy devoted to assuring that adequate funding would be available to this and other anniversary events. Mari Eijima, Thomas Conway, Mary Allis, and Beth Horowitz, all of the Japan Society staff, have been helpful in ways that are essential but too numerous to describe here.

Most of all, I am grateful to David Owens and Teddi Oda of the Japan Film Center staff for their myriad efforts, their sense of responsibility, and their exceptional dedication to carrying forward the objectives of the Japan Film Center. Without their support, the finest aspirations would come to nought; with it, the film program functions smoothly and efficiently for the benefit of all fans of the Japanese cinema.

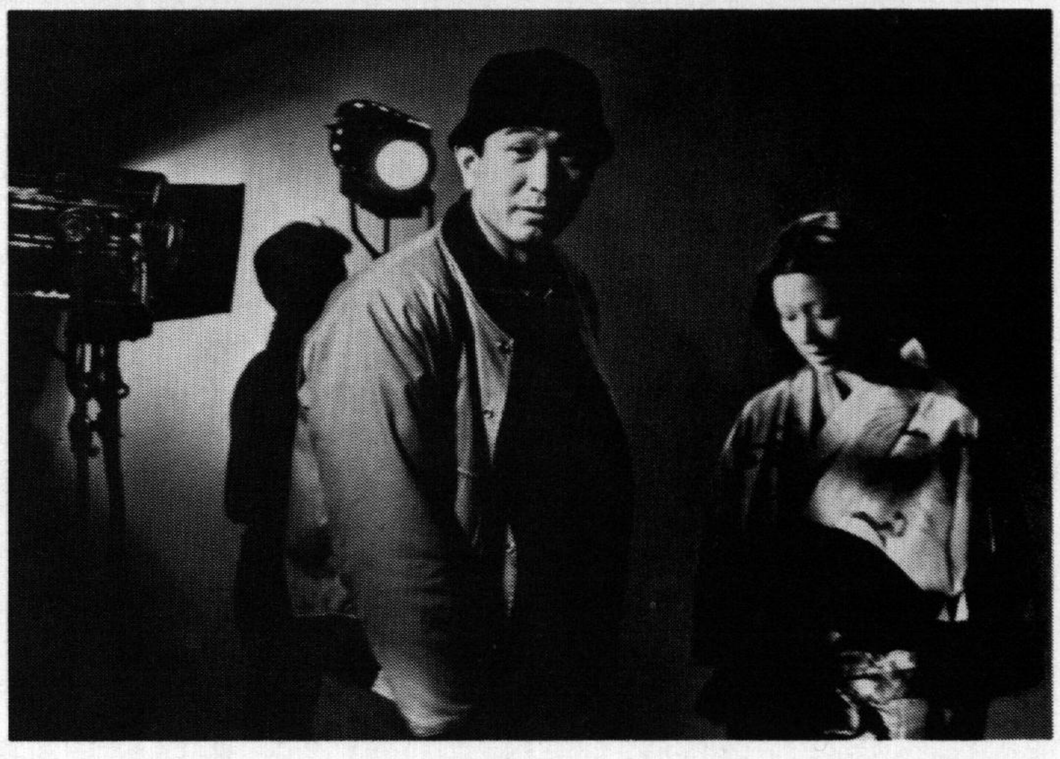
The Japan Film Center is deeply indebted to the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Armand Bartos in making the Kurosawa retrospective possible. Their interest in the arts of Japan is of long standing, and their committment to the newer art of Japanese cinema, as demonstrated in the present instance, is a particularly valued gesture.

Peter Grilli
Director, Japan Film Center

Kurosawa directing Toshiro Mifune and Isuzu Yamada in *The Lower Depths* (1957).



Kurosawa (at center in white cap) during location shooting for *Throne of Blood* (1957).



Kurosawa with actress Keiko Tsushima on set of *Seven Samurai* (1954).

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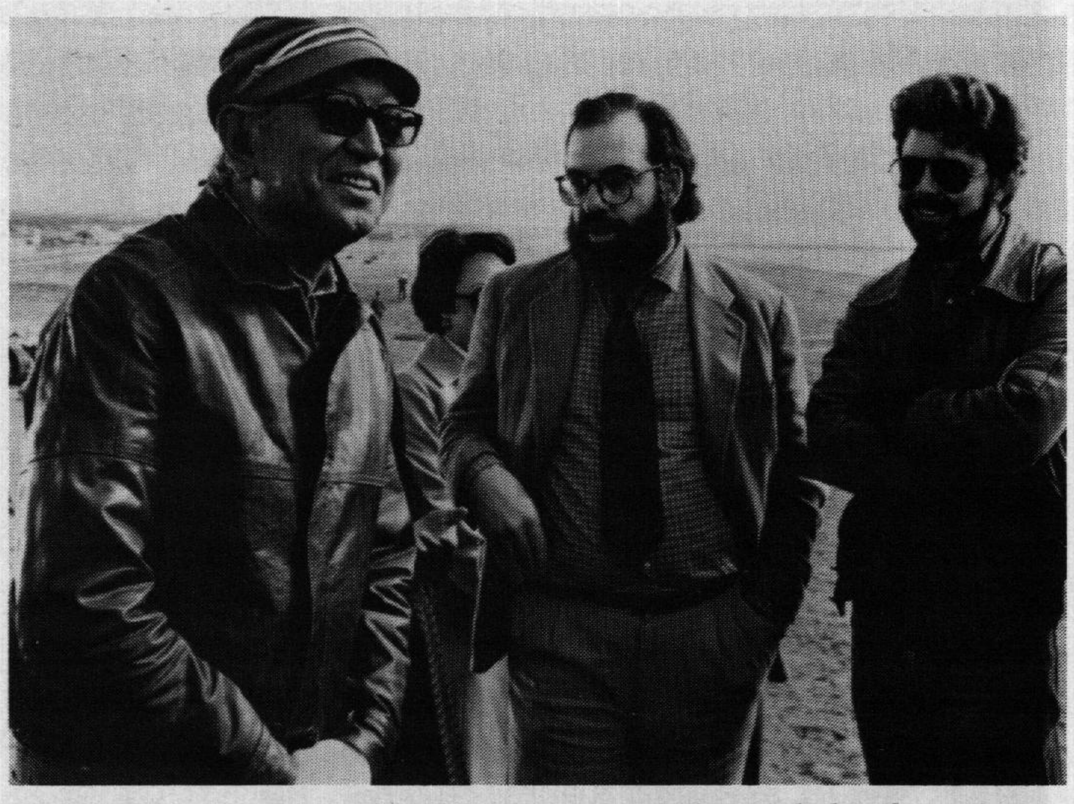
Reflections on Kurosawa



Akira Kurosawa on location for *Kagemusha* with his longtime admirers Francis Coppola and George Lucas, who served as executive producers for the international version of *Kagemusha*.

With other Japanese-directors and with Satyajit Ray, Kurosawa shares a liability to remoteness in Western eyes—in his case, not in style or subject matter but in some details of gesture and reaction. Yet he is less affected by cultural distance than most. (In Japan he is known as the "Western" director.) Even when his subjects seem slight for his abilities, there runs through most of his work a conviction of mastery that is itself exciting. It is not cinematic magic like later Fellini nor Angst *made visible like Bergman; there is a fierceness in his style, steely-fingered and sure. The many beauties for the eyes seem the by-product—inevitable but still a by-product—of a burning, ironic view. What flames in many of his films, contemporary and costume, is hatred. In* Ikiru *it is hatred of death, but in most of them it is hatred of dishonor. Like most ironists and most intelligent users of melodrama, he is an idealist in deliberately thin disguises.*

—Stanley Kauffmann
Critic

The films of Akira Kurosawa were my teachers long before I had the opportunity to actually work with him and learn from him in person. Through his strong graphic style and dedication to perfecting every element in his films, Mr. Kurosawa succeeds in sharing his epic dreams and visions as well as his warm and profound understanding of individual lives. He choreographs images and sounds to convey meanings that words alone cannot express. Mr. Kurosawa's vitality and inventiveness continue to be an inspiration to me and all other students of film.

—George Lucas
Director

Akira Kurosawa is one of two or three living masters of the cinema. Most directors have one masterpiece by which they are known, but he has eight or nine. I think it's wonderful that a large-scale, high-quality film like Kagemusha *can be made in Japan, I hope it signifies the dawn of a new golden age for Japanese film.*

—Francis Coppola
Director

The Japan Society's complete retrospective of the films of Akira Kurosawa, presented on its 75th Anniversary, is a splendid tribute. I am sure that everyone seeing his films will recognize in them a filmmaker of fierce spirit, one who refuses to compromise the integrity of his vision. As an actor who has appeared in many of Kurosawa's films, I send sincere good wishes for the success of this retrospective.

—Toshiro Mifune
Actor

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. . . I am now prepared to rank Kurosawa among the top four directors working in the world today, Luis Buñuel, Ingmar Bergman, and Robert Bresson being the others. . . . Granted there are flaws and excesses (in his films), but Kurosawa's flaws are those of genius. He is one of that small handful of filmmakers in the world who, once having mastered their craft have been free to summon images from the depths of their unconscious, but with such a degree of formal control that we can enjoy the images not only for what they mean, but for what they are. At a time when the cinema seems to be heading toward an irrevocable split between the cerebral and the visceral, Kurosawa provides a rare fusion of intellect and robustness. Moreover, everything we now know about him proclaims that he is the last of a line, a man whose upbringing and development and suffering and survival have stamped him with the mark of the true samurai director.

—Andrew Sarris
Critic

Akira Kurosawa is one of a handful of truly great film directors. The expanse of his work is wondrous. The influence of Kurosawa is visible throughout the world's cinema. He has been an inspiration to me and is an artist I hold in the highest esteem. I am honored at the opportunity to offer these few words of homage.

—Arthur Penn
Director

. . . Akira Kurosawa's reputation as a perfectionist is legendary. It's often said that work on one of his films is exhausting. When I was still in my teens, going to acting school, I got a walk-on part in Seven Samurai *and found out what it was like. But since then I have appeared in four more Kurosawa films and have found on the contrary that the work was calm and relaxed.*

This master director is extraordinarily liberal with his actors—he lets us take chances. For a freelance actor like me, every single performance counts—you can't tell yourself that if this one is not so good the next one will be better. You want to be consistently good, which makes it harder to take chances. But I can always be confident that Kurosawa will treat my work firmly and fairly, and with him I feel comfortable risking new things in my performances. With such a master, an actor gives his best. It is really a joy to work in such a relationship of trust.

—Tatsuya Nakadai
Actor

Francis Haar

Akira Kurosawa, c. 1951-52.

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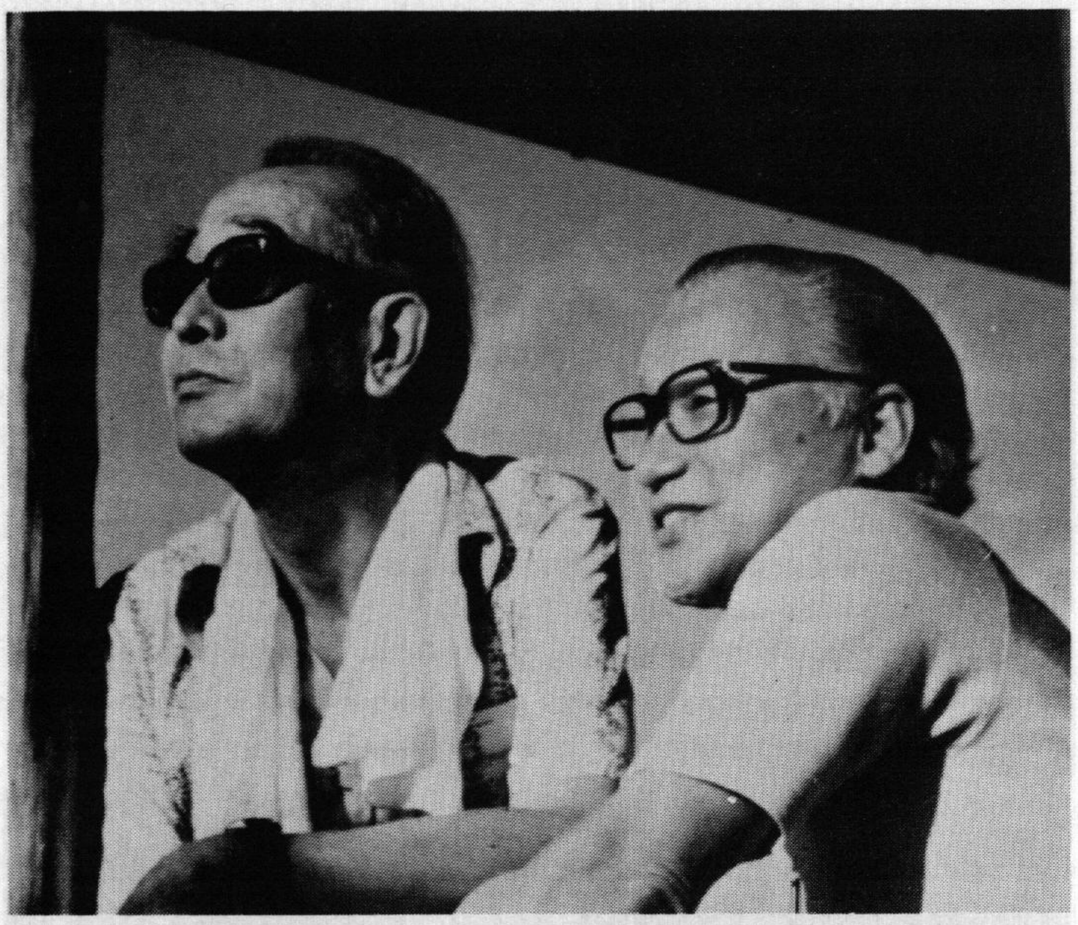

Akira Kurosawa with Kazuo Miyagawa, the cinematographer for *Rashomon* and *Yojimbo*.

Some people say Kurosawa is a genius. The term seems too facile, and I myself wouldn't call him that. Rather, his is a character that endeavors to express a unified vision, bit by bit, by combining images of moving pictures and sound. His effort is extraordinarily rational, logical, and positive. Taking his films as the end-result of his talent and positivist will, one might say of him:

Before Kurosawa there was no Kurosawa,
After Kurosawa there can be no Kurosawa.

—Shinobu Hashimoto
Screenwriter

. . . Whenever Kurosawa shouts at his crew there's a reason for it. So when any of us are the targets of his anger, we don't take it as a personal affront. We go on with our work, trying to do our best. We're always so absorbed anyway. And Kurosawa doesn't play favorites. Everyone on the crew knows that if he has something to say, he can stand up for himself. Kurosawa himself creates this kind of atmosphere. And besides, there's not another director who pays as much attention to his staff as Kurosawa. When Rashomon *won the Grand Prize (at Venice), he went to the trouble of thanking each of us who had worked on the film. "You persevered through the summer heat, you put up with the mosquitoes," he wrote in a letter. "Regardless of what may be said about the film, the fact that it won this prize is a tribute to every one of you." It was really a very nice letter.*

—Kazuo Miyagawa
Cinematographer

With his bold conceptions and his precise attention to the details of filmmaking, Kurosawa has elicited from movies the unique pleasures that only film can provide. He has been called a perfectionist—and he is. So much so that even when shooting with inadequate light he somehow manages to balance the subtle shadows of foreground and background in each frame so that one senses a range of colors in his black-and-white compositions. The subjects of his films speak courageously to great human issues, often well ahead of their times: think of his rage at the threat of nuclear destruction expressed in I Live in Fear, *for example, or of his protest at the vile corruption that sacrifices innocent lives to corporate profit in* The Bad Sleep Well, *or the plight of the aged hero of* Ikiru *who stares death in the face and recognizes how meaningless his life has been. In designing many of Kurosawa's films, I have struggled always to respond to his lofty expectations. The quality of the finished film has never failed to justify whatever difficulties were presented by the effort. I am proud, and grateful, to have been able to work with this master director.*

—Yoshiro Muraki
Art director

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Kurosawa: His Life and Art *by Audie E. Bock*

Searching for the sources of Akira Kurosawa's inspirations, more than one Japanese film critic has come to the conclusion that this screenwriter-director's point of departure lies in his own personal situation. Some flatly assert that he always makes films about himself. A note of corroboration for this approach lies in a suggestion from his line producer and script girl since 1950, Teruyo Nogami, who feels that one of the motivations behind the story line of his 1980 film *Kagemusha: The Shadow Warrior* was his perception that he has no artistic successor, and no one to act as his double, in the Japanese film world. These deductions offered by those close to Kurosawa as well as those who study him through the screen from afar seem to lend credence to the notion that there exists a link between his personal life and the choice of subjects and themes in his work.

The director himself vehemently denies any such link, with one sole exception. He has described his 1952 film *Ikiru* as arising from thoughts about what he himself would do and feel if faced with the same sudden ultimatum as its hero: a maximum of six months to live before terminal cancer removes all possibilities for action. Yet Kurosawa has never in actuality confronted a fatal disease, and in fact he conceived and filmed *Ikiru* at a time when he was unquestionably in his physical and productive prime, at the age of forty-one. As evidence, in his forthcoming autobiography he speaks of the circumstances surrounding the shooting of his 1950 film *Rashomon* with great nostalgia for the youthful energy that he and his cast and crew shared at that point in their lives.

But because the writer-director himself denies a relationship between his life and his work, it becomes necessary to examine his personal history to evaluate this contradiction. Akira Kurosawa was born in Tokyo on March 23, 1910. His father was a native of Akita Prefecture, in the deep north, with a lineage going back to one of the most famous samurai of northern Japan, Abe Sadato (1015-1062), who led an ill-fated war against Minamoto Yoriyoshi of the powerful Genji clan. Kurosawa's mother's family, on the other hand, had their origins in Osaka merchant culture. Aside from several hearty outdoor summers spent with relatives in the Akita countryside, Kurosawa grew up and received all of his education in Tokyo. His father was a physical-education teacher and administrator at the Toyama Army Academy, and his mother a career housewife who raised eight children, of which Akira was the youngest.

Among the formative influences Kurosawa has cited in his childhood are his father's love of the movies, his older brother's love of Russian literature and career choice as a silent film narrator, and some of his grade-school teachers' encouragement in sports and painting (he also took *kendo* fencing lessons as a child, inspired by a demonstration given at school). His most painful experiences included the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, his brother's suicide as a young man, the death from illness of the older sister closest to him, and to a lesser extent the discovery that he

Kurosawa instructing Toshiro Mifune about his performance in *The Bad Sleep Well*.

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could not make a living as a painter and member of the Proletarian Artists' League during the Depression, when he also participated in underground political activities.

Once Kurosawa became an employee of a film production company, by application, he went through the usual six-year apprenticeship before making his first film, the 1943 *Sugata Sanshiro.* He attributes a great deal of the skills he acquired to a patient, encouraging and responsive teacher, director Kajiro Yamamoto, who was a prolific maker of both comedies and action dramas.

During the war era, Kurosawa suffered bitterly from the constraints of censorship, but he never gave up the hope of making good films, as did some who refused to change their established style and were content to comply with national policy directives. Toward the end of the war while Tokyo was being bombed, Kurosawa married the woman who had starred in his second film, *The Most Beautiful,* Yoko Yaguchi, who became a housewife and mother of his two children.

The postwar era brought a new freedom to treat contemporary life in film, but also a bitter struggle between workers and management in the Toho film production company. The dismissals and resignations that occurred as a result of a series of strikes separated Kurosawa from some of his closest colleagues. These events account for his having become a free-lance director and making five films with companies other than Toho between 1949 and 1951. By this time he had won the Venice International Film Festival's Golden Lion for *Rashomon* and become a director of world renown.

Since the early fifties Kurosawa has been involved in making movies above all else. He has frequently, if reluctantly traveled abroad, and as the Japanese film industry began its decline in the late sixties accepted an offer to direct the Japanese side of a Twentieth Century Fox production, *Tora Tora Tora.* Cross-cultural communication, financial and artistic control problems and the allegation that he was mentally unsound led to his resignation from the project.

The adverse publicity surrounding the 1968 *Tora Tora Tora* incident proved extremely damaging to Kurosawa's career. He was unable to get major financing for his projects and ended by making *Dodeskaden* in 1970 as a low-budget independent production with his friends, directors Keisuke Kinoshita, Masaki Kobayashi and Kon Ichikawa, as co-producers. This attempt to prove that he was not insane and was capable of making a movie with a small amount of money (filmed in 28 days) emerged as an interesting experiment in color and storytelling method, but it was his first commercial failure. Despondency over these poor results, combined with the physical discomfort of an undiagnosed case of serious gallstones led him to attempt suicide.

Upon recovery he happily accepted an offer from the U.S.S.R. to film a project of his choice on Soviet soil. After two years of shooting under extreme conditions of heat and cold in Siberia, *Dersu Uzala,* the 1976 Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Language Film was the result. Another outcome, less fortuitous, was chronic poor circulation in the director's feet, the aftermath of frostbite.

In the spare moments when not writing or directing a film Kurosawa reads widely in everything from classics of world and Japanese literature to American detective novels. He plays golf, but otherwise eschews much social activity, preferring to spend time with his family, his grandchildren in particular. Although his status as an international film figure sends him to foreign countries periodically, he would rather travel no farther than his summer house on a golf course near Mount Fuji, unless he is scouting locations for a film.

The above account illustrates a contrast between a director like Kurosawa and one for whom life and art are very much intertwined, like the late Kenji Mizoguchi, who made film after film about the women he both idealized and feared. There is little in Kurosawa's personal history to trigger associations with his film story lines. With the exception of the painful experiences cited in Kurosawa's youth, there appear to be few incidents of a sensational value in his life to compare with the Mizoguchi who was stabbed by an irate sweetheart and suffered the pain of watching his wife go insane from syphilis. It is almost as if Kurosawa keeps his personal life as removed as possible from his work in order to allow his artistic imagination a freer rein. He has never dwelt on a personal experience in his films—there are no earthquake movies, no strike movies (he disclaims authorship of a strike-movie sequence Toho has always attributed to him), no Fellini-esque films about film directors' private agonies. Certainly Kurosawa's life has not lacked high adventure, intense emotion and moments of extreme pathos and humor, but when these dramatic elements emerge on the screen they appear to come from other source material.

Kurosawa asserts that he has never made an "assigned" film. He writes all of his own scripts, based on his own ideas. He feels that this is the only way to retain full artistic control of the material. Yet he does not claim that every idea for every film he has made emerged exclusively from his own imagination. (He has done enough literary and theatrical adaptations not to make a point of exclusively original scripts). He places a high value on the catalytic input from diverse sources. When he decided he wanted to make a period film subsequent to *Ikiru,* for example, he recalls that producer Shojiro Motoki one day suggested the title "Seven Samurai," and the whole structure of the story blossomed from this free-floating title, attached to no form at the time it was uttered.

In spite of the denial of real-life connections to film concepts, there have been instances of characters from Kurosawa's own experience intruding on his films. Also in his autobiography, he recalls a realization that came upon him after developing the character of Hiruta, the shabby lawyer in *Scandal* (1950). The real-life model for the guilt-ridden alcoholic with a sick but angelic daughter had emerged from a memory of Kurosawa's days as an assistant director of frequenting the bars near the studio. The tapping of real life, however, was unconscious, and recognized only long after the fact. Kurosawa brings it up not as a defense for his inspiration, but as an example of the inevitable impingement of reality upon fiction. "The character wrote himself," he marvels, "I had no control over the pen."

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The most cogent argument against the interpretation of Kurosawa's films as an expression of or elaboration upon his own life emerges from his method of screenwriting. He has never written a script without the collaboration of at least one person, and in some cases as many as four. The writing team of Kurosawa, Shinobu Hashimoto and Hideo Oguni produced a number of Japan's classic films of the fifties and sixties, including *Seven Samurai*. The system of proposing ideas and characters, sharing criticisms as well as inspirations and hashing through the plausibility of motivations and dialogue from start to finish prevents any one contributor's idea from becoming so personal as to lose the audience. The division of input is difficult to determine in the way credits appear on the screen in the finished film—the method has consisted of many inn rooms filled with crumpled pieces of paper, the rejected ideas removed without record. But Kurosawa has described Oguni as the humanistic "heart" of the team, while Hashimoto has been the "brain" technician of plot. And he has credited his most recent collaborator, Masato Ide, with some of the great moments of screen time. The critical scene with the ladies in *Kagemusha,* for example, succeeds because of Ide's suggestion to have the double confess to them that he is an impostor, and find his confession treated as a joke.

Other factors too have influenced the conception of Kurosawa's stories, among them the planning of particular roles for particular actors. To illustrate the development of a script altered by the personality of an actor, Kurosawa has cited *Drunken Angel,* in which Toshiro Mifune's character, the gangster, took away central figure status from the doctor played by Takashi Shimura. This was a case where the electrifying energy of Mifune as a young man proved impossible to tone down even in the writing phase of the film's preparation.

The end result has been a number of films that set the standard for entertainment and inspiration in today's cinema. Battles of great medieval clans and scruffy masterless samurai with peasants come from someone who has never been at war. Superhero unshaven warriors and slowly awakening bureaucrats come from someone who has never been either. Gangsters and physicians, young factory girls proving their worth as workers and patriots, rape, murder, betrayal, ransom all come from the imagination of a man who has not experienced these things in his own life. But if they are lacking in his life, few would say his films have suffered as a result.

Kurosawa frequently begs out of making statements to the public by saying, "Everything I have to say is on the screen; a filmmaker should not step out in front of it and talk about his work." He likewise avoids discussion of his personal life, but presumably what he has to say on the screen includes his reactions to the large events of his private life, translated into the universal medium of a good film story so that they can have meaning for other people as well. The making of an eloquent cinematic statement does not necessarily require the writer-director to treat his own life on the screen; it does, however, require him to treat situations and characters about which both he and an audience can care deeply, and which in so doing embody thoughtful reflections on his own life.

Kurosawa on location at Himeji Castle for the filming of *Kagemusha* with actor Daisuke Ryu (center).

Kurosawa working on location in the Siberian forest for *Dersu Uzala* (1975).

Kurosawa rehearsing his actors on the main interior set for *High and Low* (1963); next to him in the dark suit is actor Tatsuya Nakadai.

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Kurosawa and His Work *by Akira Iwasaki*

Kurosawa directing *The Lower Depths* (1957). At right is actress Isuzu Yamada.

Akira Kurosawa has already been at work on his latest film, *Akahige (Redbeard)*, for more than a year. Even allowing for a break occasioned by brief illness, this is unusually long for the making of a Japanese film, and the reason lies, above all, in the perfectionism which characterizes all Kurosawa's creative activity. For instance, on a site close to the Toho studios, he has had his architect build for him an exact replica of a charity hospital of the late Tokugawa Period, an old-style, one-storied building with a tiled roof. Not only is this structure faithful to the contemporary plans, but anybody willing to forego various modern comforts could actually live in it for months on end.

The film takes place in the period when Western medicine was first transplanted to Japan and began to take root. Those young medical students of the day who were dissatisfied with the traditional Oriental medicine imported from China many centuries previously would make their way to the port of Nagasaki, the only point of contact with Western culture in a Japan officially isolated from the rest of the world. There they would study for several years and, on their return to Edo, apply their knowledge of the most up-to-date medical treatment for the benefit of the common people. The hero of the film, the head of a charity hospital, known by the nickname of Redbeard, is such a man. He himself has been to study at Nagasaki in his youth, and it is at his hospital that the young Noboru, his at first rebellious but later faithful follower, unpacks his bags on his return from a similar mission. Undoubtedly, Kurosawa's interest was stirred by the prospect of portraying these two humanist scientists who stood at the dawn of Japan's modern age. Yet was there not, perhaps, another, more personal motive behind his choice of such a theme?

While it is Akira Kurosawa who today represents the Japanese art of the film in the eyes of the world, it does not follow that in Japan itself he is considered a truly Japanese artist. Not a few Japanese, in fact, would ascribe his world fame precisely to his "non-Japanese" qualities.

In an exchange of letters between Kurosawa and myself, published by a Japanese magazine some time ago, Kurosawa declares:

"I am a man who enjoys Basho and Buson along with Dostoevski, who likes Sotatsu, Gyokudo, and Tessai in the same way as Van Gogh, Lautrec, and Rouault. . . . I collect old Japanese lacquerware as well as antique French and Dutch glassware. In short, the Western and the Japanese live side by side in my mind naturally, without the least sense of conflict."

To a certain extent, any average intellectual in Japan today could confess to being in the same position; the ordinary dilettante, indeed, can perfectly well combine Japan and the West without feeling bothered at all. However, for a creative artist of Kurosawa's caliber it is not such a simple matter. The two things, the Western and the Japanese, certainly do exist alongside in him, but their coexistence is marked by constant conflict and sparring and, when they do make contact and combine with each

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other, by showers of sparks and the generation of much heat and light. Compared with directors of an earlier generation such as the late Yasujiro Ozu and Mikio Naruse, who are reputed to be the most "Japanese" of all filmmakers, and with whom Japan is part of the very fiber of their being, Kurosawa belongs to a more recent generation which must look to the West for help in defining Japan, which verifies and analyzes the one by constant reference to the other.

The very first scenario Kurosawa ever wrote (written while he was still an assistant director, it never reached the screen) was "The German of Dharma Temple," which portrayed the life in Japan of Bruno Taut, the celebrated German architect. The choice of subject bears witness to a constant preoccupation of Kurosawa's, from his youth right up to the present. It was Taut, one of the founders of the Bauhaus, who discovered the plain and simple beauty of the Japanese sense of form to which the Japanese themselves, overfamiliar, had become apathetic, and brought it once more into the Japanese consciousness. The process constituted a second rediscovery of Japan by the Japanese; the first was the reawakening prompted by the American art critic Fenollosa at the end of the nineteenth century. Kurosawa, too, as a young art student was much occupied with the question of the precise meaning of "Japanese," and he felt an interest in Taut as pointing the way to an answer. He discovered in Taut an instructive counterpart.

It was via such devious routes as this that the modern Japanese who had experienced fascination and infatuation for Western civilization had to hunt after, or find his way back to, the truly "Japanese." In this sense, "The German of Dharma Temple," though no more than a study, represents something essential in Kurosawa; it was an attempt by the youthful Kurosawa, using Taut as a medium, to come to terms with his own past. *Sanshiro Sugata* (1943)—his first film, which brought him his first success—tells how the hero, Sanshiro, is ordered by his teacher to spend a whole day and night up to his neck in a lotus pond, as a result of which he grasps the essential secret of judo. The film seeks to embody this purely Japanese idea of a truth to be attained through sudden enlightenment or through rigid self-discipline—an idea, incidentally, which is obviously related to the Zen concepts fashionable at the moment.

In *Redbeard*, Kurosawa's interest is directed toward the confrontation between Japan and the West in the feudal society of a century or so ago, and toward the ways in which the West prodded Japan into motion and Japan, on her side, gradually set about assimilating the West. The fact that the hero is known by the name Redbeard, which was applied to all Westerners at the time, is in itself symbolic. It is true that Redbeard is convinced of the superiority of Western medicine, and is forever studying so as not to be left behind by its constant advances, yet in other respects he is a Japanese through and through. This is demonstrated most clearly of all by the purely Japanese way in which he teaches Noboru, the pupil for whom he feels most affection and on whom he pins most hopes: He gives him not a single word of instruction or advice, but relies solely on silent practice and precept to convey his influence.

Kumonosu-jo (The Throne of Blood, 1957) is, of course,

Kurosawa going over script changes with Isao Numasaki, the male lead in *One Wonderful Sunday* (1947).

Rehearsing a scene from *Ikiru* (1952) with Miki Odagiri and Takashi Shimura.

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Kurosawa's version of *Macbeth*. In it, he consciously adopts stylistic elements from the *Noh*, yet this is no mere trick, no feeling of "Well, this is a Shakespeare classic, so let's have a bit of classic *Noh* style to match." Even if it was so at the beginning, in the course of long and careful rehearsals with all his actors—something no other director in Japan does—Kurosawa was led by his fastidious sense of style to the idea of giving the work unity as a Japanese film by the use of motifs from the *Noh*.

In making films, the Japanese are creating art in an imported medium with imported machinery and techniques. Where, then, do they come in as Japanese? Where is the evidence that they are Japanese? This is a question that constantly preoccupies Kurosawa. What makes it more difficult is the fact that the Japanese outlook he must express will not be genuine unless it loves not only Basho and Sotatsu but Van Gogh and Rouault as well. That theme, which first appears in "The German of Dharma Temple," persists through *The Throne of Blood* and right up to *Redbeard*.

It is not possible to discuss *Redbeard* stylistically, since nobody has seen it yet. *The Throne of Blood*, however was an unprecedented work in that, although its subject matter was regrettably no more than a rehash of *Macbeth*, stylistically it was an experiment with national and classical styles in the Japanese cinema.

The appeal of this style is that it views Japan through a kind of Western veil. It was for much the same reason that *Rashomon*, which first established Kurosawa as a director of international stature when it took the Grand Prix at the Venice Film Festival, won such praise among Western critics despite the fact that in Japan it was not considered such a great masterpiece—the Japanese critics voted it to fourth or fifth place among the films of that year.

The popular appeal of Kurosawa's films lies first and foremost in their ability to tell a good story. With only one or two exceptions, his films have all been commercial successes. Again in the strong contrast with such "Japanese" artists as Ozu and Naruse, he is drawn toward everything that is unusual, nonroutine, or abnormal, and he relates these things via techniques that seek constantly to startle.

One day many years ago, a young clerk in a trading company, unknown both to him and the world at large, brought him a scenario to read. As he read, Kurosawa was fascinated by the way each scene presented a challenge to the audience and each sequence had its quota of surprise and suspense. Here, at last, was the ideal type of scenario for him. In this way, Shinobu Hashimoto became Kurosawa's most trusted staff writer, and the scenario in question appeared shortly as the film *Rashomon*.

Nevertheless, unlike a crafty veteran of commercial storytelling such as Alfred Hitchcock, Kurosawa does not attach the ultimate importance to storytelling and clever strokes in the unfolding of the tale. Rather he is concerned with the inner significance of the story.

Rashomon is too well known to need much discussion here. In it, Kurosawa sets forth four accounts of a murder which takes place in a bamboo grove, given respectively by a bandit, the samurai who is killed, the samurai's wife who is violated by the bandit, and a woodcutter who witnesses the incident. Through these differing accounts, he seeks to demonstrate the many-sided nature of truth and, at a deeper level, its essential relativity—the nonexistence anywhere of any absolute truth. It was the nihilism and mistrust of humanity apparent in the tale that were to drive the original author, Ryunosuke Akutagawa, to despair and suicide. Unfortunately, they are utterly at variance with the outlook of Kurosawa himself, who is a humanist at heart. So, in the final scene of the film, he cannot resist having second thoughts and making the woodcutter, prompted by the stirrings of conscience, take up an abandoned child with the intention of bringing it up. Thus he gives the final victory to good will and neighborly love, although this ending clearly does violence to the whole philosophy of the film.

The thing which distinguishes Akira Kurosawa from other Japanese directors—I would go so far as to call it his great achievement—is precisely that he is first and foremost a director of ideas. Kurosawa is fond of insisting that every artist has, ultimately, only one theme. In his own case, he says, it is the question of why men cannot live together more happily and with greater good will than they do. Of course, one should be wary of swallowing whole such self-revelations by artists, since the artist is prone to self-delusion and self-misinterpretation in peculiarly complex and involved forms. Nevertheless, Kurosawa's remark can be taken at its face value insofar as it suggests that all his works are born, originally, of an idea. Whereas Japanese film directors in the past have leaned heavily toward naturalism, basing their work on a narrow, personalized experience, Kurosawa's style is intellectual, and his emergence after the war marked the appearance of an utterly unfamiliar element in the Japanese film world.

The fact that his favorite author is Dostoevski is in itself enough to suggest his style. Most of his films have a theme expressible in one line, or even one word: good, evil, happiness, unhappiness, the beauty of love—problems that boil down in essence to the problems of the existence of man, its meaning and its forms. Some of his titles, such as *Ikiru (To Live,* 1952) and *Ikimono no Kiroku (Record of a Living Being,* 1955), frankly set forth this concern from the very start. In *Donzoko (The Lower Depths,* 1957) he sets out again to study the conditions for man's survival in, as it were, a sealed room, and it troubles him very little that his story leans heavily in its outlines on a work by a Western writer, Gorky.

Kurosawa is a research worker who places man in a test tube, provides certain conditions or applies certain stimuli, then waits to see his reaction. His films are the resulting case studies. For example, he unearths an honest workman who finds himself one Sunday morning with only 35 yen in his pocket, in a great city plagued with the inflation and black marketeering of the immediate postwar years. What joys and what sorrows will the day bring him and his sweetheart? This is the experiment that produced *Subarashiki Nichiyobi (One Wonderful Sunday,* 1947).

Ikiru is still more frankly a case history: What effect does the news that he has only six months to live have on a man? Will he give himself over in despair to debauchery and dissolute living, or will he try to pass his remaining

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days as gracefully and meaningfully as he can? Kanji Watanabe, a middle-aged government clerk, is singled out as the hero. Twenty-five years of his life he had spent sitting at a desk in a city hall, mechanically applying his seal to the documents placed before him: the classic type of the "hollow man" who cannot, not for one moment of that time, ever be said to have "lived." One day at the hospital, he is told that he has stomach cancer and is given only three or four months to live. For the first time he becomes conscious of life, and begins to dwell on its significance. In the face of death, the man who for decades has not lived begins to live for the first time. He stops applying his seal mechanically to his official documents, conceives an affection for a girl young enough to be his granddaughter, and devotes every hour of his short remaining life to constructing for her a park no larger than a pocket handkerchief in a corner of the city. The evening of the day on which the park is completed finds him seated on a swing flecked with snow, ready now to meet his end with tranquillity. The small flame that has flared momentarily at the end of a small man's life is yet, for all its smallness, a sign that Kanji Watanabe has lived.

If *Ikiru* is Kurosawa's finest work, *Tengoku to Jigoku (High and Low,* 1963) is comparatively confused. He uses the second-rate American mystery on which it is based merely as a springboard for his ideas on and criticisms of the modern age. In the form a crime film, it is in that sense a struggle of wits and of wills between detective and criminal, a guessing game played between director and audience. In fact, however, Kurosawa uses this interest as a way of presenting his objections to and mistrust of the contemporary social structure. Here are the pitiless rules of modern capitalism. Here are the extreme material abundance and the absolute poverty that is its reverse face—though Kurosawa, carefully avoiding class references, refers to the contrasting sides of life simply as "heaven" and "hell." Here, too, is a modern Raskolnikov, who, living in the midst of it all yet priding himself on his superhuman wisdom and morality, takes his revenge on the social structure, and, in order to demonstrate the absolute infallibility of his own brain, resorts to murder and extortion. Set against this figure of evil is an honest manufacturer who is forced to give up all his property for the sake of his chauffeur's son, kidnapped by mistake for his own. The question that Kurosawa poses here is how far man is responsible for his neighbor and for the life and safety of others who are human like himself. He goes further and raises the question, Is not a man who is rich *ipso facto* guilty of a kind of original sin?

In *High and Low,* unfortunately, the question does not get across very strongly. Some, possibly correctly, have seen in the film a compromise with commercialism. In the earlier *Warui Yatsu Hodo Yoku Nemuru (The Bad Sleep Well,* 1960), however, Kurosawa had dug boldly to the roots of the major evils afflicting modern Japan—graft, bureaucratism, corruption within the political parties, and big-time capital pulling the strings of government. In *Redbeard,* Kurosawa makes it clear that the enemy confronting both Redbeard himself and Noboru is not simply disease but a political setup which creates poverty and ignorance without the means to remedy them.

A cast picture taken during the shooting of *The Idiot* in 1951 . Seated from the left are Kurosawa and actors Daisuke Inoue, Toshiro Mifune, Kuninori Kodo, Yoshiko Kuga, and Setsuko Hara; standing are Chiyoko Fumitani, Takashi Shimura, and Masayuki Mori.

Kurosawa rehearsing actress Misa Uehara while shooting *The Hidden Fortress* (1958).

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Even the characters who appear in Kurosawa's films seem to be internalized, to have passed through the filter of his intellect, and in the actors Toshiro Mifune and Takashi Shimura he has found the ideal vehicles for his ideas. Again and again they appear: the consumptive gangster Matsunaga with an inner loneliness belying outward swagger, and the boozy doctor Sanada who tends him so carefully, cursing him vilely all the while *(Drunken Angel,* 1948); the corrupt lawyer Hiruta who will stoop to any infamy in order to get money for the treatment of the consumptive daughter whom he worships *(Scandal,* 1950); Nakajima, the old man who in his opposition to nuclear tests—"Dying is one thing, but I'm damned if I'll be killed"—proposes to abandon family and wealth and go to live on the other side of the globe, and who ends up in a room in a lunatic asylum, pointing to the sunset and crying, "The world is on fire!" *(Record of a Living Being);* or Sanjuro, who turns up out of nowhere, weeds out the petty gangsters who lord it over the local community, then drifts off to the next small town in the same way he came *(Yojimbo,* 1961; *Tsubaki Sanjuro,* 1962).

Kurosawa always speaks of *Hakuchi (The Idiot,* 1951) with the greatest affection, though it is generally accounted one of his failures. Here, as in his version of *Macbeth,* it was an intellectual outlook on mankind already laid down in the original work that attracted his interest and stimulated his creativity. With *The Lower Depths* (1957), the thing that inspired him was the way Gorky takes the ordinary Russian people toward the end of the Czarist era and, placing them in an isolated setting, uses them as a kind of pure culture for his experiment. During a conversation I had with him in Warsaw last year, Andrzej Wajda, the great Polish director, who had high praise for Kurosawa, remarked that Nishi, the hero of Kurosawa's *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960) was a reincarnation in modern Japan of Hamlet. It had never occurred to me personally, but the remark undoubtedly revealed a grasp of the spring of Kurosawa's creativity.

Nor is it only Kurosawa's characters that are intellectually conceived. The settings in themselves seem somehow removed from the ordinary, everyday dimension. The very air is denser, the air pressure greater than in the atmosphere we normally breathe, sounds fall on the ear an octave higher than their usual pitch, and physical movements are speeded up or slowed down abnormally. Without such an atmosphere and such a setting, in fact, his characters would be incapable of acting freely or naturally. His films, simply described, are dramas of violent emotions, their traumatic effect heightened still further by exaggeration, emphasis, and extremes. Kurosawa himself admits to a preference for the harsher aspects of nature—for the glitter of high summer and the asperity of midwinter, for torrential rains and blizzards. They provide his films with their natural backdrop and, of course, with their psychological background as well. They are the reverse of the conventionally "Japanese"—of the equivocal, the understated and the unadorned. He rejects the traditional "boiled-rice-and-green-tea" austerity so beloved of Ozu and Naruse: "I want my films to be like a steak spread with butter and topped with good, rich, broiled eels."

I have described his style as intellectual, a label which he gives to his work himself. Yet, in another aspect, the excellence of his work derives from the acuteness with which he constantly observes, remembers, and records the external world. He keeps an avid eye on the society and men about him, ever ready to summon actuality to amend his ideas for him.

During the filming of *Rashomon,* while Kurosawa's staff was at loose ends in its Kyoto hotel waiting for the completion of an open-air set, the half-ruined gateway that was to become famous all over the world, they saw a 16-mm. film of an expedition to Africa. One shot showed a lion staring at the camerman from the edge of the jungle. "Look, Mifune!" cried Kurosawa. "That's how Tajomaru should be!" In that instant, he had seen the bandit Tajomaru as he was to appear in the film peering out at the woman with piercing eyes from the bamboo grove. Around the same time, Masayuki Mori, who played the part of the murdered samurai Kanazawa no Takehiro, saw a film featuring a black panther at one of the local cinemas, and at his recommendation they all went to see it. When the panther at last appeared, Machiko Kyo, the actress who played the part of the young wife Masago, covered her face with her hands in alarm. It was this gesture that crystallized in Kurosawa's mind the image of Masago, confronted by the two men fighting over her like wild beasts in a thicket.

Kurosawa always insists that no amount of intellectualization can substitute for the living human being. When he succeeds, it is because the careful eye he keeps trained on reality is preventing ideas from running away with him.

When Kurosawa begins writing a scenario, he has no idea of what the final scene will be; intellectual though his first inspiration may be, he abhors intellectual conclusions. He creates the setting and gives his characters their personalities, but from then on it is the characters themselves who, with unpredictable results, take over the action. A single passing remark is enough to set his heroes and heroines on a completely different course, and he is obliged to follow them wherever they lead. It is this kind of realism in the course of creation that gives a sense of actuality to the nonrealistic worlds he creates.

Unfortunately, a work produced in this fashion sometimes ends up at a point that conflicts with the film's original intellectual point of departure. At such times, the original idea is left stranded and without support. At the end of *Rashomon,* the itinerant priest who has listened to the whole story states that, thanks to the woodcutter, he has regained his temporarily shaken faith in humanity—a conclusion utterly out of keeping with the main theme the film has gone to such trouble to expound, the relativity of truth and the perfidy of man. At the end of *Seven Samurai* (1954), Kambei, the most clever strategist of the band, who has rid the farming village of the wandering samurai who have been preying on it, muses to himself as he rides away: The samurai have passed away like the wind, while the peasants, like the earth itself, go on forever—a patently forced moral that blends ill with what has gone so far. It is, as it were, a vestigial reminder of the original idea that moved Kurosawa to make the film.

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Kurosawa: Scenes and Episodes *by Donald Richie*

One winter day in 1948, when I was twenty-four years old, my friend, the late composer Fumio Hayasaka, took me to the Toho studios to watch the shooting of a film for which he was doing the score. They were filming in an elaborate open set, so detailed that it looked hardly different from the neighborhood outside the studio. A good-looking young man in a white suit and slicked-back hair was being directed by a very tall middle-aged man wearing a turtleneck sweater and a black, floppy hat. During a break Hayasaka introduced me. I then spoke no Japanese and they, with the exception of Hayasaka, spoke no English. After a halting conversation they then went back to work while I stood by the carefully detailed set and watched. The young man in the white suit was Toshiro Mifune, the tall man was Kurosawa, directing the young actor for the first time, and the film was *Drunken Angel*.

* * *

Spring, 1954. I had just emerged from the first screening of the full *Seven Samurai*. Never had I seen a film like this—my eyes were still watering, my ears still ringing. People were gathered talking, as they do when a film is clearly a success. Several clustered around a very tall man in a floppy blue hat, the same man I had met six years before. Hayasaka was nowhere around and I did not think I would be remembered. So, though I could speak some Japanese by then, I did not go and congratulate him as the others were doing. Instead, I stared at him and determined that I would do everything I could to get this film seen by everyone, everywhere.

* * *

Late autumn, 1956. Joe Anderson and I were in Izu at one of the open sets for *Throne of Blood*, Kurosawa's adaptation of *Macbeth*. It was known that we were doing a book on the Japanese film and, further, that I would be writing about this particular film for the *Japan Times*. Work was running far behind schedule, Kurosawa having refused to use a completed set because it had been constructed with nails and the long-distance lenses he was using might pick up the anachronistic nail-heads. Both Joe and I were thrilled by this uncompromising courage. We had never known a director so conscientious. The present set represented the provincial palace of Lord Washizu, the Macbeth character, and his return home was being filmed. Soldiers were in procession: banners, a stuffed boar, horses. When an assistant gave the signal the procession started forward under the late afternoon sun. Above us on a platform were Kurosawa and Asakazu Nakai, his cameraman. Earlier we had talked to the director

Kurosawa flanked by American film historians Donald Richie (l.) and Joseph Anderson (r.) on the set for *Throne of Blood* (1957).

Donald Richie, more than any other single individual, is responsible for making the Japanese cinema known and appreciated outside Japan. He has written numerous books and articles on Japanese film, including *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (with Joseph Anderson), *The Films of Akira Kurosawa,* and *Ozu*, as well as a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction about Japanese society and culture. He served for several years as curator of film at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and has lived in Tokyo for most of the past thirty-five years.

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Kurosawa directing the extras for a scene in *Seven Samurai* (1954).

Osamu Honda

Akira Kurosawa at a 1980 exhibit of his Kagemusha drawings at Japan House, New York.

and he had told us his plans for this scene. Now we were watching him do it. The entire afternoon was spent in starting and stopping the distant procession and photographing it. When we saw the finished picture the following January, not one of these shots was in it. We asked Kurosawa about it. "The scenes were nice enough," he said, "but not really necessary. Besides, they interrupted the flow of the picture." We marveled.

* * *

Late summer, 1958; at one of the open sets for *The Hidden Fortress* near Mt. Fuji. After a long day's shooting, I was sharing a bath with Mifune. His body was very white from the neck down. From the neck up he was still wearing his make-up for General Rokurota Makabe. It had been a tough day, with the same scene shot over and over again. I had noticed that Kurosawa's ballpoint pen would not work. Instead of throwing it away and getting another, he had all afternoon attempted (between takes) to make this pen, this particular ballpoint pen, work. I mentioned this, tactfully, to Mifune while we sat up to our necks in the hot water. "I know what you mean," he said. "And I felt just like that ballpoint pen. But, did you notice, he did finally get it to work."

* * *

A cold winter day, 1964; on the studio set for *Red Beard*. The picture was over budget and long over production schedule. Not a happy day—snow—and Mifune, with other contractual obligations, was still in full beard and unable to fulfill any of them. It was known that I was writing a book on Kurosawa and that I could, with some discretion, talk to the director whenever he was free. He was sitting in a canvas chair and was wearing a white cap and dark glasses, now that his eyes were giving him trouble. He looked dejected. In an effort to make him feel better, and in order to have something to say, I told him he didn't really look much different from the first time I had met him. Yes, he remembered that day, he said, way back in the days of *Throne of Blood*, with Mr. Anderson. No, I replied taken aback, back in the days of *Drunken Angel*, with the now long dead Mr. Hayasaka. He looked at me and frowned. On the Kurosawa set a mistake gets, first, a frown. "I don't remember that," he said. I said that there was no reason he should, but that it had happened. He then set to work remembering. Nothing came of it, but *I* remembered the nails in the discarded set, the ballpoint pen that would not work, the unhappily bearded Mifune. We were problems—all of us—problems to be solved.

* * *

A summer day, 1978; cicadas. At the Toho studio at Seijo I was talking with Nonchan, Teruyo Nogami. Her name has never been in the credits of any of his films, yet since the days of *One Wonderful Sunday* in 1947 she has been with him, always there, the perfect liaison, always making certain that what he wants, what he needs, he gets. Of anyone, Nonchan is the closest to him. I don't think he could function without her.

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I had just read the script for *Ran* (*Chaos*), his adaptation of *King Lear,* and was most enthusiastic about it, thinking it one of the best Kurosawa had ever done. Yes, she agreed—but the money . . . She was holding a number of color sketches and spread them out on the table for me to see—big, colorful, splashy pictures. "This is what he is doing now," she said. Now, she did not add, that he had no money to make a film with, now that he believed that the only film would be in these drawings. They were all for something to be called *Kagemusha*, a project I had not heard of.

Later, I watched him work on the *Kagemusha* portfolio. With his large, capable, craftsman's hands he was painting one picture after another. The movements were swift and sure. He always knew just what he was going to do. The entire film was in his head, emerging through his fingers. Since he had no money to make the picture on film, he was making it on paper. What other director, I wondered, would do this, would care this much, and would be this immune to despair?

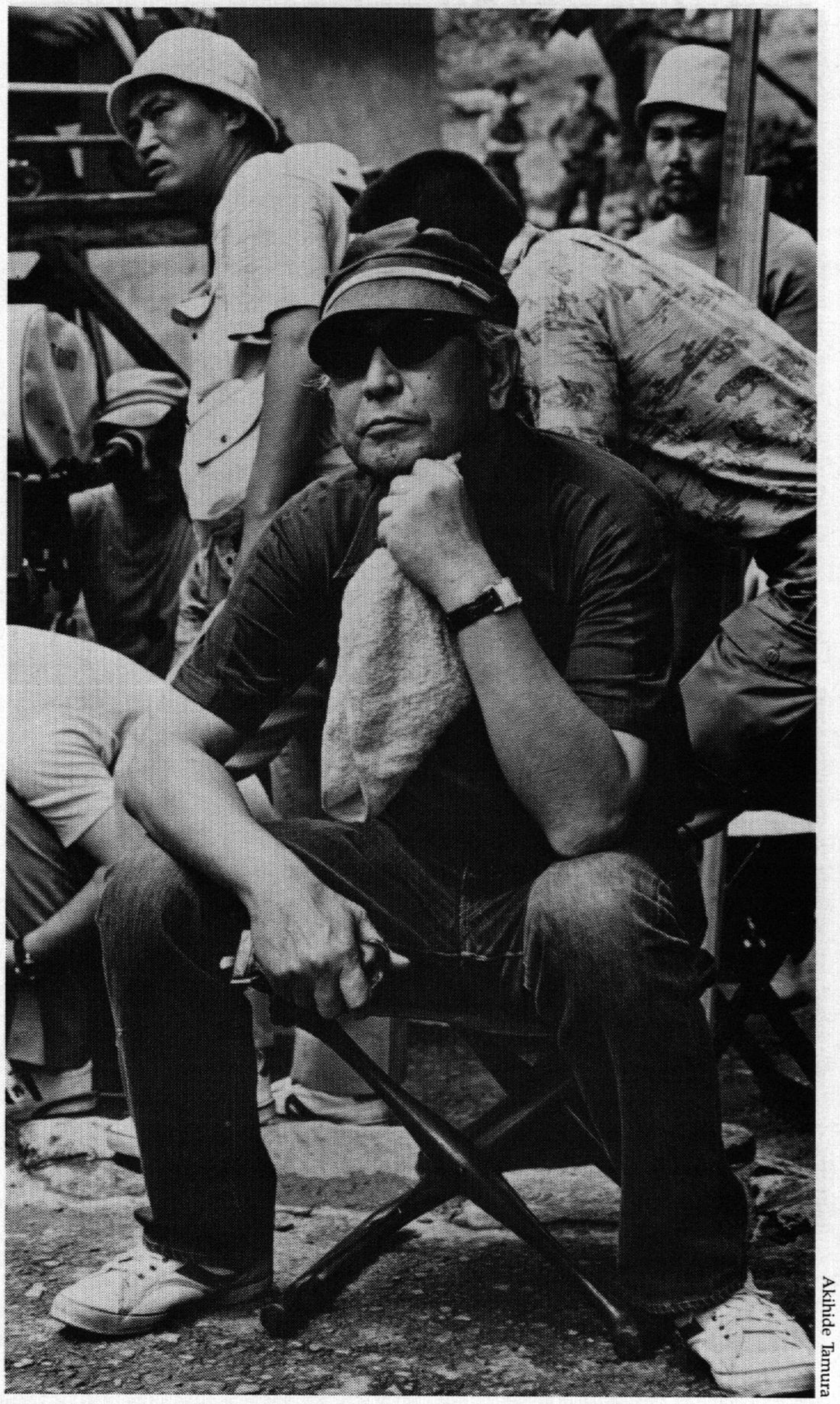
As I looked at him I was struck once again by the disparity between his face and his hands, his head and his body. A workman's body, very strong, and the hands of a craftsman. But the head is that of an ascetic, even more like a priest's now that the hair is thin; the nose is large, the lips thin. The face is closed, indicative of great spiritual strength, like the faces in Zen paintings.

* * *

March 23, 1980; a Chinese restaurant near Seijo. It is Kurosawa's seventieth birthday—his family, his children, grandchildren, Nonchan, the staff, and a few friends. Various birthday presents. But the best of all is the fact that Toho, George Lucas, Francis Coppola, and the residuals from *Star Wars* have made *Kagemusha* a reality.

I thought back to the thirty-eight-year-old director on the set of *Drunken Angel* in 1948. The intervening years had not made all that much difference—he wears caps now instead of floppy hats. I thought of the will that had created his films. Those big, strong hands were now delicately opening birthday presents, the fingers precise but very firm with unwilling knots. Kurosawa turned, smiled, and his great strong hand carefully smoothed the hair of a favorite grandson.

I thought too of that now long gone ballpoint pen, worked until it forgot it was broken, until it began again to write.



Akihide Tamura

Akira Kurosawa on location for *Kagemusha.*

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Kurosawa's Heroes and Japanese Tradition *by Tadao Sato*

Yuzo Kayama (l.) in the *nimaime* role and Toshiro Mifune (r.) as the *tateyaku* in *Red Beard* (1965).

Among the actors Akira Kurosawa has frequently cast in important roles in his films are Susumu Fujita, Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura, and Tatsuya Nakadai. These actors are all typed as leading men, known in Japanese theater and cinema parlance as *tateyaku*.

In traditional Japanese drama, from the inception of Kabuki in the Edo period on, male leads have been divided into two distinct types: *tateyaku* (heroic lead) and *nimaime* (romantic lead). The *tateyaku* is a man endowed with great physical and spiritual strength, the embodiment of samurai ideals. He never plays love scenes. That is because nothing should be more repugnant to a samurai than that an affectionate attachment detract from his loyalty to his master. The *nimaime* is generally a man of gentle good looks who specializes in playing love scenes. He lacks the physical and mental prowess of the *tateyaku*, and, by the standards of American film stars, he might even be regarded as something of a sissy—pretty, but weak and unreliable.

This is because as Kabuki developed in a feudal era, love relationships between men and women were not esteemed as expressions of moral virtue, but were seen rather as the tragic outcome of a man's weak will. There is nothing in Japanese lore and literature like European tales of chivalry in which heroes were equally adept in contests of physical strength and matters of love.

For example, Kurosawa's *Red Beard* is a tale which pits Toshiro Mifune in a typical *tateyaku* role as the experienced doctor "Red Beard" against Yuzo Kayama in a typical *nimaime* role as the young doctor Yasumoto. In a contest of wills, Red Beard must instill in the younger man the strength to become a doctor like himself. As the *tateyaku*, Mifune plays no love scenes, but Kayama as the *nimaime* falls in love with a young patient and suffers for his kindness. The fact that he falls victim to his rashness is typical of the behavior of *nimaime* in the classic genre of "double suicide plays" Monzaemon Chikamatsu wrote for the 17th-century Kabuki theater.

The differences between *tateyaku* and *nimaime* developed for the feudal theater remain in contemporary Japanese films. Among the masters of Japanese cinema, Yasujiro Ozu made predominant use of the *nimaime* type of star in lead roles. That was because the Shochiku Ofuna studio with which Ozu was affiliated specialized primarily in making love stories and had almost no *tateyaku* superstars under contract. Ozu created characters whose personal traits emphasized the gentle and sympathetic qualities for which *nimaime* were known.

Kenji Mizoguchi, too, made use of *nimaime* actors and the dramatic dilemmas of his films often depended upon the contradictory aspects within the *nimaime*'s character. Taking as his theme the resistance of women to the oppression they had been made to endure, Mizoguchi favored plots which depicted women awakening to the moral weakness and fecklessness of their *nimaime* lovers to surmount their oppression.

Tadao Sato, one of Japan's most distinguished writers on film and communications media, is editor of *Eiga Hyoron* (Film Criticism) magazine. He is the author of *The World of Akira Kurosawa, The World of Nagisa Oshima,* and numerous other books on Japanese cinema. His *Intellectual Currents in Japanese Film* will be published in English translation in 1982. Translation of this essay is by David Owens.

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The fact that all of Kurosawa's heroes are of the *tateyaku* type distinguishes them immediately from those of Ozu and Mizoguchi. This distinction has nothing to do with the empty arguments about which director is more "Japanese" or more "Western". Rather it is born of the very large difference between *tateyaku* and *nimaime* as ideal types of men.

Generally speaking, *tateyaku* play a more prominent part in period films, which may be one reason why Kurosawa makes so many period pictures. And the fact that *tateyaku* in principle do not play love scenes explains in part why so few Kurosawa films deal with love themes. In conventional Japanese period films, however, women are portrayed simply as being dutifully submissive to a strong *tateyaku* and are for the most part poorly developed as characters. Kurosawa's *Rashomon* presents a startling departure from this convention in the characterization of the female lead as a person of exceptional strength.

Even in his contemporary pictures, Kurosawa generally casts a *tateyaku* in the lead and a *nimaime* in a predominant supporting role. (Two exceptions to this are *No Regrets for Our Youth* and *The Most Beautiful*, which display heroines of unusually strong, passionate personality.) Yet the protagonist of *Ikiru* would by ordinary standards of Japanese cinema be considered a *nimaime* role. Kurosawa, casting against type, put Takashi Shimura in the central role with great success. His performances in *Drunken Angel, Ikiru* and *Seven Samurai* established Shimura as a splendid *tateyaku*.

Kurosawa has also taken what appear at first glance to be ordinary villains and turned them into *tateyaku* of extraordinary character. In the heretofore conventional wisdom, the *nimaime* actor might, for example, appear as a snivelling *petit bourgeois*. Kurosawa discovered in such performers characteristics of the *tateyaku* and wrung from them wonderfully villainous performances.

All this is by way of saying that Kurosawa has shown a particular concern for the strength of human beings. All his films inquire into the problem of how man can strengthen himself. Of course, if that were all there was to them, they would be no different from conventional samurai films. But Kurosawa believes that even the weak-spirited common man of contemporary times has within him the samurai's potential to lead a courageous life, and that women must grow just as strong as men. It is at this point that Kurosawa's work far surpasses ordinary Japanese films.

It is because Kurosawa takes great pains to show us this potential in humans that, for example, the heroine's personality in *No Regrets for Our Youth* has been unfairly reproached by critics as implausibly eccentric. For the same reason, his films are sometimes criticized for sermonizing.

Following their defeat in World War II, the Japanese lost all confidence and thought of themselves as weak and pitiable. Their battlefield courage, they thought, had been nothing more than obedience to orders. Then in the midst of their anguish, Akira Kurosawa depicted individuals who maintained their resolve to live courageously in such films as *No Regrets for Our Youth, One Wonderful Sunday, Stray Dog, Rashomon, Ikiru, Seven Samurai, Record of a Living Being,* and others. These films provided a tremendous inspiration to the postwar Japanese. At a time when we thought it

Kurosawa directing *Sanjuro* (1962).

Kurosawa directing look-alikes Tatsuya Nakadai (l.) and Tsutomu Yamazaki (r.) during the shooting of *Kagemusha* (1980).

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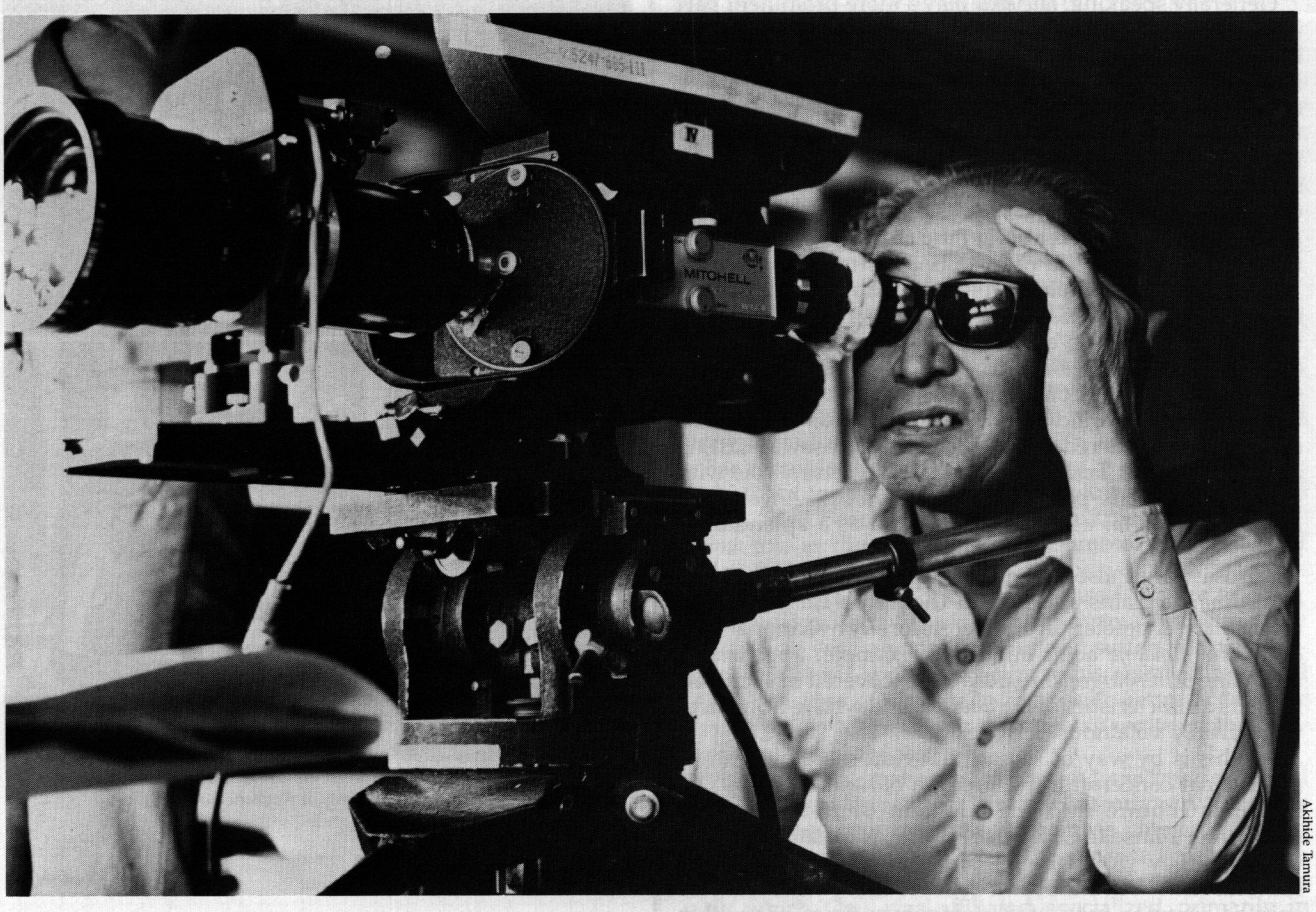
unfortunate to be Japanese, Kurosawa taught us without a trace of nationalism the nobility of living well as individuals. He did this by taking the traditional *tateyaku* type and infusing it with a new substance—the potential for growth.

Because Kurosawa brought to the screen sharply defined, realistic individuals of vigorous mind and body, the film images he created are themselves of unparallelled strength. As a consequence of extending technique to new limits, he created a completely new technique, one which is founded on his brilliant revival of a theatrical type born in traditional Japanese acting methods and which had become an anachronism in modern Japan—the *tateyaku*, the hero.



Akihide Tamura

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WHAT IS CINEMA?

What is cinema? The answer to this question is no easy matter. Long ago the Japanese novelist Naoya Shiga presented an essay written by his grandchild as one of the most remarkable prose pieces of his time. He had it published in a literary magazine. It was entitled "My Dog," and ran as follows: "My dog resembles a bear; he also resembles a badger; he also resembles a fox. . . ." It proceeded to enumerate the dog's special characteristics, comparing each one to yet another animal, developing into a full list of the animal kingdom. However, the essay closed with, "But since he's a dog, he most resembles a dog."

I remember laughing when I read this essay, but it has a serious connection with the question "What is cinema?" because film resembles so many other arts. If cinema has very literary characteristics, it also has theatrical qualities, a philosophical side, attributes of painting and sculpture, and musical elements. But what I'd like to stress is that cinema is in the final analysis cinema.

Cinematic Beauty—There is something that might be called "cinematic beauty." It can only be expressed in a film, and it must be present in a film for that film to be a moving work. When it is very well expressed one experiences a particularly deep emotion while watching that film. I believe that it is this quality that draws people to come and see a film, and that it is the hope of attaining this quality that draws the filmmaker to make his film in the first place. In other words, therein lies the essence of the cinema.

When I begin to conceive a film project, I always have a number of ideas that feel as if they would be the sort of thing I'd like to film. From among these ideas one will suddenly germinate and somehow begin to sprout; this will be the one I grasp and pursue. I have never done a project offered to me by a producer or a production company. My films emerge from my own desire to say a particular thing at a particular time. The root of any film project for me is this inner need to express something. What nurtures this root and makes it grow into a tree is the script. What makes the tree flower and bear fruit is the directing.

DIRECTING

Within the task of directing are included the coaching of actors, the cinematography, the sound recording, the art direction, the music, the editing and the dubbing and sound mixing. Although these can be conceived as separate areas, I do not see them as independent. I see them all meeting together under the task heading of direction.

The Commandant—A film director has to convince a great number of people to follow and work with him. I often say, although I am certainly not a militarist, that if you compare the production unit to an army, the script is the battle flag and the director is the commander of the front line. From the moment production begins to the moment it ends there is no telling what will happen. The director must be able to respond to any situation, and he must have the leadership ability to make the whole unit go along with his responses.

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James Wentzy

Akira Kurosawa during a visit to Japan Society in 1980.

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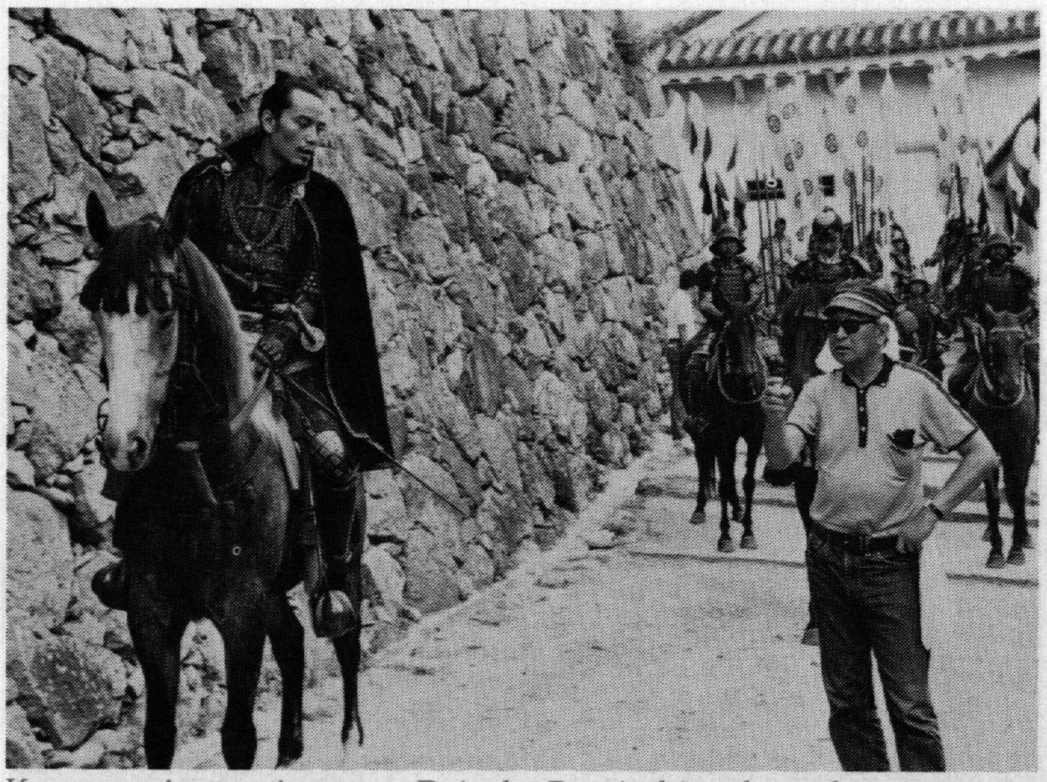

Kurosawa instructing actor Daisuke Ryu in his role as the famous general Nobunaga Oda in the film *Kagemusha* (1980).

Kurosawa directing *Red Beard* (1965).

"Kiln Changes"—A film being directed is like a ceramic pot being fired. The potter controls the fire in his kiln and knows generally what to expect in the finished pieces, but unexpected changes still occur in the firing that surprise him when he opens his kiln. Ashes and other particles can fall onto the glass-like glaze during firing creating unpredictable but beautiful results. Similarly unplanned but interesting effects may arise in the course of directing a movie. Although the continuity is all worked out in advance, it may turn out not to be the most interesting way to shoot the picture. Occasionally, things happen without warning that produce a startling effect, and the director must be able to take advantage of such accidents. When these changes can be incorporated without upsetting the balance of the film, the whole becomes much more interesting. I call them "kiln changes."

THE SCREENPLAY

With a good script a good director can produce a masterpiece; with the same script a mediocre director can make a passable film. But with a bad script even a good director can't possibly make a good film. For truly cinematic expression the camera and the microphone must be able to cross both fire and water. That is what makes a real movie. The script must be something that has the power to do this.

Structure—A good reference structure for a screenplay is the symphony, with its three or four movements and tempos. Or one can also use the Noh play with its three-part structure: *jo* (introduction), *ha* (destruction) and *kyu* (haste). If you devote yourself fully to Noh and gain something good from this, it will emerge naturally in your films. The Noh is a truly unique art form that exists nowhere else in the world. I think the Kabuki, which imitates it, is a sterile flower. But in a screenplay, I think the symphonic structure is the easiest for people of today to understand.

Study—In order to write scripts first you must study the great novels and dramas of the world. You must consider why they are great. Where does the emotion come from that you feel as you read them? What degree of passion did the author have to have, what level of meticulousness did he have to command in order to portray the characters and events as he did? You must read to the point of thoroughness where you can grasp all these things.

You must also see the great films. You must read the great screenplays and study the film theories of the great directors. If your goal is to become a film director, you must master screenwriting.

Memory—I've forgotten who it was that said creation is memory. My own experiences and the various things I have read remain in my memory and become the basis upon which I create something new. I couldn't do it out of nothing. For this reason I always keep a notebook handy when I read a book. I write down my reactions and what particularly moves me. I have stacks and stacks of these notebooks, and when I go off to write a script, these are what I read. Somewhere they always provide me a point of breakthrough. Even for single lines of dialogue I have taken hints from these notebooks. Don't read books lying down in bed—keep notebook and pencil close at hand.

Writing à Trois—I began writing my scripts with two other

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people around 1940. Up until then I wrote alone, and found that I had no difficulties. But in writing alone there is the danger that your interpretation of human character will suffer from one-sidedness. If you write about a human being with two other people you get at least three different viewpoints on him, and you can discuss the points on which you disagree. Also, a director-writer tends unwittingly to nudge the hero and the plot along into a pattern that is the easiest one for him to direct. By writing with others you can avoid this danger.

Not Explanation, But Action—The best scripts have very few explanatory passages. Adding explanation to the descriptive passages of a screenplay is the most dangerous trap you can fall into. It's easy to explain the psychological state of a character at a particular moment, but it's very difficult to describe it through the delicate nuances of action and dialogue. Yet it is not impossible. A great deal about this can be learned from the study of the great plays, and I believe the "hard-boiled" detective novels can also be very instructive.

WORKING WITH ACTORS

Rehearsals—I begin rehearsals in the actors' dressing room. First I have them repeat their lines, and gradually proceed to the movements. But this is done with costumes and makeup on from the beginning; then we repeat everything on the set. The thoroughness of these rehearsals shortens the actual shooting time considerably. We don't just rehearse the actors, but every part of each scene—the camera movements, the lighting, everything.

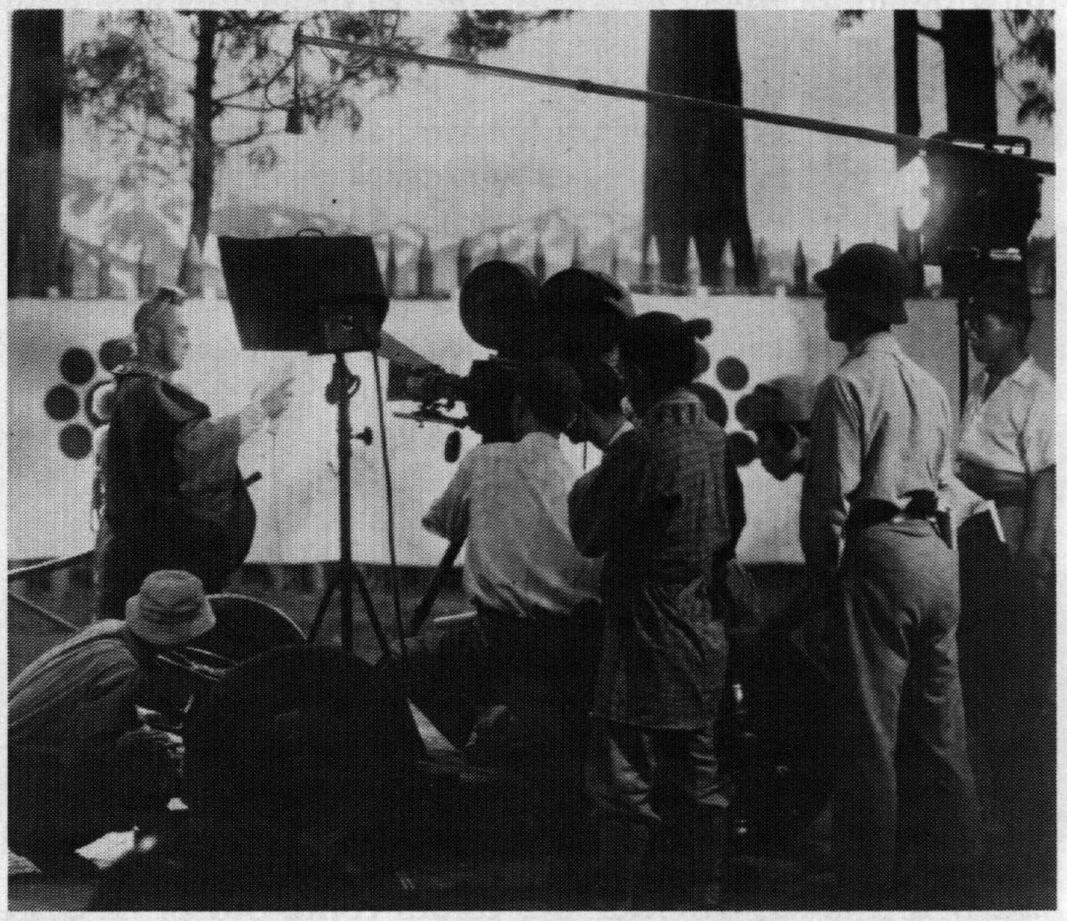
Camera Consciousness—The worst thing an actor can do is show his consciousness of the camera. Often when an actor hears the call "Roll 'em" he will tense up, alter his sight lines, and present himself very unnaturally. This self-consciousness registers very clearly in the camera's eye. I always say, "Just talk to the actor playing opposite. This isn't like the stage, where you have to speak your lines to the audience. There's no need to look at the camera." But when he knows where the camera is, the actor invariably, without knowing it, turns one-third to half-way in its direction. With multiple moving cameras, however, the actor has no time to figure out which one is shooting him.

Watching—During the shooting of a scene the director's eye has to catch even the minutest detail. But this does not mean glaring fixedly at the set. While the cameras are rolling I rarely look directly at the actors, but focus my gaze somewhere else. By doing this I understand instantly when something isn't right. Watching something does not mean fixing your gaze on it, but being aware of it in a natural way. I believe this is what the medieval Noh playwright and theorist Zeami meant by "watching with a detached gaze."

THE CAMERA

Following Actors—Many filmmakers choose to follow the actors' movements with a zoom lens. Although the most natural way to approach the actor with the camera is to move it at the same speed he moves, many people wait until he stops moving and then zoom in on him. I think this is very wrong. The camera should follow the actor as

Kurosawa during what he has described as the very relaxed shooting of *Dodeskaden* (1970), opposite actor Junzaburo Ban.



On the set of *Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail* (1945).

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he moves; it should stop when he stops. If this rule is not followed the audience will become conscious of the camera.

Multiple Cameras—Much is often made of the fact that I use more than one camera to shoot a scene. This began when I was making *Seven Samurai,* because it was impossible to predict exactly what would happen in the scene where the bandits attack the peasants' village in a heavy rainstorm. If I had filmed it in the traditional shot-by-shot method, there was no guarantee that any action could be repeated in exactly the same way twice. So I used three cameras rolling simultaneously. The result was extremely effective, so I decided to exploit this technique fully in less action-filled dramas as well, and I next used it for *Record of a Living Being.* By the time I made *The Lower Depths* I was using largely a one-shot-per-scene method.

The Three-Camera System—Working with three cameras simultaneously is not as easy as it may sound. Determining how to move them is extremely difficult. For example, if a scene has three actors in it, all three are talking and moving about freely and naturally. In order to show how the A, B and C cameras move to cover this action, even complete picture continuity is insufficient. Nor can the average camera operator understand a diagram of the camera movements. The three camera positions are completely different for the beginning and end of each shot, and they go through several transformations in between. As a general system, I put the A camera in the most orthodox positions, use the B camera for quick, decisive shots, and the C camera as a kind of guerilla unit.

The task of the lighting technician is an extremely creative one. A really good lighting man has his own plan—of course he still needs to discuss it with the cameraman and director. But if he does not put forth his own concept, his job becomes nothing more than lighting up the whole frame. I think, for example, that the current method of lighting for color film is wrong. In order to bring out the colors, the entire frame is flooded with light. I always say the lighting should be treated the same as it is for black-and-white film, whether the colors come out or not, so that the shadows come out right.

I am often accused of being too exacting with sets and properties, and of having props made that will never appear on camera just for the sake of authenticity. But even if I don't ask for this, my crew do things for me in this way. The first Japanese director to demand authentic sets and props was Kenji Mizoguchi, and the sets in his films are truly superb. I learned a great deal about filmmaking from him, and set-construction is among the most important. The quality of the set influences the quality of the actors' performance. If the plan of a house and the design of the rooms are done properly, the actors can move about in them naturally. If I have to tell an actor, "Don't think about where this room is in relation to the rest of the house," that natural ease cannot be achieved. For this reason, I have the sets made exactly like the real thing. It often may restrict the shooting, but without it a feeling of authenticity is impossible.

From the moment I begin directing a film I think about not only the music but the sound effects as well. During the shooting, along with all the other things I consider, I decide what kind of sound I want before the camera rolls. In some of my films, such as *Seven Samurai* and *Yojimbo,* I use different theme music for each main character or for different groups of characters.

I changed my thinking about musical accompaniment from the time Fumio Hayasaka began working with me as composer of my film scores. Up until that time film music was nothing more than accompaniment—for a sad scene there was always sad music. This is the way most people use music, and it doesn't work. But from *Drunken Angel* onward, I have used light music for some key sad scenes, and my way of using music has differed from the norm—I don't put it in where most people do. Working with Hayasaka I began to think in terms of the unison of sound and image as opposed to the counterpoint of sound and image.

The most important requirement for editing is overcoming your subjectivity. No matter how much difficulty you had in obtaining a particular shot, the audience will never know. If it is not interesting, it simply isn't interesting. Even if you were full of enthusiasm while filming a particular shot that enthuasiasm has to show on the screen. Otherwise, you must be objective enough to cut it.

Editing is truly interesting work. When the rushes come up I rarely show them to my crew exactly as they are. Instead, that very day the editor and I spend about three hours cutting the rushes. Only then do I show them to the crew. It is necessary to show them this edited footage for the sake of arousing their interest. Sometimes they don't understand what it is they are filming, or why they had to spend ten days to get a particular shot. In the edited footage they first see the results of their labor and become enthusiastic again. And by editing as I go along, I have only the fine cut to complete when the shooting is finished.

I am often asked why I don't pass on what I have accomplished over the years to young people. Actually I would like very much to do so. Ninety-nine percent of those who worked as my assistant directors over the years have now become directors in their own right. But I don't think any of them took the trouble to learn the most important things.

In Japan today it is very difficult for young people to become film directors, and those who already have do not offer original projects. The government must bear responsibility for this. As long as the government ignores film, nothing can be done. I often say—although the newspapers never print it—that the government should give up the cost of two Self Defense Forces fighter planes—even one would do. With that money we could establish a national film school and give young people the chance to direct their films.

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FILM NOTES

by Peter Grilli *and* David Owens

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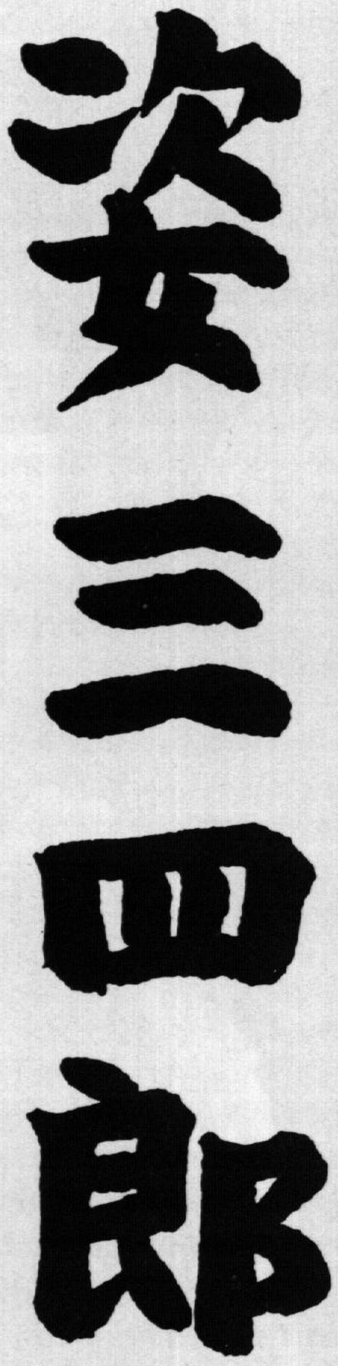
1943

SANSHIRO SUGATA

Sugata Sanshiro
(Also known as *Judo Saga*)



A Toho Production. Released March 25, 1943.
80 minutes; 2,166 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan Films.

Producer: Keiji Matsuzaki. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, after the novel by Tsuneo Tomita. **Photography:** Akira Mimura. **Art direction:** Masao Totsuka. **Music:** Seiichi Suzuki. **Sound recording:** Tomohisa Higuchi. **Lighting:** Masayoshi Onuma. **Editor:** Akira Kurosawa and Toshio Goto. **Assistant director:** Toshio Sugie.

Cast:

SANSHIRO SUGATA	Susumu Fujita
SHOGORO YANO, *his teacher*	Denjiro Okochi
YOSHIMA DAN	Akitake Kono
KOHEI TSUZAKI	Kunio Mita
TORANOSUKE NIISEKI	Akira Nakamura
PRIEST	Kuninori Kodo
TSUNETAMI IIMURA	Sugisaku Aoyama
POLICE CHIEF MISHIMA	Ichiro Sugai
HANSUKE MURAI	Takashi Shimura
SAYO, *his daughter*	Yukiko Todoroki
GENNOSUKE HIGAKI	Ryunosuke Tsukigata
SABURO MOMMA, *the jujitsu teacher*	Yoshio Kosugi
OTOYO, *his daughter*	Ranko Hanai
YUJIRO TODA	Soji Kiyokawa

". . . This was the first film I directed. Earlier, though, I had been in charge of the second unit on Kajiro Yamamoto's Horses *and other pictures, and had had experience directing. So I really didn't feel that this was my first time in the director's chair. I knew how to go about things, how to work with actors, and the rest.*

At that time—right in the middle of the war—the censorship bureau was being extremely strict about what could or couldn't be filmed. Since most artists couldn't step out of line and were doing only work that was in accord with national policy, I decided to make a really old-fashioned motion picture.

It was just then that I saw an advertisement for Tsuneo Tomita's new novel Sugata Sanshiro, *and immediately realized that it was the sort of thing I could do. . . . I hadn't even read it yet, but I was certain that it had the "real life" quality I was after. . . . I asked Iwao Morita, the Toho producer, to get it for the studio, and he and Tomoyuki Tanaka of the production-planning department went right to Tomita and got the film rights . . .*

It was just right as an entertainment picture, and when you think that this was 1943, it was about all we were allowed to make at the time."

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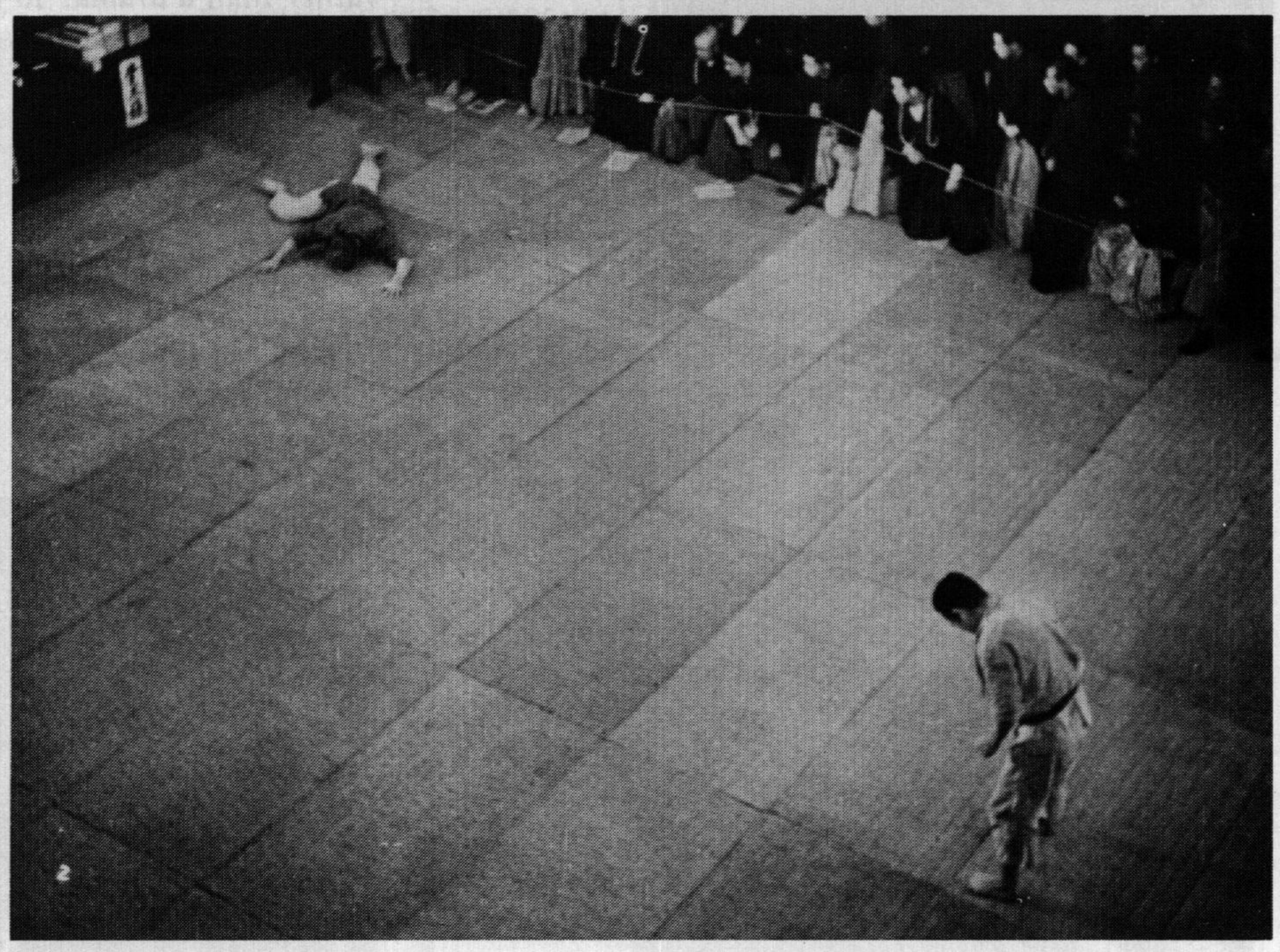
Kurosawa's very first film heralds themes that were to reappear throughout his later work: the search for personal fulfillment by a dedicated individual, the dignity and perseverance of an average man, the education of the hero. Set in the 1890s, the story deals with the early development of judo. Sanshiro Sugata, an innocent young student of the martial arts, apprentices himself first to an arrogant teacher of *jujitsu* but is soon converted to the superior way of judo by a master who stresses spiritual ideals and discipline over the morally void techniques of *jujitsu*. Sanshiro struggles to control his wilder impulses and to adhere to his master's spiritual guidance. Eventually, to uphold the honor of his master and school, Sanshiro is forced to fight off successive challenges from skilled opponents by joining technique to spirituial purity.

To this simple fable of moral education, Kurosawa brought an intensity and energy and a lithe narrative style that made the film an astonishing debut for a 33-year-old director. Equally impressive were the performances he elicited from his actors, particularly the highly-charged passion of Susumu Fujita in the title role. The critical scene in which Sanshiro leaps into a lotus pond and remains there overnight until he comprehends enlightment through watching a lotus bloom is not in the original novel, but is a creation of Kurosawa's. Here he depicts in film an image of individual will and spiritual enlightment for which words are inadequate.

". . . A director's style is often an accumulation of details, various short-cuts he has devised, various preferences appearing in picture after picture, a certain predilection for a certain kind of story, the fondness for a certain kind of image. In this Kurosawa is no different than anyone else. What is unusual is that from his first film onward the elements of his style should be so visible . . . The Kurosawa film lacks any extraneous scenes, is without longeurs, and all unimportant transitions are missing. His craftsmanship and his economy are one. This efficiency, as rare in films as it is in anything else, accounts for much of the compelling interest generated by a Kurosawa picture, by the immediacy of its action . . . most of the elements of his style are as visible here in his debut as they are in (his latest film).

—Donald Richie
THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA



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Ichiban utsukushiku

一番美しく

A Toho Production. Released April 14, 1944.
85 minutes; 2,324 meters

Executive producer: Motohiko Ito. **Producer:** Jin Usami. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa. **Photography:** Joji Ohara. **Art direction:** Teruaki Abe. **Lighting:** Masayoshi Onuma. **Musical supervision:** Hisashi Iuchi. **Sound recording:** Ryohachi Sugawara. **Assistant director:** Jin Usami.

Cast:

GORO ISHIDA	Takashi Shimura
KEN SANADA, *his assistant*	Ichiro Sugai
SOICHI YOSHIKAWA	Soji Kiyokawa
TOKUKO MIZUSHMA, *factory girl*	Takako Irie
TSURU WATANABE, *factory girl*	Yoko Yaguchi
YURIKO TANIMURA, *factory girl*	Sayuri Tanima
SACHIKO YAMAZAKI, *factory girl*	Sachiko Ozaki
FUSAE NISHIOKA, *factory girl*	Shizuko Nishioka
ASAKO SUZUMURA, *factory girl*	Asako Suzuki
MASAKO KOYAMA, *factory girl*	Haruko Toyama
TOKIKO HIROTA, *factory girl*	Tokiko Hiromichi
MUSIC TEACHER	Akitake Kono

". . . This is the picture of mine that Keisuke Kinoshita, the Shochiku director, likes best—and, for that matter, I like it too. I tried to depict this group of women as though this were a documentary on their lives, rather than a drama. To get the actresses to shed their professionalism and to play their parts like amateurs, as though they were really factory girls, I tried several things. I began by making them run a lot, and for the duration of the shooting I had them lodged at the dormitory of an actual optical-instruments factory.

It's interesting that soon after the picture was finished all the actresses got married and became good housewives. It was about this time, too, that I got married myself. Maybe I shouldn't be passing this along, but it wasn't because I was in love with the woman who became my wife (Yoko Yaguchi, who plays Tsuru in the film). I got married because Mr. Morita, head of production at Toho, had been telling me for some time that it wasn't good for a man to go through life single."

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Though its chief influences were in German and Russian documentaries, *The Most Beautiful* bears uncanny similarities to the "re-created" documentaries Humphrey Jennings was making in England during World War II about the difficult but noble lives of civilians laboring on the homefront as the nation struggled for survival. Kurosawa's film is made up of vignettes about the volunteers working in an optical-instruments factory in rural Japan during the war. One of the group leaders is accused of favoritism for sheltering another girl who may be coming down with tuberculosis. The leader, whose own mother is dying, mislays a lens in her distress. Another of the girls falls off a roof and breaks her leg but insists on continuing work. Yet another is sent home sick but regains her health and returns to work.

". . . Kurosawa wanted to make a 'documentary' and that is precisely what the film is. It opens with the head of production making a speech and we are shown the lines of employees, standing like soldiers, as they listen. It is a real factory, with real workers, and we are shown it in real documentary fashion. . . . Kurosawa devotes the camera to people. Rarely do we see a background, only occasionally is a room or a section of the factory examined. Usually, he fills his frame with girls—the effect is that nothing but these girls exists; hundreds of them seen, the few in the foreground demanding our attention.

Kurosawa's documentary is so enriched by the kind of beauty which only truth can give. The plot line is manipulated to a degree but, oddly, the characters are not. In this context of preserved actuality, of beautifully captured wartime stringency (the very conditions of which—not enough film, not enough lights, not enough sets—might account for the extreme economy and directness of the picture), the performances ring with a kind of truth that one finds usually only in real documentaries.

—Donald Richie
THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA

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1945

SANSHIRO SUGATA, Part II

Zoku Sugata Sanshiro
(Also known as *Judo Saga II*)

A Toho Production. Released May 3, 1945.
83 minutes; 2,268 meters

Producer: Motohiko Ito. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, after the novel by Tsuneo Tomita. **Photography:** Takeo Ito. **Art direction:** Kazuo Kubo. **Sound recording.** Shoichi Kameyama. **Lighting:** Choshiro Ishii. **Music:** Seiichi Suzuki. **Assistant director:** Minoru Nakamura.

Cast:

SANSHIRO SUGATA	Susumu Fujita
SHOGORO YANO, *his teacher*	Denjiro Okochi
GENNOSUKE and TESSHIN HIGAKI	Ryunosuke Tsukigata
GENZABURO HIGAKI	Akitake Kono
SAYO	Yukiko Todoroki
YUJIRO TODA	Soji Kiyokawa
YOSHIMA DAN	Masayuki Mori
KOHEI TSUZAKI	Seiji Miyaguchi
DAIZO SAMONJI	Ko Ishida

". . . This film was like a warmed over version of the original. I had already done it once, and I just couldn't get myself deeply involved in it. At the same time, I found the brothers of Gennosuke Higaki, the villain of the first film, rather interesting and devoted too much attention to them. As a result, I think Sanshiro's role is considerably weakened."

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This sequel to *Sanshiro Sugata* is a rather pallid imitation of Kurosawa's first film. Made near the end of the war, a distasteful xenophobic nationalism has crept in (perhaps at the direction of the propaganda authorities) and although the pictorial and narrative craftsmanship are superb, this film lacks the fierce intensity of the original creation.

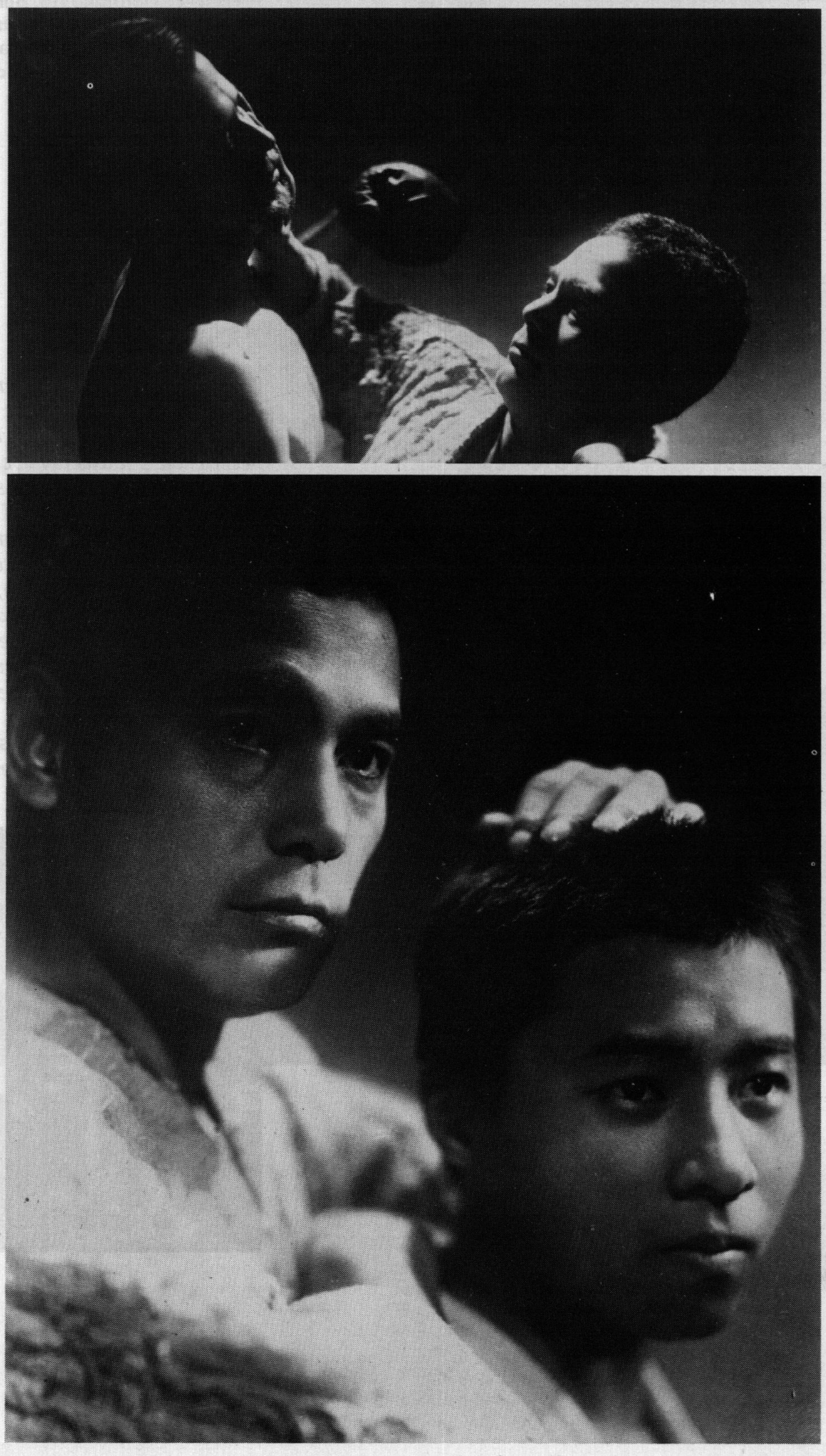
Five years after the events described in the first *Sanshiro Sugata,* the young judo student encounters a vicious American sailor beating up a defenseless Japanese rikisha puller. Sugata tosses the brute into the drink and so impresses the rikisha boy that he too takes up judo. Later, Sugata is subjected to watching a destitute follower of *jujitsu* (the rival martial art that Sugata had sought to overcome in the first film) fight a foreign boxer in what is obviously a mismatch. Finally, Sugata must take on the evil and demented brothers of Gennosuke Higaki, the hated rival he had defeated in the first film. Gennosuke is now bedridden and repentant, but his brothers (one of whom is played by the same actor who plays Gennosuke) are determined to take their vengeance. Sugata defeats them handily on a snowy mountaintop and then takes it upon himself to become the benevolent protector of his defeated opponents, a decision that proves almost fatal.

Sugata Sanshiro (Part II) was confisated by the U.S. Occupation government as a work of wartime propaganda, and an unsubtitled print has since been housed in the Library of Congress archives. Though that print has been shown on rare occasions, this marks the first time that a subtitled print of the film will be shown in the United States.

". . . (A) lack of meaning pervades the entire picture and the reasons that this should be so reveal something about Kurosawa as a director. Kajiro Yamamoto has said that he is the 'inspirational' type of creator, and this is true. He sees things clearly and whole upon the moment of conception, and the making of a film is therefore the battle to regain the initial vision. He, as director, is never satisfied, but what he considers only a partial success becomes, for us who do not know the original vision, the picture itself, which is often near perfection . . . In this second part of Sugata *there was no original vision to sustain since it is the only film he has made without wanting to. What is surprising is that it is not worse than it is.*

"It, then, is the nearest that the director has ever come to the ordinary Japanese films and its similarities and differences are worth noting. It is a propaganda picture—utterly the opposite from a personal picture; it is an entertainment film—quite different from an entertaining film. Kurosawa's lack of interest was a lack of interest in the content because what a picture is about remains for him the most important thing in a picture."

—Donald Richie
THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA



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1945

THE MEN WHO TREAD ON THE TIGER'S TAIL

Tora-no-o o fumu otokotachi

A Toho Production. Completed August, 1945; released April 24, 1952.
58 minutes, 1,575 meters
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan Films

Producer: Motohiko Ito. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, after the Kabuki play *Kanjincho*. **Photography:** Takeo Ito. **Art direction:** Kazuo Kubo. **Sound recording:** Keiji Hasebe. **Lighting:** Iwaharu Hiraoka. **Music:** Tadashi Hattori. **Assistant director:** Jin Usami.

Cast:

BENKEI	Denjijro Okochi
TOGASHI	Susumu Fujita
THE PORTER	Kenichi Enomoto
KAMEI	Masayuki Mori
KATAOKA	Takashi Shimura
ISE	Akitake Kono
SURUGA	Yoshio Kosugi
HITACHIBO	Dekao Yokoo
YOSHITSUNE	Hanshiro Iwai

". . . This one is like a musical-comedy version of the Kabuki play Kanjincho. *In fact, before I shot this picture, I had a scenario for a film called* Dokkoi kono yari *(the title is untranslatable, the film was never made). It was to have been a real action drama, with full samurai riggings, but since the horses we would have needed were all requisitioned for use in the war, I decided to try shooting* Kanjincho.

Tiger's Tail *was shot on a single set, with as tight a budget as possible, planned simply, according to a certain pattern. And though it is based on* Kanjincho, *it does not adhere to the original. The confrontation of Denjiro Okochi's Benkei and Susumu Fujita's Togashi, which is at the heart of the play, is viewed obliquely in the film. That is, I capitalized on the comic strengths of Enoken (Kenichi Enomoto) as the porter to frame the exchange between Togashi and Benkei.*

We had next to nothing to work with in those days, so I had to be very economical with the set, and I hardly moved the camera at all. But I took great pains to make what I knew should be an interesting picture."

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The action of the film closely follows that of the Kabuki play *Kanjincho*. Yoshitsune, a popular and successful general for the Minamoto clan, has come under the envious suspicion of his brother Yoritomo, the ruling shogun of Japan in the late 12th century. Yoshitsune flees to the north with his bodyguards, led by the fiercely loyal warrior-priest, Benkei. As they make their escape, they must pass a barrier manned by the shogun's men. In an attempt to delude their interrogators, Yoshitsune is disguised as a servant to a priest travelling the country in search of donors for his temple. (The translated title of the play is "The Subscription List.") Togashi, the chief of the barrier guards, is not fooled, but when Benkei, as the leader of the group, mercilessly beats the servant (who is really his liege lord), Togashi is so impressed by Benkei's audacious act that he allows them to pass.

Kurosawa subverts this classic favorite of the Kabuki theater simply by adding one character, a bumbling porter who almost gives the plot away, played by Kenichi Enomoto (known as Enoken), one of Japan's most popular comedians of the 1930s and 40s. Inserting him into *Kanjincho* is, to quote Donald Richie, "a bit like adding Jerry Lewis to the cast of *Hamlet*." The porter is an innocent bystander to the events taking place, and as such represents Everyman. His naive reactions and common speech provide comic counterpoint to the stylized gravity of the play—and consequently make light of the feudal values the play espouses.

Japanese Kabuki theaters were closed in 1944 because the government thought such entertainment too frivolous for those austere times. But Kabuki itself was used for propaganda purposes where patriotic themes could be exploited. *Kanjincho* was a play ripe for such exploitation, but when the authorities saw what Kurosawa had done to it they were horrified and promptly banned it. Had the war not ended just then, Kurosawa might have suffered serious consequences. Ironically, the American Occupation also banned the film. Seeing it only superficially as a period piece, the new authorities suppressed it for being feudalistic.

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1946

NO REGRETS FOR OUR YOUTH

Waga seishun ni kui nashi

わが青春に悔なし

A Toho Production. Released October 29, 1946.
110 minutes; 3,024 meters
Distributed in the U.S. by Corinth Films

Producer: Keiji Matsuzaki. **Screenplay:** Eijiro Hisaita. **Photography:** Asakazu Nakai. **Art direction:** Keiji Kitagawa. **Sound recording:** Isamu Suzuki. **Lighting:** Choshiro Ishii. **Music:** Tadashi Hattori. **Assistant director:** Hiromichi Horikawa. **Editors:** Akira Kurosawa and Toshio Goto.

Cast:

YUKIE YAGIHARA	Setsuko Hara
PROF. YAGIHARA, *her father*	Denjiro Okochi
HER MOTHER	Eiko Miyoshi
TAKAYOSHI NOGE	Susumu Fujita
NOGE'S MOTHER	Haruko Sugimura
NOGE'S FATHER	Kuninori Kodo
ITOKAWA	Akitake Kono
"DOKUICHIGO," *Secret Police Inspector*	Takashi Shimura
EDUCATION MINISTER	Taizo Fukami
PROF. HAKOZAKI	Masao Shimizu

". . . This is one of the few times the major figure in one of my films has been a woman. But she certainly is not the usual kind of heroine. Japan had been reborn into an era in which women too had to possess a strong sense of self, and so I tried to create a heroine who attains self fulfillment.

I was given quite a going over by the Scenario Review Board because my script resembled one to be shot by Kiyoshi Kusuda. I was asked if I was trying to impede the work of a fledgling director. Of course, I had no such intentions. Even if two writers work on similar materials, the finished products will not be the same because of their different personalities. That's the nature of art. I told them so and had a fight on my hands from those opposed to my directing the picture. As it turned out, we had to rewrite the latter half of the script. I wasn't at all happy about that. Hisaita at first refused to redo it, but I prevailed upon him and we got it done."

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The story is based on the Takikawa Incident of 1933 in which a Kyoto University professor of law was forced to resign for his supposedly "Communistic thought," causing a great uproar at all the nation's universities. One of Professor Takikawa's students was Hidemi Ozaki, who was later arrested in what became known as the Sorge Spy Case; Ozaki was executed in prison in 1944.

The film concerns Yukie, the idealistic daughter of a professor, who is courted by two of her father's most earnest pupils. One of them, Noge, is a bright perceptive defender of the professor's liberal views. The other, Itokawa, is unimaginative and thoroughly orthodox. Yukie is in love with Noge. Noge and Itokawa graduate and go off to work in Tokyo. Yukie stays on at home, unhappy and troubled by a need to make something of her aimless life. She goes to Tokyo to find a job, meets Noge by chance, and soon their romance is rekindled. They begin living together, but Yukie knows nothing of what he really does in his job with a small magazine. Government agents suddenly accuse them of subversive acts, and arrest them both. Noge is executed, but Yukie

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Subarashiki nichiyobi

素晴らしき日曜日

A Toho production. Released June 25, 1947.
108 minutes; 2,950 meters.

Producer: Sojiro Motogi. **Screenplay:** Keinosuke Uegusa and Akira Kurosawa. **Photography:** Asakazu Nakai. **Art direction:** Kazuo Kubo. **Sound recording:** Shigetoshi Yasue. **Lighting:** Kyuichiro Kishida. **Music:** Tadashi Hattori. **Assistant director:** Tsuneo Kobayashi.

Cast:

YUZO	Isao Numazaki
MASAKO	Chieko Nakakita
YAMIYA, *the black marketeer*	Ichiro Sugai
HIS MISTRESS	Midori Ariyama
OLD MAN	Toshi Mori
MAN WITH DISFIGURED FACE	Tokuji Kobayashi
DUMPLING VENDOR	Koreyoshi Nakamura
DANCE HALL PROPRIETOR	Masao Shimizu
VAGRANT	Atsushi Watanabe
DANCER	Aguri Hidaka

". . . There was an old film by D.W. Griffith called Isn't Life Wonderful. *Just after World War I, a young couple plant potatoes in an overgrown field. When the harvest is finally ready, the potatoes are stolen. Nevertheless, the young couple are hopeful about their next crop.*

I recall picking up several hints from that film when I began planning One Wonderful Sunday. *The script was done by Keinosuke Uegusa with me. But somehow the picture just didn't flow for me. I won a director's prize for it, and even though there's a lot going on in the picture, there remain things that I didn't get just right."*

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A young man and his girlfriend set off on a Sunday outing with only 35 yen to their names. But it's spring, they're in love, and they're determined to enjoy their holiday together. Some of their precious few yen are wasted when the man—in the midst of a game with some neighborhood boys—knocks a baseball into a food vendor's stand and must purchase the ruined merchandise. They go from there to a cabaret, a zoo, and a concert where the young man is beaten by ticket scalpers angered by his insistence that they sell their tickets at a fair price. Later they go to a coffee shop, but he has to leave his raincoat because they can't afford to pay for the coffee. Disappointed by their encounters with the real world, they make up their own: they pretend to set up their own coffee shop, they conduct their own concert. He sees her off at the station and they promise to meet again the next week.

Despite the severe economic, technical and political constraints on filmmaking in Japan barely more than a year after the end of the war, Kurosawa

hearted film comedy. To the surprise of many critics he has frequently mentioned Frank Capra as one of his favorite directors, and here the Capra influence seems obvious. To quote Donald Richie: "The whimsicality of the later scenes, the jaunty optimism of the girl, the right-you-are-if-you-think-you-are story, the humanism which is always threatening to curdle into sentimentality—this is the legacy of Frank Capra. Even the acting style is influenced—the way that she (a plucky Jean Arthur) is always reaching up to him (a rueful James Stewart) to fix his hat properly. Kurosawa had seen it in *It Happened One Night, Mr. Deeds Goes to Town,* and *Lady for a Day*—and the film shows it."

One Wonderful Sunday is also Kurosawa's closest brush with musical comedy—a cross perhaps of *Singing in the Rain* and *Threepenny Opera.* So much music, of such great variety, weaves in and out of this film that it almost becomes one of the protagonists. There is a great deal of Schubert—the young

bert is their favorite—sprinkled with strains of *Carmen, My Blue Heaven,* and other pop tunes. Though rarely seen outside Japan, *One Wonderful Sunday* remains a favorite of Japanese movie-

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1948

DRUNKEN ANGEL

Yoidore tenshi

AWARDS: *Kinema Jumpo,* Best Film of the Year

A Toho Production. Released April 27, 1948.
98 minutes, 2,690 meters (original version: 150 min., 4,105 meters)
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan Films.

Producer: Shojiro Motoki. **Screenplay:** Keinosuke Uegusa and Akira Kurosawa. **Photography:** Takeo Ito. **Art direction:** Takashi Matsuyama. **Sound recording:** Wataru Konuma. **Lighting:** Kinzo Yoshizawa. **Music:** Fumio Hayasaka. **Assistant director:** Tsuneo Kobayashi.

Cast:

DR. SANADA	Takashi Shimura
MATSUNAGA, *the gangster*	Toshiro Mifune
OKADA, *the gang boss*	Reizaburo Yamamoto
NANAE, *Matsunaga's mistress*	Michiyo Kogure
MIYO, *the nurse*	Chieko Nakakita
GIN, *the bar girl*	Noriko Sengoku
BOOGIE-SINGER	Shizuko Kasaoki
TAKAHAMA, *Sanada's friend*	Eitaro Shindo
GANG BOSS	Masao Shimizu
OLD MAN IN BAR	Taiji Tonoyama
SCHOOL GIRL	Yoshiko Kuga
OLD WOMAN	Choko Iida

"In this picture I was finally myself! This one was really mine! In One Wonderful Sunday *I had accomplished some of what I'd wanted but*

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Drunken Angel captures perfectly the spirit of postwar Japan: a society in ruins, full of fears and hopes, evil and degradation constantly threatening man's impulses toward virtue, optimism dragged always back to the gloom of reality.

Near a filthy, disease-ridden sump in war-ravaged Tokyo, Dr. Sanada operates a neighborhood clinic. When Matsunaga, an arrogant petty hoodlum comes to have a bullet removed from his arm, Sanada discovers that the man also has tuberculosis. Loathing each other, but at the same time drawn together by desperate mutual need, the two strong-willed men develop a grudging respect for one another. The film is the story of their relationship. Matsunaga all the while is trying to take over the territory of his imprisoned gang-boss. When the boss gets out, he quickly maneuvers himself back into place and has Matsunaga bumped off. Without sentimentality, the doctor and a bar-girl who had loved Matsunaga mourn the young hoodlum, beginning to comprehend the goodness in him that had been locked in a death-struggle against the violence and evil of his life.

The moral ambiguities of both doctor and hoodlum make for a script of extraordinary subtlety. As Donald Richie has described them: ". . . the doctor *is* kind of angel because he is absolutely determined to do good, the way other men might be determined to do bad. Like the title-hero of *Red Beard,* he knows precisely wherein good lies and nothing will stop him. But Mifune is a kind of angel, too, though of a darker breed. He is the kind of angel one wrestles with, and Shimura (as Dr. Sanada) must play Jacob to this dark, unknowable power." Script, performance, and execution all combine to make the film a masterpiece.

Scriptwriter Keinosuke Uegusa recalls the struggle to balance the roles of the film's two protagonists: ". . . While we were working the weight shifted toward the gangster and the doctor got weaker and weaker. We decided that the gangster simply could not be the hero . . . and I remember we decided that the mistake was about halfway through. So we re-wrote from then on . . . Kurosawa's way of working is so relentless that, once the place was discovered he felt no compunction at all in cutting through all the attractive bad spots. He always does this—with neither regrets nor compromises. His attitude is a fine cutting sword. He not only has the strength to go directly to the foundation of any idea, he also has the strength to throw things out. Come to think of it, it is probably this combination which makes him an artist."

(translated by D. Richie)

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1949

THE QUIET DUEL

Shizukanaru ketto

静かなる決闘

A Daiei Production. Released March 13, 1949.
95 minutes, 2,591 meters
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan Films.

Producers: Hisao Ichikawa and Shojiro Motoki. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa and Senkichi Taniguchi, after an original play by Kazuo Kikuta. **Photography:** Shoichi Aizaka. **Art direction:** Koichi Imai. **Sound recording:** Mitsuo Hasegawa. **Lighting:** Tsuneyoshi Shibata. **Music:** Akira Ifukube. **Assistant director:** Shinya Nakamura.

Cast:

KYOJI FUJISAKI	Toshiro Mifune
KYONOSUKE FUJISAKI, *his father*	Takashi Shimura
MISAO MATSUGI, *Kyoji's girlfriend*	Miki Sanjo
SUSUMU NAKADA	Kenjiro Uemura
TAKIKO NAKADA, *his wife*	Chieko Nakakita
RUI MINEGISHI, *the nurse*	Noriko Sengoku
CORPORAL HORIGUCHI	Junnosuke Miyazaki
PATROLMAN NOZAKA	Isamu Yamaguchi
NURSE IMAI	Hiroko Machida

"This is the story of an army doctor who contracts syphilis while operating on a patient at the front, realizes after his return home that he can no longer marry his fiancée, and agonizes over leaving her. I think I paid too much attention to the early scenes of the battlefield hospital. That is, in my way of doing things I like to set the stage for the drama and establish an atmosphere. Consequently, rather than bring out the internal aspects of the story—the young doctor's anguish—I devoted too much effort to directing those other aspects of the film.

. . . Originally, I saw the stage play and thought it would be good for Mifune. He had been the gangster in Drunken Angel *and now he could be the doctor."*

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Young Dr. Fujisaki cuts his finger while operating on a wounded soldier at a battlefield hospital on a Pacific island. Later, he learns that the patient was syphilitic and that he has caught the disease. After the war, he returns to private practice with his father, but he does not tell his girlfriend why he won't marry her. While treating a policeman, Fujisaki learns that the man who had attacked the policeman is the same syphilitic man he had operated on during the war. The man's pregnant wife delivers a stillborn baby, and he is finally persuaded to seek treatment for his disease. The doctor seeks solace in the practice of his profession as a cure for the unhappy end to his love affair.

Here again, Kurosawa had to compromise. The original ending called for the young doctor to go gradually insane from his disease. However, medical authorities in the U.S. Occupation government, when shown the script, insisted that the ending be softened: such a terrifying ending might frighten people away from seeking medical treatment. Other Japanese doctors whom Kurosawa consulted also advised that the spectacular mad scene that Kurosawa had written for Mifune was medically implausible and might discredit their profession.

The film suffers from too many coincidental crossings of plot lines and characters. One senses also Kurosawa's diminished interest when he was prevented from making the film he had originally envisaged. The early scenes in the field hospital are tense, deeply felt, and brilliantly executed. When the action returns to Japan, however, social message replaces human drama, with the result that tension slackens and a sense of validity is lost. Nonetheless, the execution of many scenes is subtle, and one can easily imagine that if Kurosawa had had his way with the ending the film might well have been a triumph.

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1949

STRAY DOG

Nora-inu

AWARDS: Japan Cultural Festival—Grand Prize

An Eiga Geijutsu Kyokai/Shin-Toho Production. Released Oct. 17, 1949
122 minutes; 3,342 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan Films.

Producer: Shojiro Motoki. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa and Ryuzo Kikushima. **Photography:** Asakazu Nakai. **Art direction:** Takashi Matsuyama. **Sound recording:** Fumio Yanoguchi. **Lighting:** Choshiro Ishii. **Music:** Fumio Hayasaka. **Assistant director:** Inoshiro Honda.

Cast:

DETECTIVE MURAKAMI	Toshiro Mifune
CHIEF DETECTIVE SATO	Takashi Shimura
POLICE CHIEF NAKASHIMA	Gen Shimizu
CHIEF INSPECTOR ABE	Yasushi Nagata
SPECIAL DETECTIVES	Reikichi Kawamura
	Hajime Izu
	Sakutaro Yamakawa
YUSA, *the criminal*	Isao Kimura
HARUMI, *his girlfriend*	Keiko Awaji
HARUMI'S MOTHER	Eiko Miyoshi
SATO'S WIFE	Kazuko Motohashi
OGIN, *a pickpocket*	Teruko Kishi
DANCEHALL GIRL	Noriko Sengoku
HONDA, *the suspect*	Reizaburo Yamamoto
OLD TUB-MAKER	Eijiro Tono
YUSA'S SISTER	Fumiko Homma
THEATER DIRECTOR	Minoru Chiaki
BELLBOY	Isao Ubukata

"I wanted to do something in the style of Georges Simenon, because I like his work a great deal, but it didn't turn out quite that way. I really didn't have a story to film next, and then I heard about a cop whose pistol had been stolen. That was all I started with.

If one of the characters is to be considered the protagonist of Stray Dog, *it really should be the criminal, played by Isao Kimura. It was Kimura's first featured role.*

My first treatment for this picture was in the form of a novel. I thought it would be simple just to transform the novel into a finished scenario, which certainly was not the case. It turned out to take just as much time and effort to do the scenario. In writing the novel I had neglected to consider "movie time." In a novel, psychological expression can be described rather directly, in just a few sentences. But it's an entirely different thing to get human psychology in a screenplay. The script required a lot of revising. But still the novel was *useful. I wanted to preserve its very first sentence— 'It was the hottest day of the summer' —which I did in the opening shot of the film: a dog panting, its tongue lolling out."*

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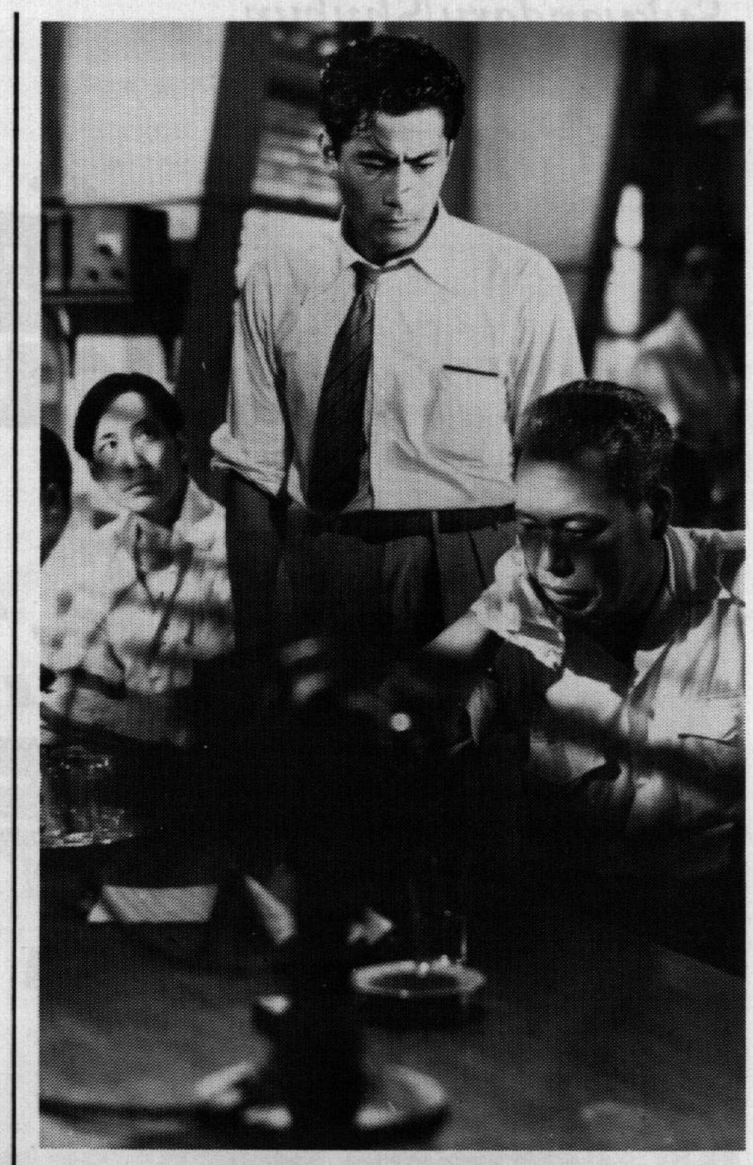
Kurosawa's comment about the protagonist of *Stray Dog* is curious in that the criminal does not even appear until nearly the end of the film. But it is his existence, his whereabouts, the results of his unseen actions that are the constant preoccupation of the characters whom we do see. A young detective, Murakami, has his pistol stolen right out of his pocket as he rides a crowded bus. Ashamed for having lost what was not only a valuable weapon but the very symbol of his identity, Murakami sets off on an obsessive search for his lost pistol. One clue leads to another until Murakami finally is successful in tracking down the suspect. Along the way, however, a robbery and a murder are committed and his own boss is shot trying to help him solve the case. In a frantic finale, Murakami chases down his suspect and tackles him in a muddy meadow as a group of innocent school children pass by and the gentle strains of Mozart are heard on a piano in a nearby house.

Once again, Kurosawa makes symbolic use of moral ambiguities. In *Drunken Angel,* the tubercular gangster knocks over a can of white paint and dies covered in white. Here, the detective, supposedly the "good guy," becomes virtually indistinguishable from his prey as the two men wrestle in the muddy field.

In *Stray Dog,* the oppressive heat of midsummer is as much a protagonist as any of the human actors. As Mifune searches for the criminal through the multiple levels of Tokyo's postwar underworld, every image in every scene is either drenched in perspiration or somehow reduced by the heat. It is as though Nature and all humanity are oppressed. "It is interesting," writes Donald Richie, "that Kurosawa again uses extreme heat when he again wishes to show a city exhausted, fearful, defenseless, in *Record of a Living Being*. His comment, in both films, is that people are prostrated: in the 1955 film by fear of atomic disintegration; in the 1949 picture by the long war and the new carpet-bagger civilization."

"One of the most magical moments in the film is also one of the most irrational. We have seen the heat, even seemed to feel it. Over and over, people say: 'I wish it would rain.' The detectives go to see the tough little girlfriend of the killer. She argues with them, then argues with her mother, and then—quite suddenly—begins to cry. This time the tears are real (before, she cried merely to get rid of the cops) and as she cries there is thunder, the heavens open,and there is a cloud-burst. Everyone, everything is instantly drenched. The heat is truly off because just after this the criminal is discovered. It is as though someone needed to break down and admit humanity before the heavens would open and the reign of evil be over."

—Donald Richie
THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA



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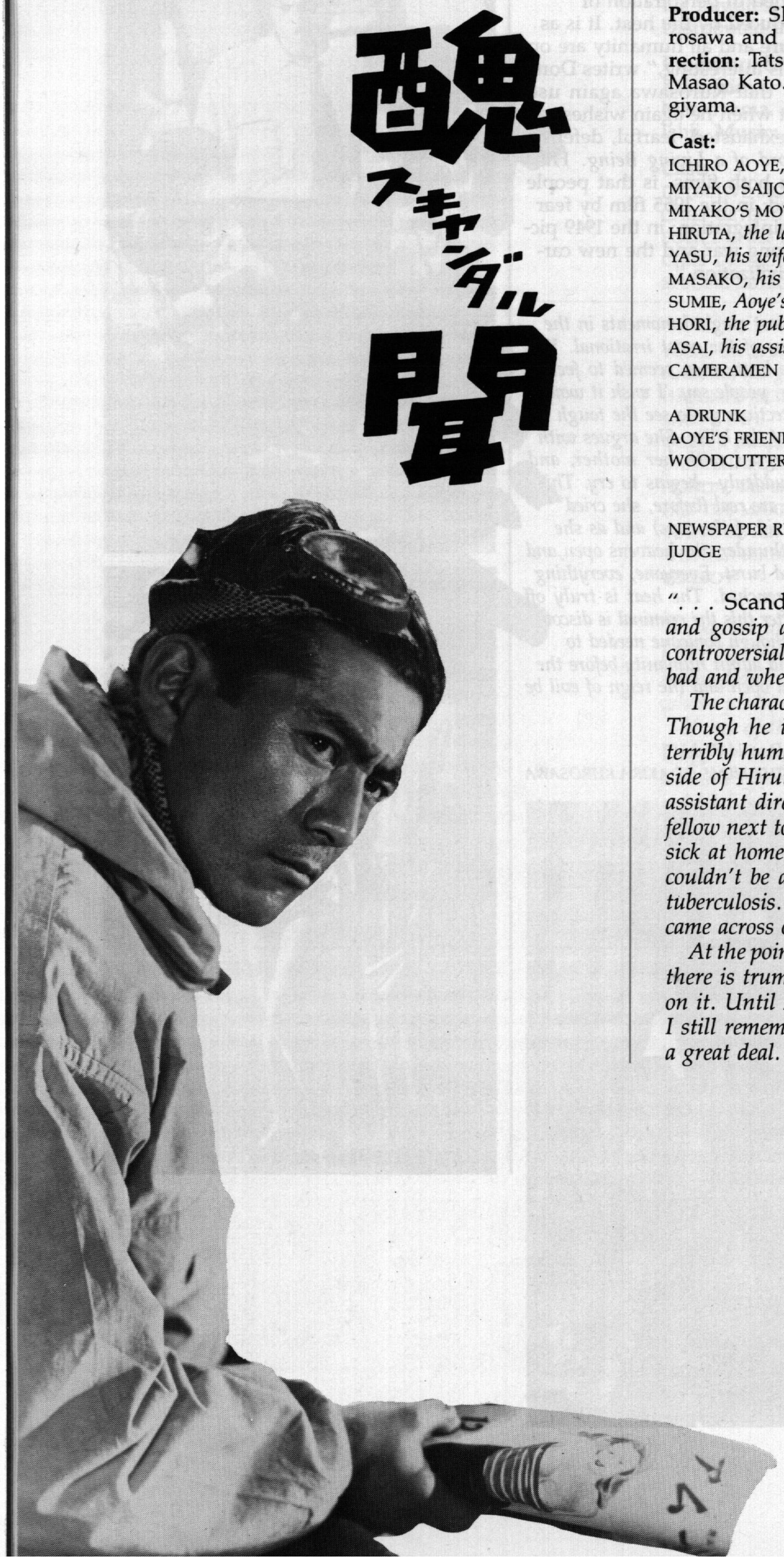
1950

SCANDAL

Sukyandaru/Shubun



A Shochiku Production. Released April 30, 1950
104 minutes; 2,860 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by Macmillan Films

Producer: Shojiro Motoki and Takashi Koide. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa and Ryuzo Kikushima. **Photography:** Toshio Ubukata. **Art direction:** Tatsuo Hamada. **Sound recording:** Saburo Omura. **Lighting:** Masao Kato. **Music:** Fumio Hayasaka. **Assistant director:** Teruo Hagiyama.

Cast:

ICHIRO AOYE, *a painter*	Toshiro Mifune
MIYAKO SAIJO, *a singer*	Yoshiko (Shirley) Yamaguchi
MIYAKO'S MOTHER	Fumiko Okamura
HIRUTA, *the lawyer*	Takashi Shimura
YASU, *his wife*	Tanie Kitabayashi
MASAKO, *his daughter*	Yoko Katsuragi
SUMIE, *Aoye's model*	Noriko Sengoku
HORI, *the publisher*	Eitaro Ozawa
ASAI, *his assistant*	Shinichi Himori
CAMERAMEN	Koji Mitsui
	Yoichi Osugi
A DRUNK	Bokuzen Hidari
AOYE'S FRIEND	Taiji Tonoyama
WOODCUTTERS	Kuninori Kodo
	Kichijiro Ueda
	Shusuke Agata
NEWSPAPER REPORTER	Junji Masuda
JUDGE	Masao Shimizu

". . . Scandal is about the kind of cheap journalism that purveys lies and gossip about the private lives of people. At the time it was a controversial question: whether such journalism practice was good or bad and whether it constituted an invasion of privacy.

The character that most fascinated me was Hiruta, the corrupt lawyer. Though he is a villain, he has another side to his character that is terribly human, which is what makes him credible. In fact, it was this side of Hiruta that I first encountered: one day while I was still an assistant director, I was having a drink at a bar in Shibuya. The old fellow next to me was having some food wrapped up to take to someone sick at home. We fell into conversation, and he mentioned that there couldn't be a finer daughter than his own, who was bedridden with tuberculosis. I modelled Hiruta on that old man and I think he really came across on the screen.

At the point when Hiruta enters and announces his daughter's death, there is trumpet music. That was Fumio Hayasaka's idea. He insisted on it. Until I saw the finished film I did not know how right he was. I still remember that scene—music and image were one. It taught me a great deal. Hayasaka's work in film music was epoch-making."

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Kurosawa's relationship with the press has always been an uneasy one, and intrusions by the yellow-press into personal privacy are to him one of the chief immoralities of modern society. Taking advantage of the U.S. Occupation's democratizing reforms and confusing freedom with license, journalists pushed the newly regained liberties to unreasonable extremes, and provoked one scandal after another.

While painting near a remote mountain spa, a young artist meets a popular singer who has gotten lost on a hike. He gives her a ride on his motorcycle back to her hotel, where the two are spotted by a photographer for a gossip magazine. Soon, a picture of the two of them together is popping up all over Tokyo with scandalous news of their "affair". The enraged artist first threatens violence against the publisher, then decides that he and the singer should sue the magazine. With what little money he has, the artist hires a seedy lawyer whose office is a ramshackle rooftop hut. This shyster is easily bought off by the magazine to throw the case: he has an ailing daughter at home whose medical bills he must pay. The guilt-ridden, self-loathing lawyer, inspired by his angelic dying daughter, decides to confess everything in the end and the defamed couple win their case.

Though *Scandal* is terribly sentimental in places (one critic saying it makes Frank Capra movies look hypoglycemic), Takashi Shimura's performance as the corrupt attorney is superb, rivaling his more famous roles in *Drunken Angel* and *Ikiru*.

"The picture is a protest film all right, but its protestations are not aimed at the world of the yellow press. They are aimed at the world itself, at this world which takes what is loved, which forces impossible decisions, which insists upon a choice among evils. It states, however, that moral dilemmas may be cut if not untied. That the truth, reality, seeing things as they are, goes a long way toward saving. In this case the lawyer saves himself, though he loses everything that belongs to him. In Rashomon, *the picture that directly followed this one, Kurosawa goes one step further and questions reality itself."*

—Donald Richie
THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA

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1950

RASHOMON

羅生門

AWARDS: Venice Film Festival, Grand Prize, 1952
Academy Award, Best Foreign Film, 1953

A Daiei Production. Released August 25, 1950.
88 minutes; 2,406 meters
Distributed by Films Incorporated (Janus Collection)

Executive producer: Masaichi Nagata. **Producer:** Shojiro Motoki and Jingo Minoura. **Screenplay** by Akira Kurosawa and Shinobu Hashimoto, after original short stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa. **Photography:** Kazuo Miyagawa. **Art direction:** Takashi Matsuyama; **Sound Recording:** Iwao Otani. **Lighting:** Kenichi Okamoto. **Music:** Fumio Hayasaka. **Assistant director:** Tai Kato.

Cast:

TAJOMARU, *the bandit*	Toshiro Mifune
MASAGO, *the woman*	Machiko Kyo
TAKEHIRO, *her husband*	Masayuki Mori
THE WOODCUTTER	Takashi Shimura
THE COMMONER	Kichijiro Ueda
THE PRIEST	Minoru Chiaki
THE POLICE AGENT	Daisuke Kato
THE MEDIUM	Fumiko Homma

". . . This all began when one of several screenplays Shinobu Hashimoto had done made its way to me. (Hashimoto was then a young trading-company clerk trying to break into movies.) It was interesting but too short. To the stories of the murdered nobleman, the bandit, and the wife, I thought I would add one more—that of an outsider, the wood-cutter.

I was sure this would make a good picture. But the producers at Daiei couldn't understand it, even after I showed them the script. 'Never mind,' I assured them and somehow managed to push the project through anyway.

I conceived of this film as a return to the finest qualities of silent films. I wanted to rediscover the beauty of films that was lost when talkies came in. Just as modern painting had developed from origins in simplicity, I thought cinema too should once again be brought back to its simple origins.

The great surprise of Rashomon *was Kazuo Miyagawa's camera-work. When we looked at the rushes he was always terribly worried about the results he'd gotten. He'd ask repeatedly what I thought, and each time I'd tell him it was perfect."*

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Rashomon is always described in superlatives. As the first Japanese film encountered by many Western critics, it marked their discovery of the Japanese film, a national cinema of great artistry and sophistication. Many are still reeling from that first impact. It is certainly one of the most praised and most analyzed films ever made. So often is it heralded as the ultimate statement on the relativity (or the unknowability) of Truth, that the phrase "Rashomon situation" seems almost to have entered the English language.

When asked what *Rashomon* is really about, Kurosawa has replied, only half-facetiously, "Well, it's about this murder. . ." Every critic, every viewer has his own version of what *really* happens in the film. At the risk of adding yet another half-truth to the already vast collection, the facts of "The Great Rashomon Murder Mystery" are as follows:

A 12th-century nobleman and his wife travelling near Kyoto are accosted by a notorious bandit. The man is first bound to a tree and later killed; the woman is raped. The bandit is arrested and he and the woman are brought before a magistrate to explain what happened. To their differing versions is added that of the dead husband, spoken through a medium. A woodcutter who happened to observe the events while passing through the forest presents another, still different, view.

This incident is related by the woodcutter to a vagrant and a priest, all of whom take shelter from a thundershower under Kyoto's crumbling Rashomon gate. Disturbed by the pessimism of this story, the studio insisted on an upbeat ending: the three men find an abandoned infant, and the woodcutter takes the foundling home to care for as his own child.

The three decades since *Rashomon* was made have not dulled its fascination for audiences everywhere, nor their appreciation for its stylistic perfection. Like any great work of art, it is far greater than the sum of its many separate parts: its multiple meanings, its narrative thrust, its acting, its visual style, its editing—all are flawless. And yet, every viewer comes away feeling that he has experienced something more, something deeper than a perfectly constructed film. Richie sums it up: "Its frequent revivals in Japan, its frequent re-showings in other countries, its constant appearance in retrospectives, the fact that it is still talked about, still discussed, makes one finally realize that, along with *Ikiru* and *Seven Samurai*, it is a masterpiece."

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1951

THE IDIOT

Hakuchi

白痴

A Shochiku Production. Released May 23, 1951.
166 minutes, 4,543 meters
Distributed in the U.S. by New Yorker Films

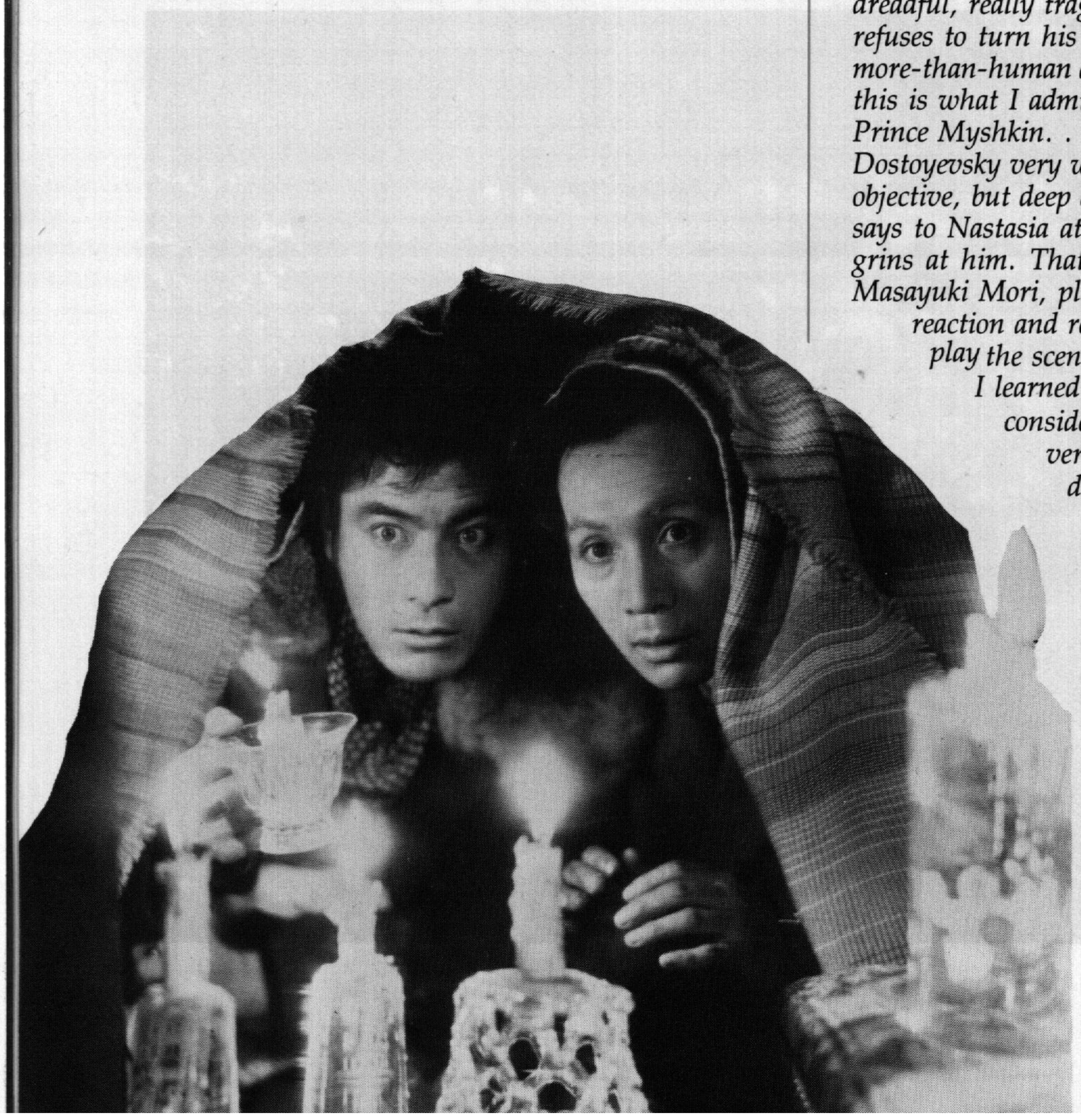
Producer: Shojiro Motoki and Takashi Koide. **Screenplay:** Eijiro Hisaita and Akira Kurosawa, after the novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. **Photography:** Toshio Ubukata. **Art direction:** Takashi Matsuyama. **Sound recording:** Yoshizaburo Senoo. **Lighting:** Akio Tamura. **Music:** Fumio Hayasaka. **Assistant director:** Teruo Hagiyama.

Cast:

KINJI KAMEDA	Masayuki Mori
DENKICHI AKAMA	Toshiro Mifune
TAEKO NASU	Setsuko Hara
ONO	Takashi Shimura
SATOKO, *his wife*	Chieko Higashiyama
NORIKO, *his daughter*	Chiyoko Fumitani
AYAKO, *his daughter*	Yoshiko Kuga
MUTSUO KAYAMA	Minoru Chiaki
JUMPEI KAYAMA, *his father*	Kuninori Kodo
HIS MOTHER	Eiko Miyoshi
TAKAKO, *his sister*	Noriko Sengoku
KAORU, *his brother*	Daisuke Inoue
TOBATA	Eijiro Yanagi
KARUBE	Bokuzen Hidari
AKAMA'S MOTHER	Mitsuyo Akashi

". . . I have been an avid reader of Dostoyevsky since I was young, and I always wanted to film one of his novels. Of course, I'm not in the same league as Dostoyevsky, but he is my favorite author. No one writes more honestly about human existence. I find no other author so appealing, so—well, so gentle. By gentle I mean the kind of gentleness that makes you want to avert your eyes when you see something really dreadful, really tragic. He has this power of compassion. And then he refuses to turn his eyes away; he, too, looks; he, too, suffers. . .This more-than-human quality, this compassion, this near godlike quality—this is what I admire in Dostoyevsky, and what I love terribly in his Prince Myshkin. . .In making this film, I think I came to understand Dostoyevsky very well. At a superficial glance, he does not seem at all objective, but deep down he is marvellously objective. Prince Myshkin says to Nastasia at one point, 'You are such a fine person.' Nastasia grins at him. That's what Dostoyevsky writes. In dramatizing this, Masayuki Mori, playing opposite Setsuko Hara, was surprised at her reaction and remarked that I had thought up an uncanny way to play the scene.

I learned a great deal from doing this project. Most people consider it a failure, but I really don't think it is. At the very least, making The Idiot *helped me add internal depth to the pictures that followed."*



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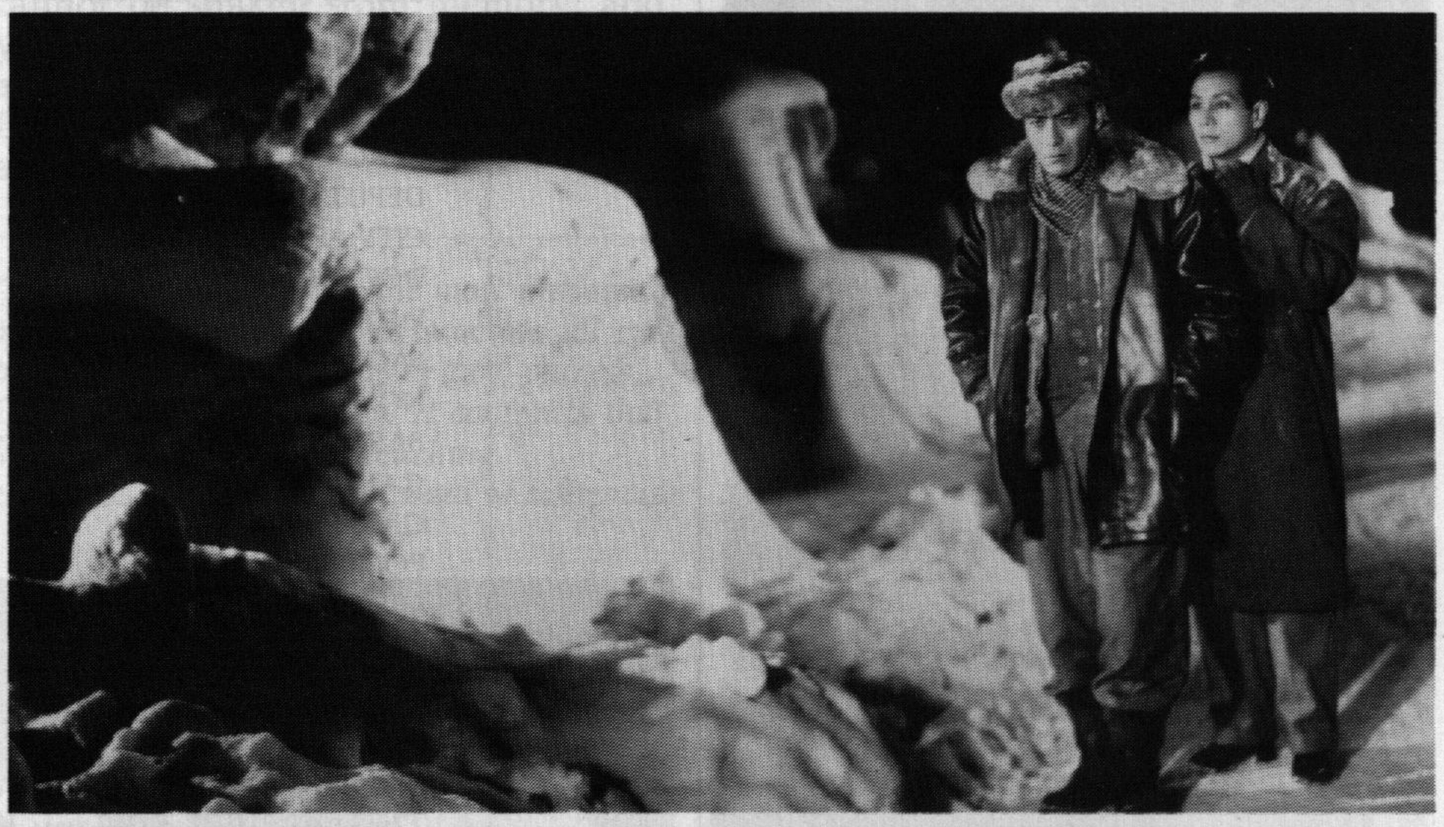
Kurosawa sets his version of Dostoyevsky's novel in Hokkaido and cast Masayuki Mori in the role of the doomed hero, here called Kameda. Toshiro Mifune plays the Rogozhin role, Setsuko Hara the part of Nastasia (called Nasu Taeko in Japanese approximation), and Yoshiko Kuga that of Aglaia. As Donald Richie has noted, "Kurosawa's choice of Hokkaido as locale seems due to its long contact with Russia; it might be thought closer to Dostoyevsky's milieu than any other area in Japan. In this northern island the traditional modes of Japanese living are not common. Chairs and tables are widely used, for example. At the same time the people have some of that peculiarly inward quality which one finds in snow countries."

Kurosawa remains remarkably faithful to the details of the novel, with all its complicated and changing relationships between the various characters. In short: Kinji Kameda returns to his home in Hokkaido from a stay in an asylum on far-off Okinawa. He meets the brusque Akama and they strike up an uneasy friendship. Akama is in love with Taeko, Ayako loves Kameda; Kameda loves both women, but is more drawn to Taeko. The two men fight over her. Akama stabs Taeko. Then, in a significant departure from the original source, the two men go insane together.

Just as the above précis gives no real idea of the film, the film adheres so rigidly to the details of Dostoyevsky's plot that it does not capture the spirit of the novel. Kurosawa's passion for Dostoyevsky clouded his judgment of how to adapt it. Again, Donald Richie: "In later adaptations *(Throne of Blood* and *The Lower Depths)* Kurosawa was much less personally involved with his material and did not feel it necessary to be literal. . . .In *The Idiot* all the characters must inhabit a compromise country—Hokkaido; Mifune must talk anarchism, and Mori, Christianity—issues not burning to the Japanese. Kurosawa must take a nineteenth-century novel and lay it in contemporary Japan, hoping that this would preserve the immediacy of Dostoyevsky, and—instead—obscures it."



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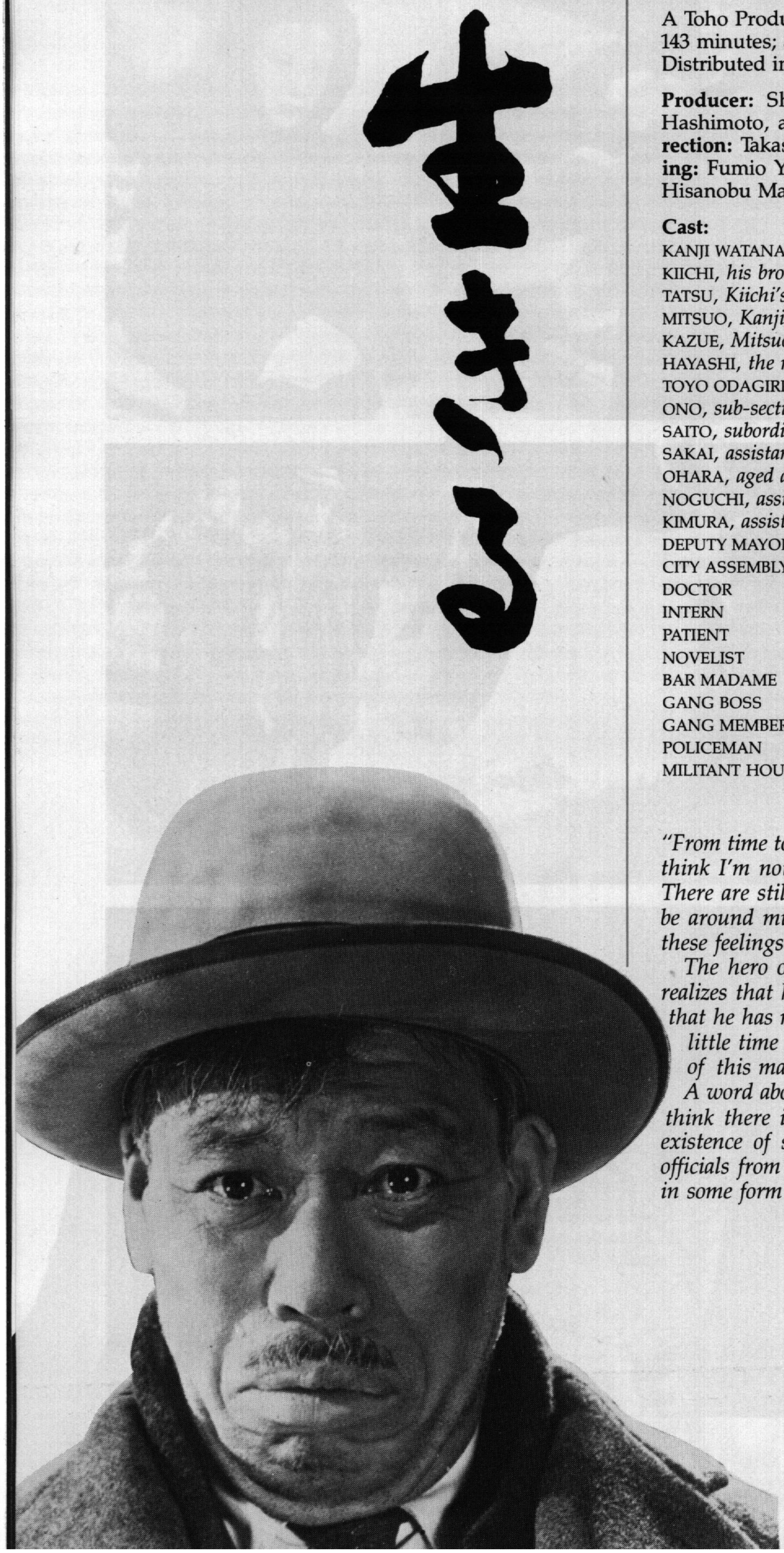
1952

IKIRU

Ikiru (Also known as *To Live* and *Doomed*)



AWARDS: Berlin Film Festival—Silver Bear
Kinema Jumpo—Best Film of the Year
David O. Selznick Golden Laurel

A Toho Production. Released October 9, 1952.
143 minutes; 3,918 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan films.

Producer: Shojiro Motoki. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, Shinobu Hashimoto, and Hideo Oguni. **Photography:** Asakazu Nakai. **Art direction:** Takashi Matsuyama. **Music:** Fumio Hayasaka. **Sound recording:** Fumio Yanoguchi. **Lighting:** Hiromitsu Mori. **Assistant director:** Hisanobu Marubayashi.

Cast:

KANJI WATANABE	Takashi Shimura
KIICHI, *his brother*	Makoto Kobori
TATSU, *Kiichi's wife*	Kumeko Urabe
MITSUO, *Kanji's son*	Nobuo Kaneko
KAZUE, *Mitsuo's wife*	Kyoko Seki
HAYASHI, *the maid*	Yoshie Minami
TOYO ODAGIRI, *girl in Watanabe's office*	Miki Odagiri
ONO, *sub-section chief*	Kamatari Fujiwara
SAITO, *subordinate clerk*	Minosuke Yamada
SAKAI, *assistant*	Haruo Tanaka
OHARA, *aged assistant*	Bokuzen Hidari
NOGUCHI, *assistant*	Minoru Chiaki
KIMURA, *assistant*	Shinichi Himori
DEPUTY MAYOR	Nobuo Nakamura
CITY ASSEMBLYMAN	Kusuo Abe
DOCTOR	Masao Shimizu
INTERN	Isao Kimura
PATIENT	Atsushi Watanabe
NOVELIST	Yunosuke Ito
BAR MADAME	Yatsuko Tanami
GANG BOSS	Seiji Miyaguchi
GANG MEMBER	Daisuke Kato
POLICEMAN	Ichiro Chiba
MILITANT HOUSEWIVES	Kin Sugai, Eiko Miyoshi, Fumiko Homma

"From time to time I think about my own death. And when I do, I also think I'm not yet ready to die, that I couldn't bear leaving this life. There are still so many things left to do while I'm still alive. I won't be around much longer. When I get this feeling, I just ache. Out of these feelings came Ikiru.

The hero of the film looks death in the face and for the first time realizes that his past life has been meaningless. Or rather, he realizes that he has not yet lived at all. And so he decides to live well in what little time he has left. I wanted to examine closely the tragedy born of this man's triviality.

A word about the officials in the various government offices: I don't think there is another country like Japan where everyone senses the existence of so thick and unshakable a wall separating government officials from ordinary people. Whenever I try to express this opinion in some form or another, I'm usually branded a Communist."

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Ikiru ranks high on many critics' lists of the "greatest films of all time." It is a masterpiece, a moral statement that extends beyonds all cultural barriers toward a universal validity. Profoundly moving and rich in meanings, *Ikiru* sustains varied interpretations. And yet, like every supreme work of art, it defies ultimate explanation for the powerful effect it has on all viewers.

Kanji Watanabe, a petty official in a city ward-office, learns he is dying of cancer. Told that he has only six months left to live, he struggles with the dilemma of how to spend those final months. He tries first to retreat to his family, but cannot: his wife is dead, his son is cold and distant, concerned only with his own affairs. Watanabe then seeks solace in a frenetic search for sensual pleasure, but discovers that his years of orderly routine have left him no capacity for conventional amusements, no unfulfilled dreams to chase. Next he becomes attached to a vivacious young girl who had once worked in his office. The girl, who now works in a toy factory, tells Watanabe that making little stuffed animals makes her feel closer to all children. Her youthful naivete inspires Watanabe to use his newfound freedom and his position to do something good for people. He singlemindedly cuts through the red tape that had blocked the construction of a park that citizens' groups had long been clamoring for. He pushes the project through to completion and then dies, finally having found meaning in his life.

These are the facts of Watanabe's story, abruptly cut short halfway through the film. In its extraordinary second half, Kurosawa reveals, through flashback and through the unwitting revelations of Watanabe's family and associates gathered at his wake, what Watanabe was really all about. Indirectly, we learn of the enormous social and personal obstacles that the old man overcame in his determined search for self-fulfillment.

Takashi Shimura—memorable in so many other of Kurosawa's films—here reaches beyond acting to a total union with the role of Watanabe. In scene after scene, his barely audible grunts and tiniest gestures form images that cannot be shaken from memory; and yet, each re-viewing brings surprises and discoveries, new facets to his performance that had previously escaped attention.

"This is a film rooted in the most universal of truths, the one that cuts across all cultural barriers, all concepts of love, success, God: the fact of mortality. It confronts that fact with honesty and a touching eagerness. . . .It would be hard to overpraise Akira Kurosawa's direction. He clearly has all the resources of film techniques at his command, and, confident of his knowledge, is not constrained to display them. Fancy montages, whirling effects, bizarre angles are not for him. It is his purpose to make life seem to occur and, like a true artist, he does this by showing less than would occur in life. He selects his elements perfectly, never lets the emotional scenes stray past sentiment to sentimentality, and with unmelodramatic juxtaposition weaves the elements in his story, letting the rhythm as well as the content flick away at our sensibilities with gentle, telling strokes."

—*Stanley Kauffman*
A WORLD ON FILM

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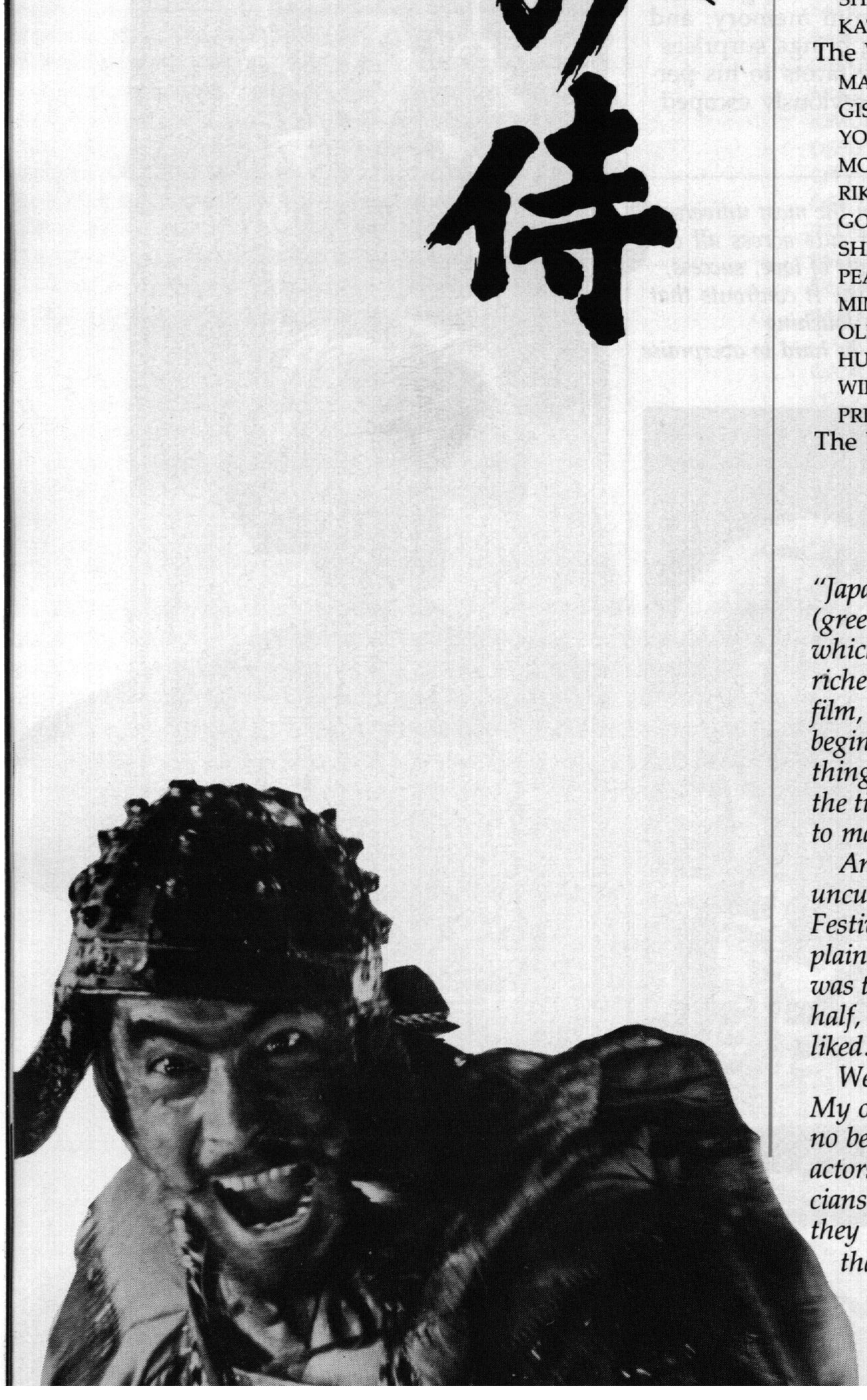
1954

SEVEN SAMURAI

Shichinin no Samurai



AWARDS: Venice Film Festival—San Marco Silver Lion, 1954
Kinema Jumpo—Best Japanese Film Ever Made, 1979

A Toho Production. Released April 26, 1954.
200 minutes; 5,480 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by Toho International and MacMillan Films.

Producer: Shojiro Motoki. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, Shinobu Hashimoto, and Hideo Oguni. **Photography:** Asakazu Nakai. **Art direction:** Takashi Matsuyama. **Art consultation:** Seison Maeda and Kohei Ezaki. **Sound recording:** Fumio Yanoguchi. **Lighting:** Hiromitsu Mori. **Music:** Fumio Hayasaka. **Assistant director:** Hiromichi Horikawa. **Fencing direction:** Yoshio Sugino. **Archery direction:** Ienari Kaneko and Shigeru Endo.

Cast:

The Seven Samurai:	
KAMBEI, *their leader*	Takashi Shimura
KIKUCHIYO	Toshiro Mifune
GOROBEI	Yoshio Inaba
KYUZO	Seiji Miyaguchi
HEIHACHI	Minoru Chiaki
SHICHIROJI	Daisuke Kato
KATSUSHIRO	Isao Kimura
The Villagers:	
MANZO	Kamatari Fujiwara
GISAKU	Kuninori Kodo
YOHEI	Bokuzen Hidari
MOSUKE	Yoshio Kosugi
RIKICHI	Yoshio Tsuchiya
GOSAKU	Keiji Sakakida
SHINO, *Manzo's daughter*	Keiko Tsushima
PEASANT WOMAN	Fumiko Homma
MINSTREL-PRIEST	Sojin Kamiyama
OLD MAN	Toranosuke Ogawa
HUSBAND	Yu Akitsu
WIFE	Noriko Sengoku
PRIEST	Ichiro Chiba
The Bandits:	Shimpei Takagi, Shin Otomo, Kichijiro Ueda, Akira Tani, Haruo Nakajima, Takashi Narita, et al.

"Japanese films all tend to be rather bland in flavor, like ochazuke *(green tea over rice; used by Yasujiro Ozu as a title for one of his films, which gives some hint of the flavor). But I think we ought to have richer foods, and richer films. So I thought I would make this kind of film, entertaining enough to eat. Of course, I've felt that way from the beginning—still, the labor of accomplishing just that in Japan! Something always comes up—we didn't have enough horses, it rained all the time.* Seven Samurai *was just the kind of picture that is impossible to make in Japan.*

And then, when it was finished, it was too long. They released it uncut in Japan anyway, but we had to shorten it for the Venice Film Festival. Naturally, none of the critics understood it. They all complained about the first half being so confused. It certainly was—that was the half that was so cut. I knew what a good film it was. The second half, which went to Venice without major cuts they understood and liked. As a matter of fact, minor cutting helped it. . .

We all suffered making that film! But it was wonderful work, too. My own staff, those people who always work with me—well, there are no better people in the world to work with. And I don't mean only the actors, or the writers, or art directors—I mean the carpenters, electricians, the grips and lightmen. Even without my telling them much, they knew just what I would have wanted. It is thanks to all of them that I've been able to make films like this one."

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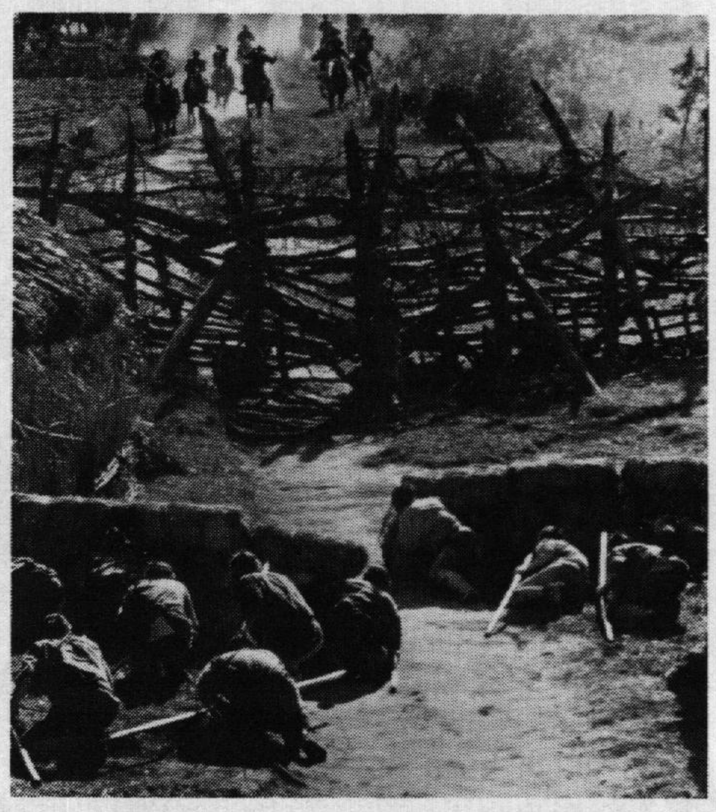
Seven Samurai is unquestionably one of the enduring classics of world cinema. In a poll of Japanese film critics in 1979, it was selected as the best Japanese film ever made (*Ikiru* was voted No. 2, *Rashomon* No. 9, and *Yojimbo* No. 11). It has also been named to "best ever" lists by many film critics around the world, for whatever such plaudits are worth. If imitation is the sincerest form of praise, then *Seven Samurai* has been praised most extravagantly. In addition to John Sturges' literal adaptation to the American West, *The Magnificent Seven,* it has been honored by numerous cinematic references in other films, some sequences in *Star Wars* being among the examples.

Seven Samurai is also the apotheosis of the action film, and moviegoers everywhere have responded enthusiastically to its elemental plot. A small band of good, strong men come to the aid of a farm village threatened by a horde of marauding bandits. They do so because it is the right and honorable thing to do, even though they receive little tangible reward and even less thanks. This simple moral tale epitomizes a humanitarian ideal. It puts men in a light in which they want to see themselves: striving for goodness. But in its most basic terms, the film is good guys against bad guys, like every great Western, and we cheer for the heroes.

Calling *Seven Samurai* "the greatest battle epic since *The Birth of a Nation*," Pauline Kael writes, "Akira Kurosawa achieves what modern American and European epic-makers vainly attempt: the excitement of the senses." This is accomplished through action filmed with stunning virtuosity. In scene after scene throughout this long film the action intensifies until it explodes at the end—the final, decisive confrontation of samurai and bandits—in which the viewer is plunged directly into the inferno of battle. So real, so immediate, is the action that one rubs one's eyes in disbelief even while experiencing it. Donald Richie: "This last reel is one of the greatest of cinematic accomplishments. It is chaotic but never chaos; disordered but orderly in its disorder. The rain pours down; bandits dash in; horses neigh and rear; Shimura poses, bow ready; Mifune slashes; an arrow thuds home and we glimpse it only for the fraction of a second necessary; riderless horses rear in terror; a samurai slips in the mud; Mifune grabs another sword. All of these images and literally hundreds more are crowded into a final reel which galvanizes the screen."



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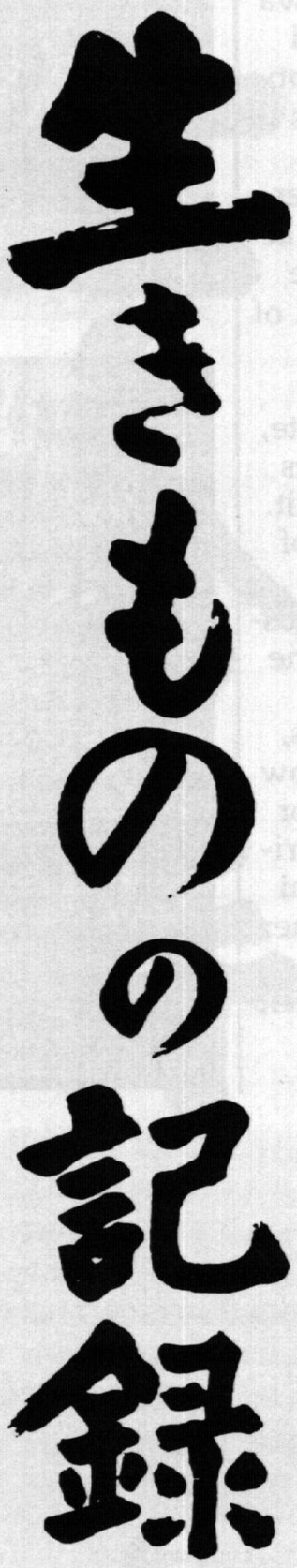
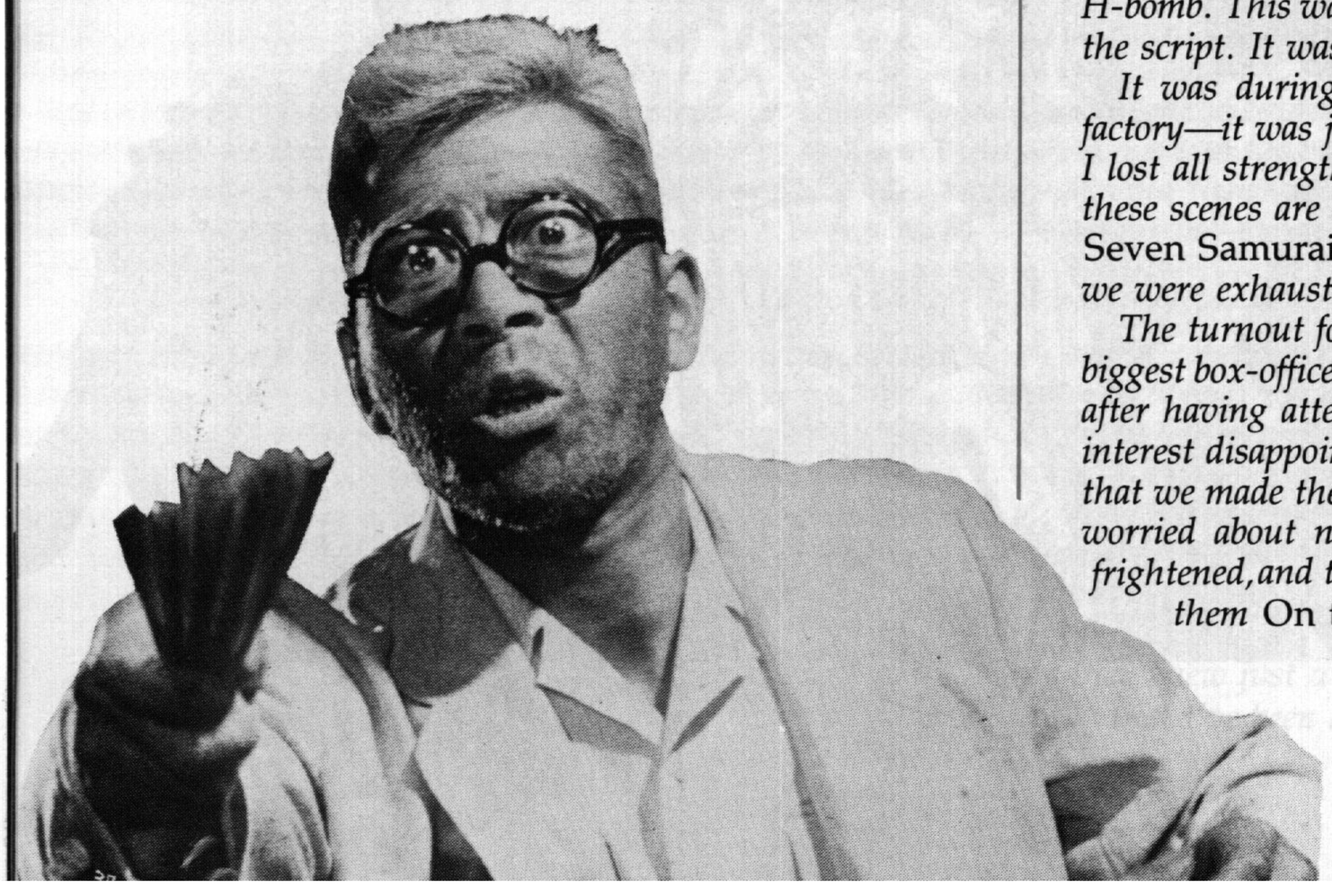
1955

I LIVE IN FEAR

Ikimono no kiroku
(Also known as *Record of a Living Being*)





A Toho Production. Released November 22, 1955.
113 minutes; 3,103 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan Films.

Producer: Shojiro Motoki. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, Shinobu Hashimoto, and Hideo Oguni. **Photography:** Asakazu Nakai. **Art direction:** Yoshiro Muraki. **Sound recordng:** Fumio Yanoguchi. **Lighting:** Kyuichiro Kishida. **Music:** Fumio Hayasaka. **Assistant director:** Hisanobu Marubayashi.

Cast:

KIICHI NAKAJIMA	Toshiro Mifune
TOYO, *his wife*	Eiko Miyoshi
YOSHI, *his eldest daughter*	Haruko Togo
YAMAZAKI, *Yoshi's husband*	Masao Shimizu
ICHIRO, *Kiichi's eldest son*	Yutaka Sada
KIMIE, *Ichiro's wife*	Noriko Sengoku
JIRO, *Kiichi's second son*	Minoru Chiaki
SUE, *Kiichi's second daughter*	Kyoko Aoyama
ASAKO, *Kiichi's mistress*	Akemi Negishi
HER FATHER	Kichijiro Ueda
SATOKO, *Kiichi's former mistress*	Kiyomi Mizunoya
TAEKO, *her daughter*	Sahoko Yonemura
RYOICHI, *Kiichi's son by another mistress*	Yoichi Takikawa
HARADA, *a dentist*	Takashi Shimura
SUSUMU, *his son*	Kazuo Kato
SUMIKO, *Susumu's wife*	Toyoko Okubo
ARAKI, *the judge*	Ken Mitsuda
HORI, *the lawyer*	Toranosuke Ogawa
OLD MAN FROM BRAZIL	Eijiro Tono
ISHIDA	Atsushi Watanabe
OKAMOTO	Kamatari Fujiwara
PSYCHIATRIST	Nobuo Nakamura

"While I was making Seven Samurai *I went to see Hayasaka (a close friend, the composer who did the music for many of Kurosawa's films) who was sick. We were talking, and he said that if a person were in danger of dying he couldn't work very well. He was quite ill at the time, very weak, and we knew he might die. He knew it too. Just before, we had had word of the nuclear experiments at Bikini. When he said a dying person could not work, I thought he meant himself—but he didn't it turned out. He meant everyone—all of us. Next time I met him I suggested we do a film on just that subject. He was pleased. We immediately began working on it.*

Together and through asking other people we decided that a satiric approach would work best. This followed my idea—I wanted to do a comedy, but I didn't know how to make a satire on something like the H-bomb. This was the problem I kept running up against while writing the script. It was difficult to keep it funny. . .

It was during the filming of the scenes following the fire at the factory—it was just then that Hayasaka died. This was a great shock. I lost all strength to work, to work well at any rate, and that is why these scenes are so weak. And the ending, too, is weak. After filming Seven Samurai *we were all tired out but happy; after* I Live in Fear *we were exhausted.*

The turnout for this film was poor; few people came, and it was my biggest box-office flop. After putting so much of myself into this picture, after having attempted to treat a serious theme seriously, this lack of interest disappointed me. When I think back on it, however, I see now that we made the film too soon. At that time few people were seriously worried about nuclear extinction. It was only later that people got frightened, and then a number of films on the subject appeared, among them On the Beach."

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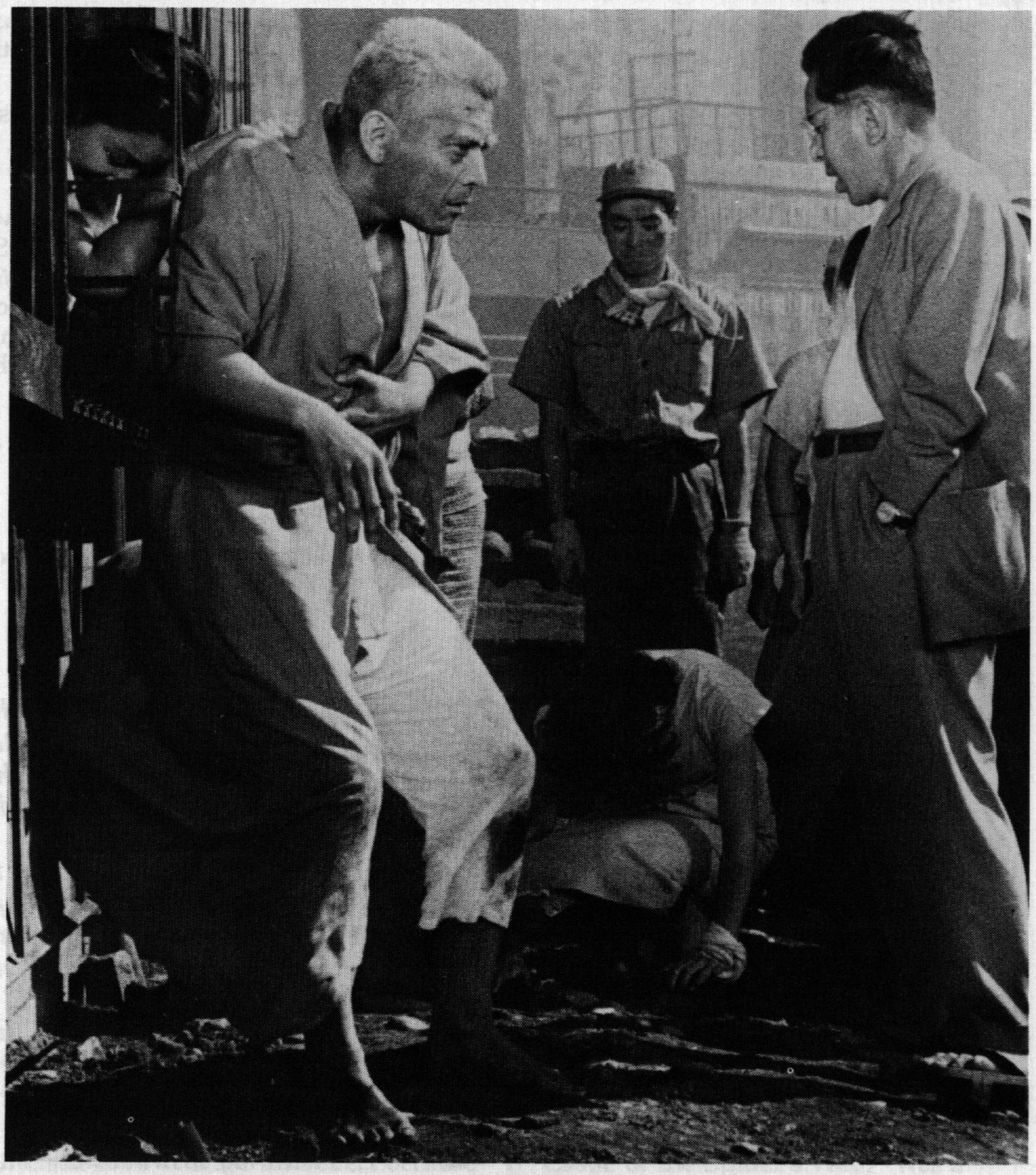
With extraordinary daring, Kurosawa cast the rugged young Toshiro Mifune in the role of Kiichi Nakajima, the aging patriarch set on fleeing a Japan threatened with nuclear extinction. And Mifune performs splendidly. But he cannot overcome his physical limitations (or, rather, his greatest strengths: his youthfulness and physical vitality): we can see that the lines in his face have been drawn with greasepaint, not worry; that his hair is gray from spray, not age. This is the film's single greatest defect, yet one cannot help but admire Kurosawa's resistance to typecasting—and Mifune's valiant characterization: he *almost* makes us forget who he usually is.

Nakajima is the elderly owner of a small foundry who fears atomic holocaust. He seeks to sell the factory in order to take his family to Brazil, which he believes is safe from the effects of nuclear-bomb tests. Naturally, his family resists: his sons and daughters all depend on the foundry for their employment and they look forward to sharing the fruits of the inheritance they believe is rightfully theirs. Old Nakajima cannot persuade even his mistresses and their children to join him in Brazil. Fearing that the dotard will ruin their livelihood, his relatives take him into family court (this is actually where the picture begins) and finally seek to have him committed to an institution. Nakajima, who understands why his family resists, burns down the foundry in an effort to force them to go abroad with him, but only succeeds in further alienating his family and eventually driving himself utterly mad.

". . . if the film had been merely a 'social document' it would not continue to live in the memory, and would not—with all its flaws—remain truly the 'record of a living being'. The reason is that Kurosawa (as in The Quiet Duel, *as in* Scandal, *as in* The Bad Sleep Well*) became more interested in the 'living' aspect of his subject than he did in its 'social' aspect. In doing so he created in the old father a kind of Everyman, a modern Lear even, who sees what may happen and who fears it. This is the reason that the message gets lost, but through this loss something more important is gained."*

—*Donald Richie*
THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA



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1957

THRONE OF BLOOD

Kumonosu-jo
(Also known as *The Castle of the Spider's Web*)

蜘蛛巣城

AWARDS: Los Angeles International Film Festival
Lisbon Film Festival, Special Grand Prize

A Toho Production. Released January 15, 1957.
110 minutes; 3,006 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan Films.

Producers: Akira Kurosawa and Shojiro Motoki. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, Hideo Oguni, Shinobu Hashimoto, and Ryuzo Kikushima, after Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. **Photography:** Asakazu Nakai. **Art direction:** Yoshiro Muraki. **Art consultation:** Kohei Ezaki. **Sound recording:** Fumio Yanoguchi. **Lighting:** Kyuichiro Kishida. **Music:** Masaru Sato. **Assistant director:** Mimachi Nonagase.

Cast:

TAKETOKI WASHIZU, *a feudal lord*	Toshiro Mifune
ASAJI, *his wife*	Isuzu Yamada
YOSHIAKI MIKI, *his friend*	Minoru Chiaki
YOSHITERU, *Miki's son*	Akira Kubo
KUNIHARU TSUZUKI, *Washizu's over-lord*	Takamaru Sasaki
KUNIMARU, *Tsuzuki's son*	Yoichi Tachikawa
NORIYASU ODAGURA	Takashi Shimura
WITCH	Chieko Naniwa

"I have long thought that the Japanese jidai-geki *(period film) is usually historically uninformed. Beyond that, it has never really availed itself of modern filmmaking techniques. In* Seven Samurai *we tried to do something about that and* Throne of Blood *had the same general motivation behind it.*

. . . The chief problem was how to adapt Macbeth *to a genuinely Japanese context. The story is understandable enough, but the Japanese tend to think differently about such things as witches and ghosts. I decided upon the techniques of the Noh theater because in Noh style and story are one. I wanted to use the way Noh actors move their bodies, the way they walk, and the general composition provided by the Noh stage. This is one of the reasons that there are so few close-ups in the picture. I tried to show everything in full shots. Japanese almost never make films this way, and I remember thoroughly confusing my crew with my instructions—they were so used to moving up for dramatic moments of high emotion, and I told them to pull further back. In this way, I suppose you might call the film experimental."*

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A simple plot outline of *Macbeth* does not bear repeating, but some thoughts of Donald Richie's on adaptations of it do: "Kurosawa—unlike Orson Welles, who saw only an adventure story, unlike Maurice Evans, who saw only histrionics—gives us a parable, ice-cold at center, which tells us that we are responsible for what we do." That parable, for all the criticism Kurosawa has borne for being "too Western," is deeply rooted in Japanese military lore and spiritual traditions. His version of *Macbeth* is as close to the *Tale of Heike* as it is to Shakespeare. This epic of 12th-century military power struggles—tales originally recounted to musical accompaniment by mendicant Buddhist monks—emphasizes that "all earthly existence is vanity and evanescence." Bound permanently to the wheel of causation, man is responsible for the results of his actions, even though he sometimes may lack the power to control his deeds. Like the *Heike,* which inspired many classic Noh dramas, *Throne of Blood* is deeply imbued with this Buddhist spirit of cause-and-effect, making all the more appropriate the Noh stylization that Kurosawa adopted.

Asaji, the Lady Macbeth character, is perhaps the most compelling of Kurosawa's few female protagonists. Within the generally Noh-like style of the film, she and the witch remain closest in appearance and acting style to the conventions of the Noh stage. Richie: ". . . it is the two women who live in this stylized and ritual world (of the Noh). And it is they, who, after all are the movers of the plot and who, in Kurosawa as in Shakespeare, are firmly on the side of evil. . . . Asaji wants to realize herself through power and thinks that she will better her condition by killing. This, we are shown, leads to madness and death. But it is also true that if there were a way of achieving this power without harming others, this would not necessarily lead to the happiness she ostensibly desires. . . . Asaji has made up her mind. She knows what she wants. Consequently, she denies herself the freedom to change her mind. She is as rigid as the Noh mask which her face imitates. She gives herself over to cause-and-effect because she believes in it."

At the end of *Throne of Blood,* the protagonist Washizu's own men turn on him (in a significant departure from Shakespeare) and he dies in a prolonged hail of arrows. Astonishing and terrifying in its brutality, this stylized demise is a perfectly acceptable dramatic convention in Japan. Some Western audiences have reacted to this finale with laughter, however, as though it were comic relief rather than the profoundly stirring conclusion to the parable that Kurosawa intended.

For collectors of the arcane, the film's Japanese title *Kumonosu-jo,* literally "Castle of the Spider's Web," was a product of Kurosawa's research into 16th-century castle construction (the period in which the action takes place). He discovered that builders made use of a peculiar kind of wood cultivated specially for use in castle-gates which had a wavy grain that was intended to disorient invaders. The wood was called "spider-hair wood," and thus a castle built with it could be considered a spider's nest.

"We studied old castle layouts, the really old ones, not those white castles we still have around. And we decided to use black and armored walls since they would go well with the suiboku-ga *(ink-painting) effect we planned with lots of mist and fog. . . . But we created something which never came from any historical period. To emphasize the psychology of the hero, driven by compulsion, we made the interiors wide with low ceilings and squat pillars to create the effect of oppression."*

—Yoshiro Muraki
Art director

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1957

THE LOWER DEPTHS

Donzoko

A Toho Production. Released September 17, 1957.
137 minutes; 3,744 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan Films.

Producer: Akira Kurosawa. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa and Hideo Oguni, after the play by Maxim Gorky. **Photography:** Ichio Yamazaki. **Art director:** Yoshiro Muraki. **Sound recording:** Fumio Yanoguchi. **Lighting:** Hiromitsu Mori. **Music:** Masaru Sato. **Assistant director:** Mimachi Nonagase.

Cast:

SUTEKICHI, *the thief*	Toshiro Mifune
OSUGI, *the landlady*	Isuzu Yamada
ROKUBEI, *her husband*	Ganjiro Nakamura
OKAYO, *her sister*	Kyoko Kagawa
KAHEI, *the priest*	Bokuzen Hidari
"TONOSAMA," *the ex-samurai*	Minoru Chiaki
THE ACTOR	Kamatari Fujiwara
TOMEKICHI, *the tinker*	Eijiro Tono
ASA, *his wife*	Eiko Miyoshi
OSEN, *the prostitute*	Akemi Negishi
YOSHISABURO, *the gambler*	Koji Mitsui
OTAKI	Nijiko Kiyokawa
TATSU	Haruo Tanaka
SHIMAZO, *the police agent*	Kichijiro Ueda

"Gorky's setting was Imperial Russia, but I changed it to Edo-period Japan. Also, I used bakabayashi *(literally, "idiot music," a kind of lighthearted flute and drum music traditionally associated with travelling entertainers, peddlers, and the like). We always think of this music as being joyous and festive. I used it for precisely the opposite effect. I wanted to suggest something tragic and dark. . . . During this period, the Shogunate government was crumbling and thousands of people in Edo and other cities were living almost unendurable lives. Their resentment we can still feel in the* senryu *and* rakushu *(satirical poems and farces) of the period. I wanted to capture this atmosphere, to reveal it, though whether I really did or not, I'm still not sure.*

The film was easy to make. We worked steadily and well, and there were almost no bad takes. We had only one indoor set and one open set. We also had many rehearsals, and worked out all the choreography, camera positions, and everything else well in advance of shooting. Maybe that was why it all went so easily . . . Once, to get everybody in the proper mood, I invited onto the set one of the remaining great masters of old Edo rakugo *(humorous, highly satirical, storytelling), and we never had more fun than on that day.*

I wanted Mifune to play his part in the style of Nezumi-kozo *(a fictitious and romantic robber who saves maidens and steals only from the rich; the hero of hundreds of plays and films. Naturally, he is a figure much despised by the intelligentsia and only children, farmers, laborers crowd into his frequent film appearances. A bit like Robin Hood, he is too near in time to have acquired any antique patina and Kurosawa's idea was personal, highly interesting, and almost dogmatically unfashionable). That didn't work though. Mifune is simply too well-built and has too much presence. He cannot help but bring his own dignity to his roles."*

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The Lower Depths is a tour-de-force of acting and atmosphere. Kurosawa, having accomplished the world's greatest action film in *Seven Samurai,* here turns his hand to a script in which there is virtually no action at all. Most of the events take place in a single claustrophobic interior set, with only occasional escapes to an equally dismal exterior courtyard. A seedy collection of lowlifes occupies quarters run by an avaricious old man and his shrewish wife. Each of them spends his time trying to outwit the landlord at the expense of his fellow sufferers. And each suffers from some defect that makes him a target of scorn: the thief steals to buy his way into the landlord's favor; the tinker is under the delusion that he is a craftsman; the prostitute prattles on about the great love of her life; the one-time samurai lives on memories of past glory; the actor, in his drunken haze, cannot remember his lines. Only the cynical gambler keeps himself aloof from all the squabbles, and only the pilgrim-priest tries to resolve them—this sweet-natured old holy-man tries to offer his companions hope, a preposterous notion.

Despite Kurosawa's remarks about Mifune not quite capturing the raffish, *Nezumi-kozo* quality intended for the part, this is surely one of the actor's finest performances. Mifune himself is fond of remembering the role, and ranks it second only to his work in *Seven Samurai.* Donald Richie: "One might single out of Mifune's performance. His mimicry is flawless: every one of the recognized details of the *yakuza* (hoodlum) is there; the mock-toughness, the little-boy angularity of gesture, the abrupt shift of his kimono skirt, the calculated vulgarity of his squat, the sudden warmth of his

smile—the nastiness, the sexiness, the innocence, the danger. All of this is continually before us; yet, as in any great performance, it is varied by the person with whom he is acting. Here Mifune's timing seems almost miraculous. . . . His is a superb performance, and the whole point is that it *is* a performance. One applauds it as one would that of a solo dancer, an acrobat, an athlete."

Appearing with Mifune in smaller parts are many familiar actors from the Kurosawa repertory company, and never before has the ensemble acting been so strong. Particularly notable are Bokuzen Hidari, whose Emmett Kelly face gives the role of the priest special pathos, Koji Mitsui as the gambler, Kamatari Fujiwara as the actor, and Minoru Chiaki as the ex-samurai.

One of the film's most remarkable

qualities is Kurosawa's ironic use of the rhythmic clatter of festival music. Despite the mournful undertones he wishes to reveal, the music transforms Gorky's grim "theater of life" into a wry comedy about the mess all mankind is in.

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1958

THE HIDDEN FORTRESS

Kakushi toride no san-akunin

(Also known as *Three Bad Men in a Hidden Fortress)*

AWARDS: Berlin Film Festival—Silver Bear
International Film Critics Award—Best Director

A Toho Production. Released December 28, 1958.
139 minutes; 3,802 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by Toho International and Film Images

Producer: Masumi Fujimoto and Akira Kurosawa. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, Hideo Oguni, Ryuzo Kikushima, and Shinobu Hashimoto. **Photography:** Ichio Yamazaki. **Art direction:** Yoshiro Muraki. **Sound recording:** Fumio Yanoguchi. **Lighting:** Ichiro Inohara. **Music:** Masaru Sato. **Assistant director:** Mimachi Nonagase.

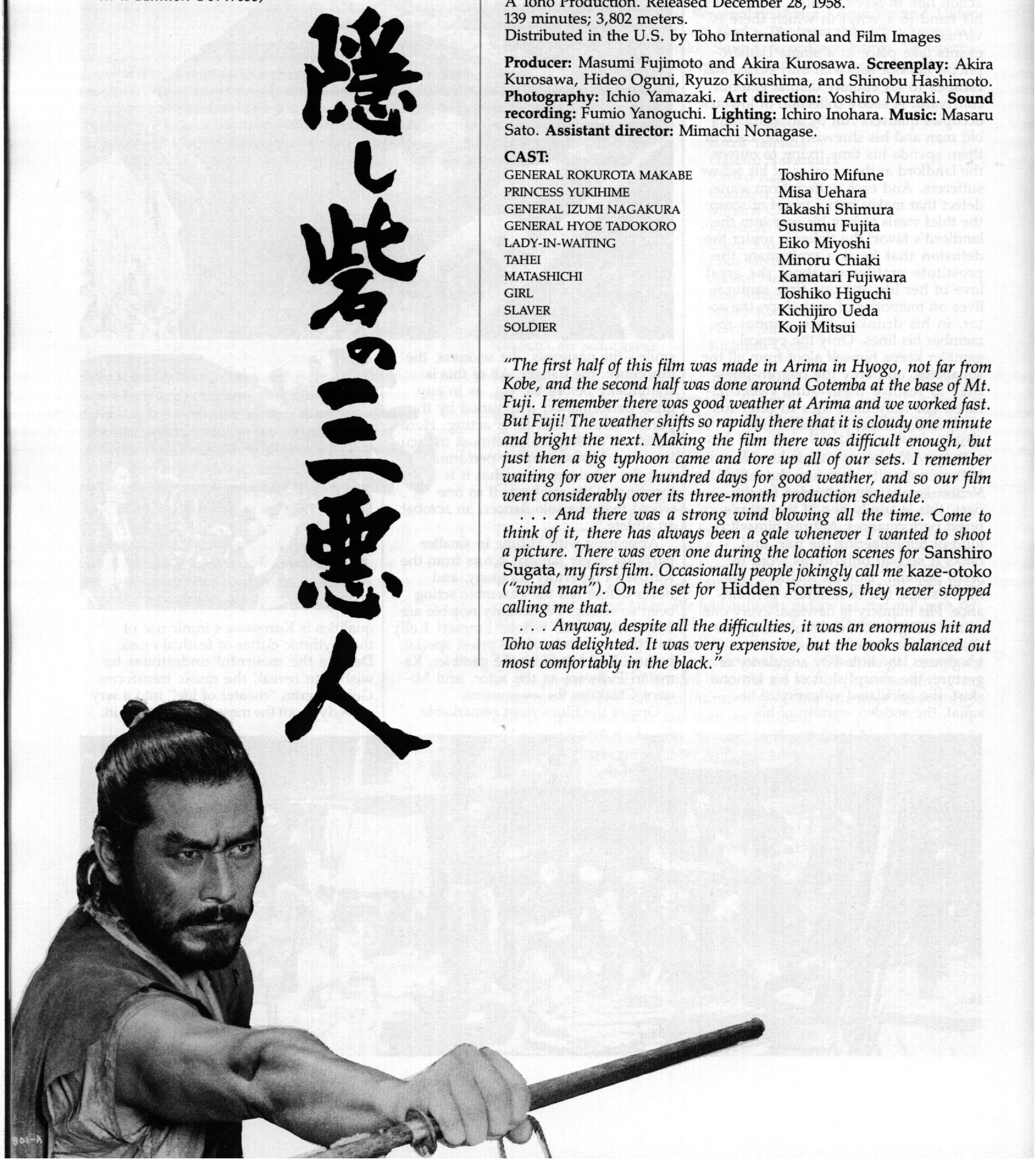
CAST:

GENERAL ROKUROTA MAKABE	Toshiro Mifune
PRINCESS YUKIHIME	Misa Uehara
GENERAL IZUMI NAGAKURA	Takashi Shimura
GENERAL HYOE TADOKORO	Susumu Fujita
LADY-IN-WAITING	Eiko Miyoshi
TAHEI	Minoru Chiaki
MATASHICHI	Kamatari Fujiwara
GIRL	Toshiko Higuchi
SLAVER	Kichijiro Ueda
SOLDIER	Koji Mitsui

"The first half of this film was made in Arima in Hyogo, not far from Kobe, and the second half was done around Gotemba at the base of Mt. Fuji. I remember there was good weather at Arima and we worked fast. But Fuji! The weather shifts so rapidly there that it is cloudy one minute and bright the next. Making the film there was difficult enough, but just then a big typhoon came and tore up all of our sets. I remember waiting for over one hundred days for good weather, and so our film went considerably over its three-month production schedule.

. . . And there was a strong wind blowing all the time. Come to think of it, there has always been a gale whenever I wanted to shoot a picture. There was even one during the location scenes for Sanshiro Sugata, *my first film. Occasionally people jokingly call me* kaze-otoko *("wind man"). On the set for* Hidden Fortress, *they never stopped calling me that.*

. . . Anyway, despite all the difficulties, it was an enormous hit and Toho was delighted. It was very expensive, but the books balanced out most comfortably in the black."



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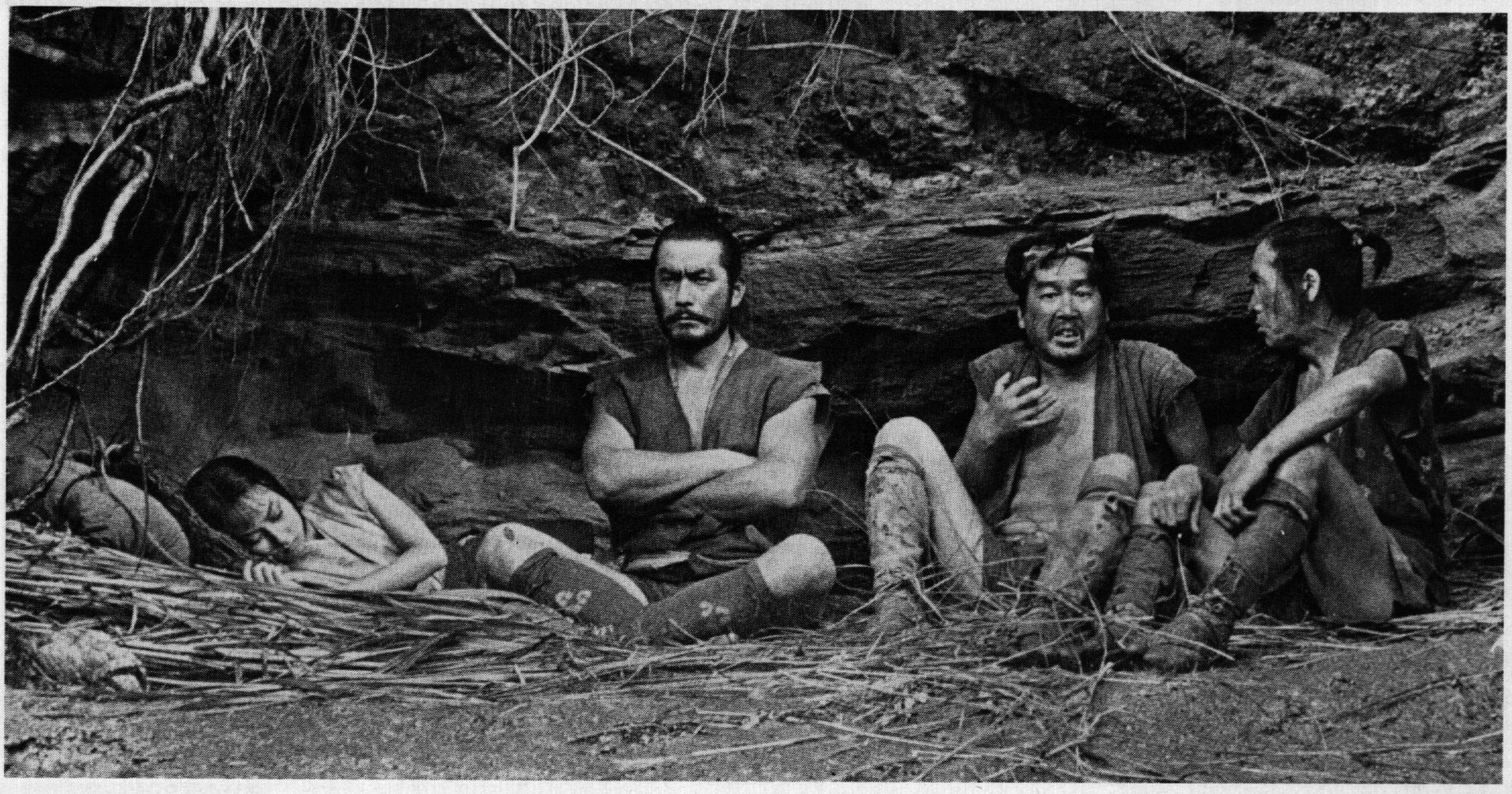
A familiar story: a princess under the protection of a brave and resourceful general is pursued by enemies of her clan, bent on capturing her treasure trove of gold. The general must find a way to carry her to safety in friendly territory. Along their escape, they come upon two peasants whom they press into service with promises of reward if they arrive securely at their destination. Just as they near safety, they are captured. Their captor, it turns out, had been humiliated in battle by the princess' guardian. Recognizing the justice of his captive's cause, he defects to her side and aids her escape. All make it to the promised land, the peasants get their reward, and presumably the princess lives happily ever after.

But this is not a simple fairytale. Kurosawa takes the elements of fairytale and the conventional stuff of Japanese period films, and mixes them into a grand farce. "It is as though Buñuel had made *The Mark of Zorro,*" says Donald Richie.

Kurosawa had several objectives in making *The Hidden Fortress.* This was to be the last picture on his Toho contract before he started his own production company, and he wanted to make a good boxoffice movie to repay the company's patience with his earlier, more difficult films. It was also his first film using Toho's newly developed Cinemascope process, for which he wanted a suitably grand and sweeping subject to display on the wide screen. (This was in fact the first Japanese film in 'scope.) Moreover, despite his fondness for the fantastic aspects of *chambara* (sword-fight) films, he deplored their conventional style and hoped to spoof the conventions. He did so with brilliant success. The picture was a boxoffice smash to boot.

What else about the story seems familiar? Well, if one turns the two peasants into robots, makes the defecting general into a mercenary, and transforms the horses into space-ships, you have some of the key ingredients of *Star Wars.* George Lucas does acknowledge a great admiration for Kurosawa's films, and a particular fondness for *Hidden Fortress.*



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1960

THE BAD SLEEP WELL

Warui yatsu hodo yoku nemuru

A Kurosawa Films/Toho Production. Released Sepember 4, 1960.
151 minutes; 4,123 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan Films and Toho International
Producers: Akira Kurosawa and Tomoyuji Tanaka. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, Shinobu Hashimoto, Hideo Oguni, Ryuzo Kikushima, and Eijiro Hisaita. **Photography:** Yuzuru Aizawa. **Art direction:** Yoshiro Muraki. **Sound recording:** Fumio Yanoguchi. **Lighting:** Ichiro Inohara. **Music:** Masaru Sato. **Assistant director:** Shiro Moritani.

Cast:

KOICHI NISHI, *Secretary to Iwabuchi*	Toshiro Mifune
ITAKURA, *his friend*	Takeshi Kato
IWABUCHI, *the company president*	Masayuki Mori
MORIYAMA, *administrative officer*	Takashi Shimura
SHIRAI, *contract officer*	Akira Nishimura
WADA, *accountant*	Kamatari Fujiwara
MIURA, *accountant*	Gen Shimizu
KEIKO, *Iwabuchi's daughter*	Kyoko Kagawa
TATSUO, *Iwabuchi's son*	Tatsuya Mihashi
KANEKO	Kyu Sazanka
NONAKA, *public prosecutor*	Chishu Ryu
OKAKURA	Seiji Miyaguchi
LAWYER	Nobuo Nakamura
COMMISSIONER	Susumu Fujita

"This was the first film made by Kurosawa Productions, my own unit which I run and finance myself. From this film on, everything was my own responsibility. Consequently, I wondered about what kind of film to make. Making one just to make money didn't appeal to me—one shouldn't take advantage of an audience.Instead, I wanted to make a film of some social significance. At last, I decided to do something about corruption, because it has always seemed to me that graft, bribery, etc., of a public level are among the worst crimes possible. These people hide behind the facade of some great organization and no one ever really knows how dreadful they are. Exposing them, I believed, was a socially significant act. And so I started this film.

But even while we were making it, I knew that it wasn't working out as I had planned and that this was because I was simply not telling and showing enough. Like the final scene with Mori on the telephone. This is the last of several calls, all apparently to the same person, someone very high in the Japanese government. That suggests, but it is not explicit enough. An even worse man is at the other end of that telephone line, but in Japan if you go any further than that you are bound to run into serious trouble. This came as a big surprise to me, and maybe the picture would have been better if I had been braver.

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A young man whose father had died several years earlier in a nasty bit of corporate intrigue—was it suicide or murder?—seeks vengeance upon those he believes responsible. He goes about it in a most unusual way: first, he takes another man's name, and then he marries the boss' daughter. The man, Koichi Nishi, has carefully ingratiated himself as the boss' secretary until such time as he believes he can carry out his revenge. The police are investigating charges against the company of corruption, and Nishi extracts from one bribery suspect a promise of help in his revenge in exchange for protection. He intimidates another accomplice into joining the plot. But his plans go awry when he actually falls in love with the pitiably crippled woman he had married for convenience. She, naively believing her father has reformed, unwittingly sets the trap for her husband's assassination.

The Bad Sleep Well gets a bit tangled in its own plot lines, but contains some remarkably inventive sequences that redeem the narrative's gyrations. The most spectacular is the opening sequence of the wedding reception for Nishi and his bride, Keiko. The ceremonies are interrupted when the police arrest one of the guests, a company official. Then an enormous wedding cake in the shape of the company's headquarters is wheeled into the room with a flower in the window from which Nishi's father had fallen to his death years earlier. In this twenty-minute sequence of unrelieved tension, Kurosawa contrasts more brilliantly than ever before the difference between illusion (everyone at the wedding is playing a role, disguising his true motivations) and the reality of the empty ritual being played out.

Polish film director Andrzej Wajda calls Nishi a reincarnation of Hamlet in modern Japan. Richie further elucidates the parallels: "Mifune/Hamlet's father has been killed by the man who becomes his own second father (father-in-law in the film, rather than step-father) and the hero's initial motivation is simple revenge. He loves Kagawa/Ophelia in his own way but this relationship to Mori/Claudius is of such strength that she is sacrified and her Laertes-like brother's attempts to avenge her are instrumental in bringing about the hero's downfall. Mifune has a Horatio-like friend and even a Polonius-like mentor (Fujiwara) whose advice he carefully disregards. He even arranges a kind of play (the opening wedding-sequence) in which to trap the conscience of the corporation president. The ending of both film and play is suitably Elizabethan, with many corpses and much scenery-chewing."

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1961

YOJIMBO

Yojimbo
(Also known as *The Bodyguard*)

用心棒

AWARDS: Venice Film Festival—Best Actor (Toshiro Mifune)

A Kurosawa Films/Toho Production. Released April 25, 1961.
110 minutes; 3,025 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan Films.

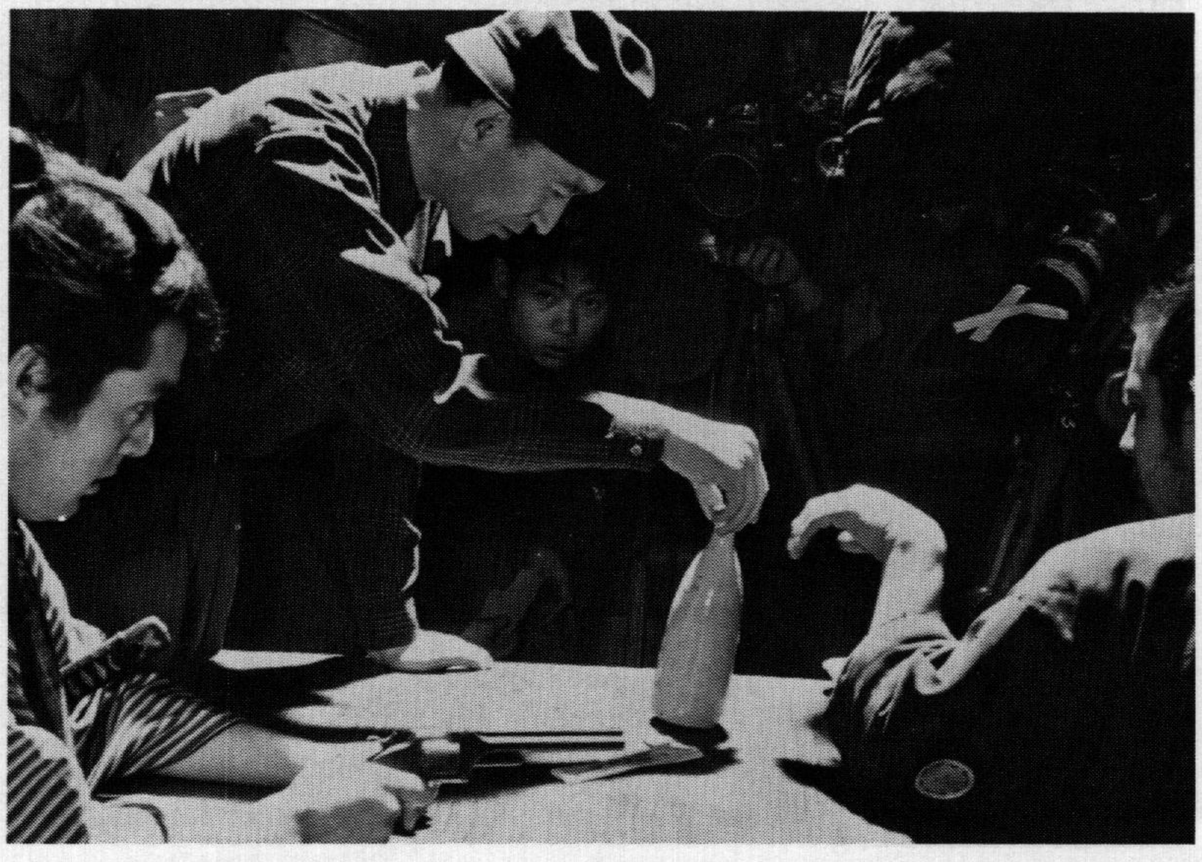
Producers: Tomoyuki Tanaka and Ryuzo Kikushima. **Screenplay:** Ryuzo Kikushima and Akira Kurosawa. **Photography:** Kazuo Miyagawa. **Art direction:** Yoshiro Muraki. **Sound recording:** Choshichiro Mikami. **Lighting:** Choshiro Ishii. **Music:** Masaru Sato. **Assistant director:** Shiro Moritani.

Cast:

SANJURO KUWABATAKE	Toshiro Mifune
GONJI, *the saké-seller*	Eijiro Tono
TAZAEMON, *the silk merchant*	Kamatari Fujiwara
TOKUEMON, *the saké merchant*	Takashi Shimura
SEIBEI, *Tazaemon's henchman*	Seizaburo Kawazu
ORIN, *Seibei's wife*	Isuzu Yamada
YOICHIRO, *their son*	Hiroshi Tachikawa
USHITORA, *Tokuemon's henchman*	Kyu Sazanka
UNOSUKE, *his younger brother*	Tatsuya Nakadai
INOKICHI, *his brother*	Daisuke Kato
HANSUKE	Ikio Sawamura
KUMA	Akira Nishimura
KOHEI, *a farmer*	Yoshio Tsuchiya
NUI, *his wife*	Yoko Tsukasa
HOMMA, *the ex-bodyguard*	Susumu Fujita

"For a long time I had wanted to make a really interesting film—and it finally turned into this one. The story is so ideally intriguing that it's surprising no one else ever thought of it. The subject is about rivalry on two sides, and both sides are equally bad. We all know what that is like. Here we are, weakly caught in the middle, and it is impossible to choose between the evils. Myself, I've always wanted somehow to stop such senseless battles of bad against bad. But we're all pretty weak, and I've never been able to. That is why the hero of this film is different from us. He is capable of standing squarely in the middle and stopping the fight. At any rate, that was the beginning of the film in my mind.

. . . It was an enormously popular hit. Everyone at the company said it was because of the swordplay. But that's not really so. The main reason for its appeal was the character of the hero and what he does. He is a real hero, with a real reason for fighting. And he really does *fight. He doesn't just stand by waving his sword."*



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Yojimbo is one of the most celebrated and influential of all Japanese films. It spawned the Italian "spaghetti-Western" films of the 1960s, beginning with its direct descendant *For a Fistful of Dollars*. That later Westerns should have imitated *Yojimbo* is not surprising, since the film itself seems inspired by the classic American genre. Kurosawa has acknowledged his debt to American Westerns: "Good Westerns are liked by everybody. Since humans are weak they want to see good people and great heroes. Westerns have been done over and over again, and in the process evolved a kind of grammar all their own. I have learned from this grammar of the Western."

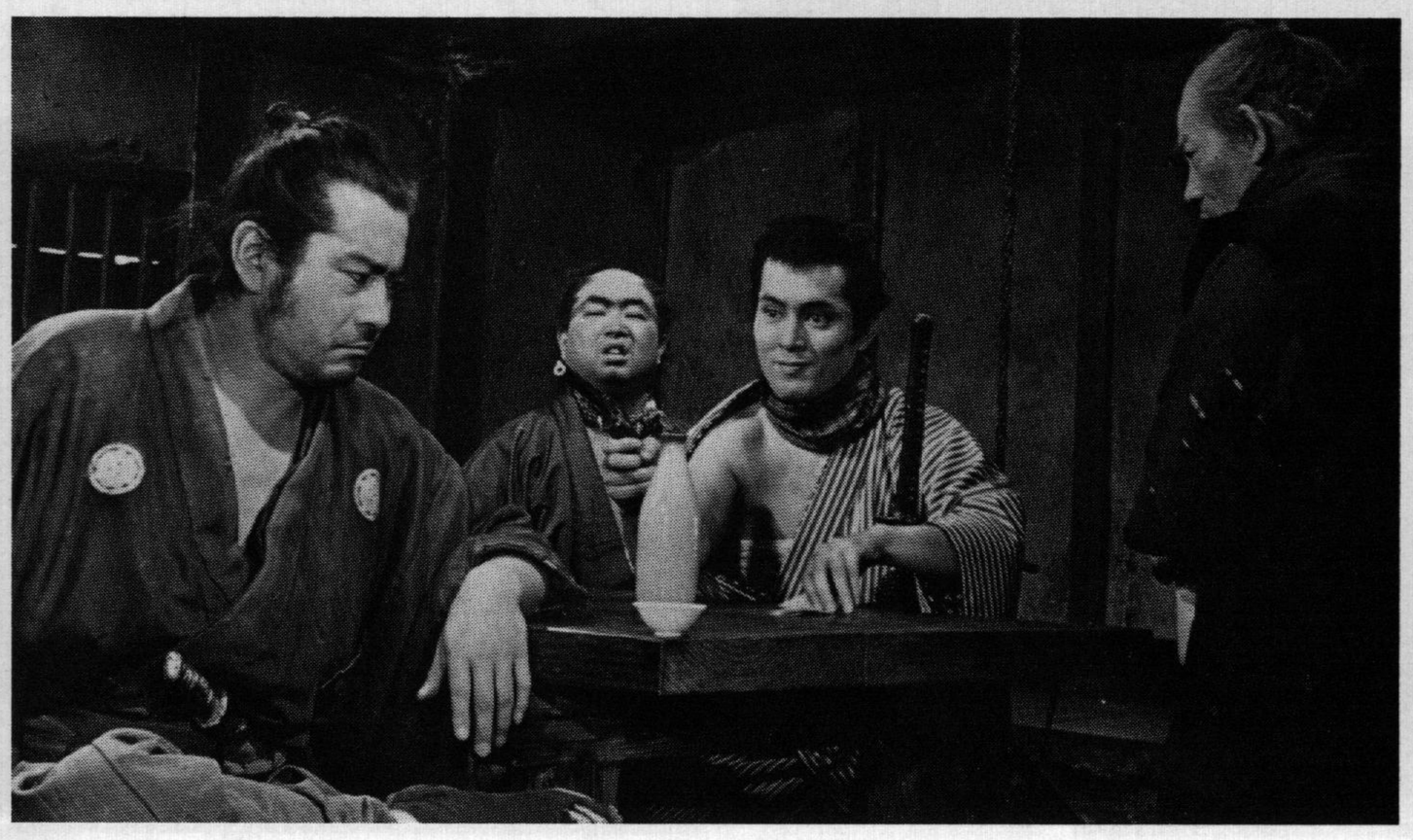
An itinerant swordsman wanders into a strife-torn village on the outskirts of nowhere, where the local saké merchant and silk merchant are belly-deep in a murderous struggle to gain control of the town. He hires himself out as a bodyguard, or *yojimbo*, first to one party, then to the other, and in the end manages to extract himself adroitly from the slaughter that ensues.

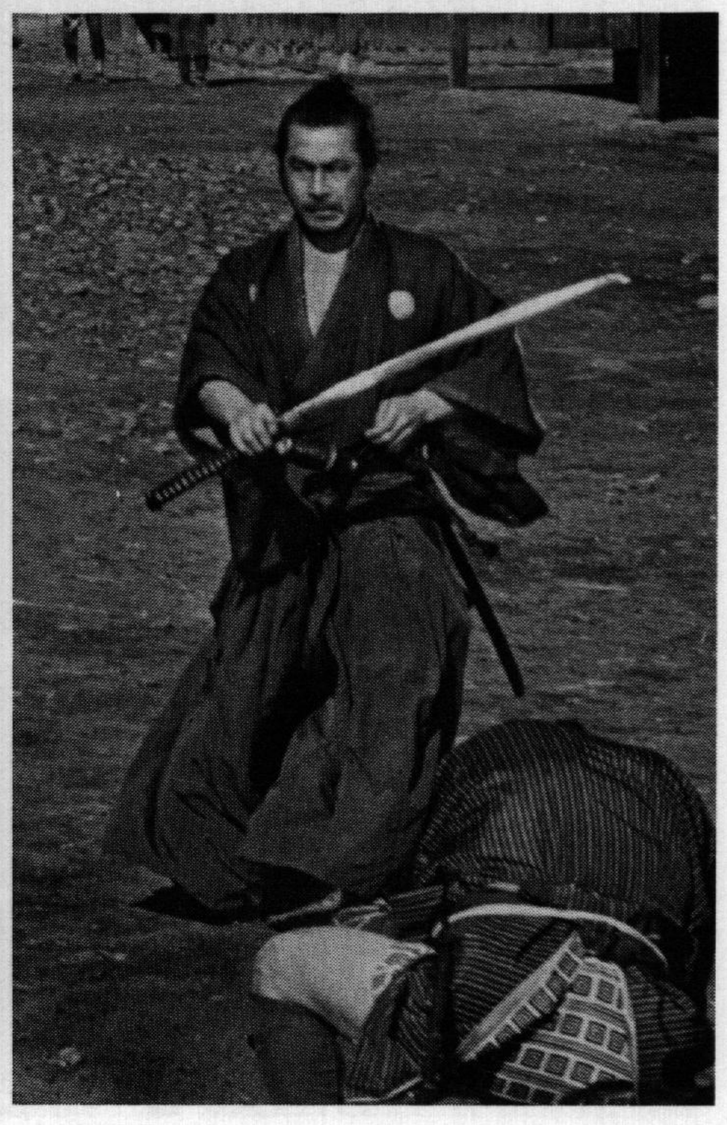
Calling *Yojimbo* "the first great shaggy-man movie," Pauline Kael has written of it: "We would expect violence carried to extremity to be sickening; Kurosawa in a triumph of bravura technique, makes it explosively comic and exhilarating." Every character is a monster, a grotesque, and the hero is no better than the vicious townsmen he hoodwinks. His only virtue is that he is successful at playing one evil off against the other. As Richie has put it: ". . . in this picture there is suddenly no dilemma. Mifune's only problem is how to get enough to eat and find something interesting to do. . . . For reasons entirely non-moral (he is quixotic, he is easily bored, he likes a good time) he decides to help the bad destroy each other. This accomplished, still unmoved, by no means a samaritan, without a civic thought in his animal-head, he can walk away and forget about the whole thing."

Yojimbo is generally considered the best filmed of all of Kurosawa's pictures. Kurosawa, thoroughly pleased with cinematographer Kazuo Miyagawa's work on *Rashomon*, had not had another chance to work with him since they were at different studios. Yet for *Yojimbo* he was able to secure the famous cameraman's services, one of Miyagawa's rare departures from Daiei. The film's story and setting—two feuding clans opposing each other from opposite ends of a small, grubby town—were perfectly suited to the widescreen format, and Miyagawa's photography remains a model for the use of Cinemascope technique.

"Kurosawa's technical mastery, freshness of vision, and dramatic instinct are of the first order. The intensity of his style is built largely on minimal cutting, and insistence on staying with *the shot until he is forced to change or it is obligatorily interrupted by another; he often follows a character in close-up who takes us to another close-up. He has also developed effective ways of having actors enter a film shot without letting them seem like stage entrances. . . . He composes good pictures, yet his pictures never delay the film, they augment it. He uses light and air subtly (the gray wind-whipped square in which the two gangs line up). He punctuates with vivid images."*

—Stanley Kauffmann
A WORLD ON FILM





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1962

SANJURO

Tsubaki Sanjuro

A Kurosawa Films/Toho Production. Released January 1, 1962.
96 minutes; 2,685 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by Toho International.

Producers: Tomoyuki Tanaka and Ryuzo Kikushima. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, Ryuzo Kikushima, and Hideo Oguni, after a novel by Shugoro Yamamoto. **Photography:** Fukuzo Koizumi and Takao Saito. **Art direction:** Yoshiro Muraki. **Sound recording:** Wataru Konuma and Hisashi Shimonaga. **Music:** Masaru Sato. **Assistant director:** Shiro Moritani. **Swordplay choreography:** Ryu Kuze.

Cast:

SANJURO TSUBAKI	Toshiro Mifune
HANBEI MUROTO	Tatsuya Nakadai
IORI IZAKA, *leader of the young samurai*	Yuzo Kayama
SAMURAI	Akihiko Hirata
	Kunie Tanaka
	Hiroshi Tachikawa
	Tatsuhiko Hari
	Tatsuyoshi Ehara
	Kenzo Matsui
	Yoshio Tsuchiya
	Akira Kubo
KUROFUJI	Takashi Shimura
TAKEBAYASHI	Kamatari Fujiwara
KIKUI	Masao Shimizu
HIS WIFE	Takako Irie
CHIDORI, *his daughter*	Reiko Dan
THE SPY	Keiju Kobayashi

"Originally this was a story by Shugoro Yamamoto. I had changed it around, and actually finished the script before doing Yojimbo. *In the original version, the hero is not very good with the sword but he is smart and he fights with his head. After* Yojimbo *was such a success, however, we decided to do another film like it, and so this not-so-tough samurai became the hero, Sanjuro. I rewrote the script and was going to give it to Hiromichi Horikawa to direct, but again the company decided I should do it. So, I wrote the script over again and Sanjuro became more athletic, better at sword-fighting. Eventually, we only used a third of the original script, but we added lots of action that hadn't been in the original. . . . and among the things sacrificed was my original idea of using color just for the section where the red and white camellias float down the stream.*

Personally, I think it very different from Yojimbo. *Japanese audiences do too. The youngsters loved* Yojimbo, *but it is the adults who like* Sanjuro. *I think they like it because it's the funnier and really the more appealing of the two films."*

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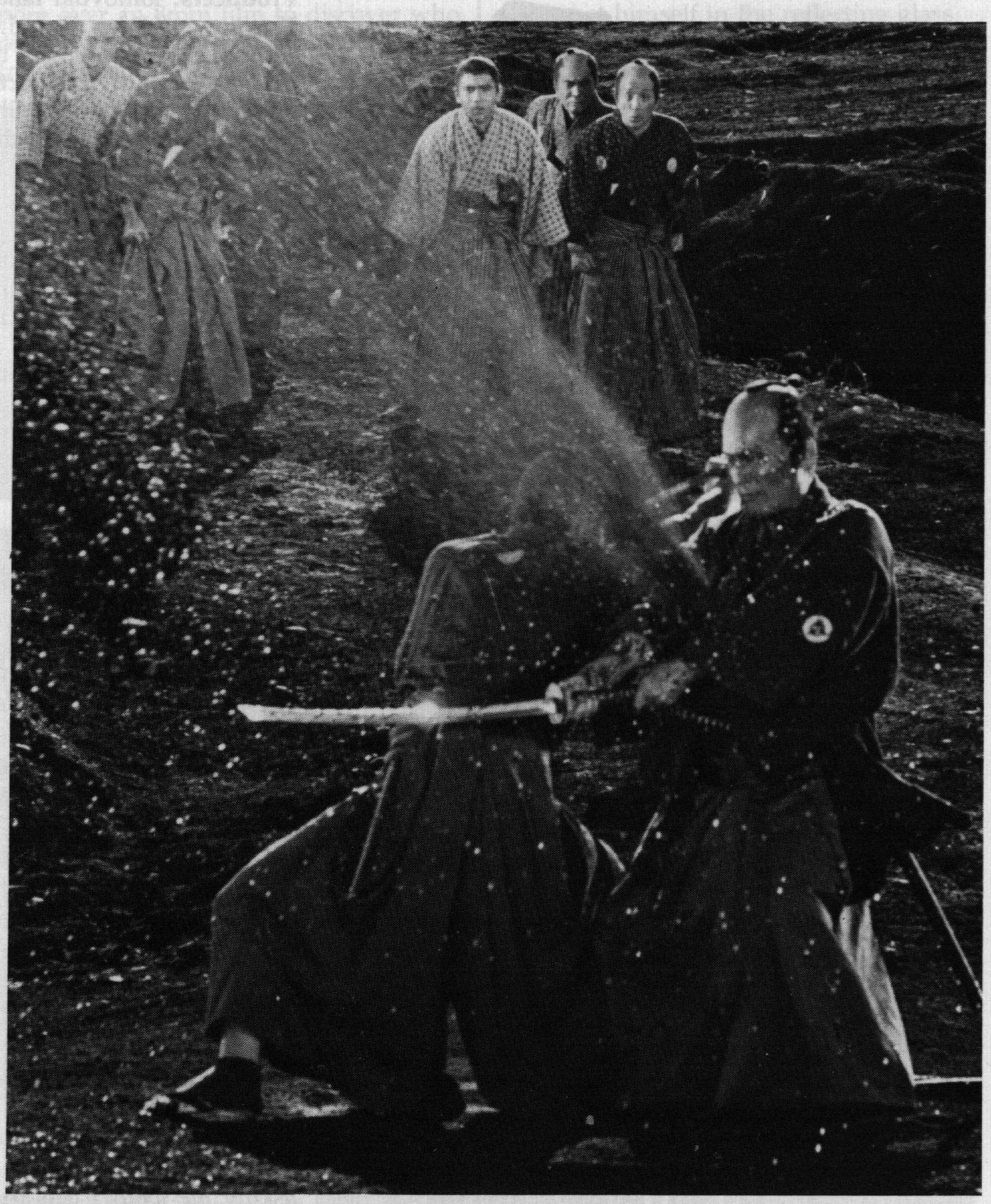
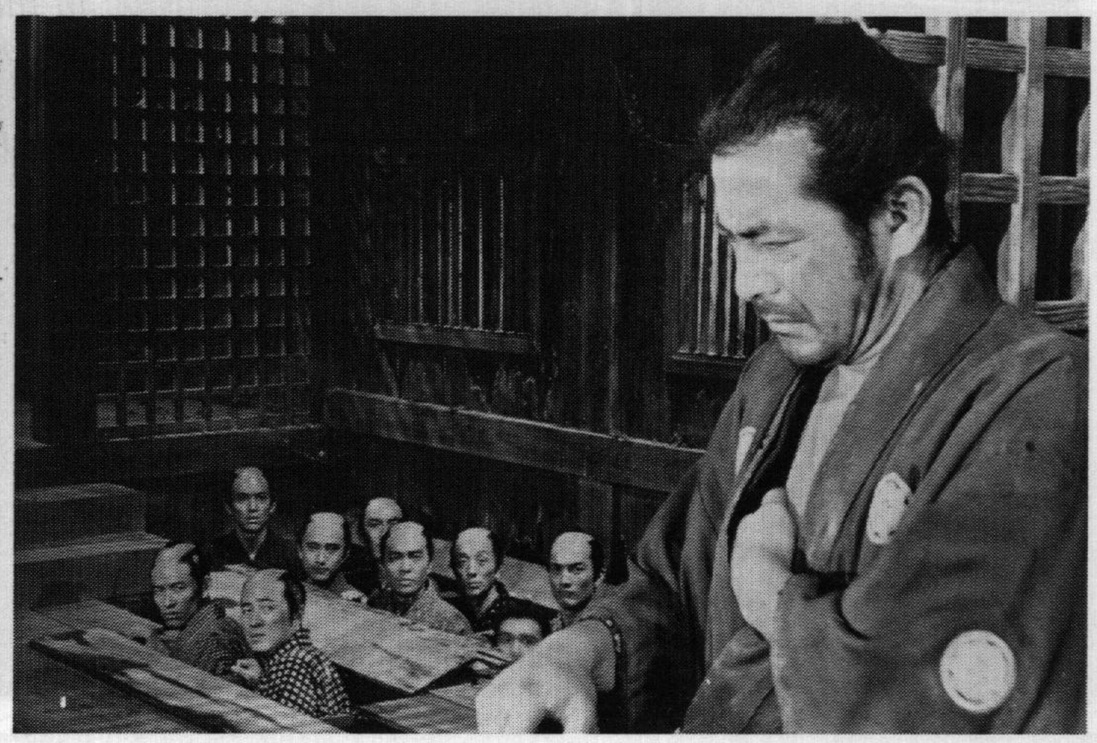
"People aren't what they seem to be," says a character early on in *Sanjuro*, sounding one of Kurosawa's familiar themes. And in this samurai comedy, they certainly are not. A band of young, inexperienced samurai gathered for a secret meeting in a temple find a flea-bitten vagrant in their midst. The youngsters, who have been petitioning their clan authorities for certain reforms, have entrusted their case to the clan superintendent. Their uninvited guest, who is really a samurai despite his unlikely appearance, warns them that the superintendant is really their enemy. He proceeds to lead them in a campaign of intrigue against the corrupt leaders of the clan. They must recapture their leader's kidnapped uncle and unseat the villains who have unscrupulously taken control of the clan's affairs. In the end, the evil superintendent is ousted and a chamberlain who had been under suspicion is vindicated. Following a brief but spectacular swordfight, the unconventional roving samurai brusquely takes his leave.

Sanjuro is a sequel to *Yojimbo*—a parody of a parody. Though the stories in the two films are not directly related, Kurosawa carried over his main character from one film to the next. In *Yojimbo*, when his prospective employers ask his name, the bodyguard stares out a window overlooking a mulberry field and replies, "Kuwabatake Sanjuro—going on forty," *kuwabatake* meaning mulberry-field and *sanjuro* meaning, roughly, thirty. In a parallel scene from *Sanjuro*, the scruffy hero stares out the window at a camellia in full bloom and identifies himself as "Tsubaki (Camellia) Sanjuro—going on forty." It is an abundance of such running gags and cross-references which gave *Sanjuro* a tone of familiar resonance.

"In execution the film cannot be faulted. It seems to me flawlessly directed, excellently acted by, among others, Mifune and Tatsuya Nakadai. The final, silent confrontation of the two, which is snapped by slashing violence, is drama at its source."

—Stanley Kauffmann
A WORLD ON FILM





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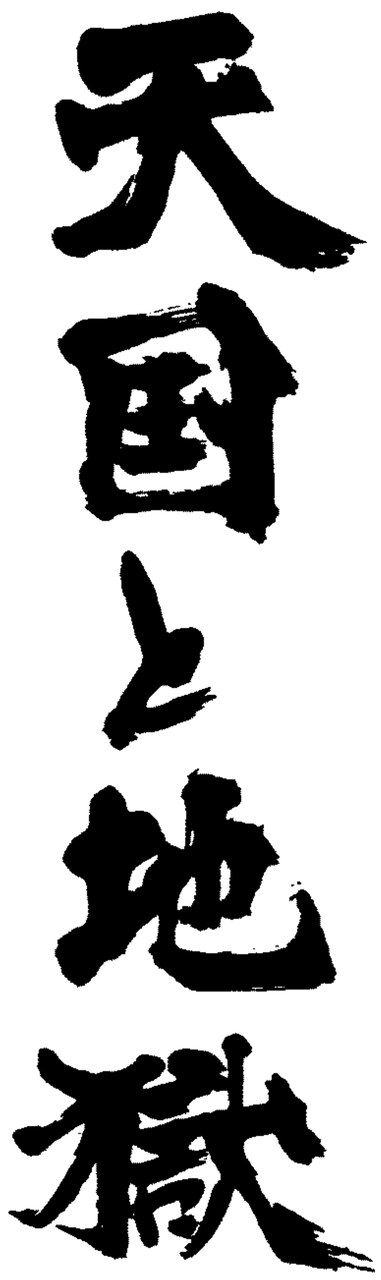
HIGH AND LOW

Tengoku to jigoku
(Also known as *Heaven and Hell* or *The Ransom*)



A Kurosawa Films/Toho Production. Released March 1, 1963.
143 minutes; 3,924 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by Toho International.

Producers: Tomoyuki Tanaka and Ryuzo Kikushima. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, Hideo Oguni, Ryuzo Kikushima, and Eijiro Hisaita, after the novel *King's Ransom* by Ed McBain. **Photography:** Asakazu Nakai and Takao Saito. **Art direction:** Yoshiro Muraki. **Sound recording:** Fumio Yanoguchi and Hisashi Shimonaga. **Lighting:** Hiromitsu Mori. **Music:** Masaru Sato. **Assistant director:** Shiro Moritani.

Cast:

KINGO GONDO	Toshiro Mifune
REIKO, *his wife*	Kyoko Kagawa
KAWANISHI, *her brother*	Tatsuya Mihashi
AOKI, *the chauffeur*	Yutaka Sada
INSPECTOR TOKURO	Tatsuya Nakadai
DIRECTOR	Takashi Shimura
COMMISSIONER	Susumu Fujita
DETECTIVE TAGUCHI	Kenjiro Ishiyama
DETECTIVE ARAI	Isao Kimura
DETECTIVE NAKAO	Takeshi Kato
DETECTIVE MURATA	Yoshio Tsuchiyama
DETECTIVE SHIMADA	Hiroshi Unayama
NEWSPAPER REPORTER	Koji Mitsui
GINJI TAKEUCHI, *the kidnapper*	Tsutomu Yamazaki

"I used only a very small part of Ed McBain's novel King's Ransom, *which to be perfectly blunt is not very good. My idea was just to develop its sense of threat, and leave the rest aside. Its use of point-of-view, also, is terrific, and that's about all I took from it.*

The punishment for kidnapping in Japan is really rather light, you know. In fact, I had often wondered what would happen in the case of a child being kidnapped. . . . Some friends of mine almost went through this same experience, having received threatening letters saying that their child would be kidnapped. That incident really frightened me. Then, when I read the novel, I decided to make a film on the subject. Ever since making this picture, I have received all sorts of complaints and reprimands accusing me of teaching criminals how to go about kidnapping children.

About the scene were Gondo throws the ransom money from the toilet window on the train—I tried to figure out all the details on how to do this by riding the train with a map of the area outside and a blueprint of the train's interior. Sometimes I'd also use the phone on the train to call the National Railways. This ended with them finally asking me what I was up to. What I learned, though, was that only in the toilet did the window open all the way. The design called for it to open only a few centimeters. The two things I discovered from all this were how to drop the money and how the phone on board the train could be used as an important plot device."

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The son of a wealthy executive's chauffeur is kidnapped—by mistake, the executive's own son was the target—just as the executive had gathered all his resources for a bid to take over his company. The money is used instead to ransom the boy, under the careful supervision of the police. The hunt is then on for the kidnapper, a hospital intern and dope dealer who lives in the slums of Yokohama and has always gazed up with jealous rage at the executive's house high on a bluff overlooking the city. The first half of the film takes place almost entirely in "heaven," the executive's house on the hill. From there it descends into "hell" as the police track the culprit through the city, step by agonizing step.

High and Low is a detective drama in terms not only of its story, but also its style. Everything about it has to do with detecting things visually. It abounds in windows, lenses and mirrors which reflect or refract all the action. In one sequence, the detectives pore over an 8mm film to discover who picked up the ransom money thrown from a train. In the film's most startling sequence a puff of telltale smoke billows red out of what is otherwise pure black-and-white. And in the film's harrowing final scene, the exhausted father is left staring at himself in the reflecting glass separating himself from the kidnapper in a prison visiting-room.

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1965

RED BEARD

Akahige

AWARDS: Moscow Film Festival—Film Workers Union Special Award
Venice Film Festival—San Giorgio Prize

A Kurosawa Films/Toho Production. Released April 3, 1965.
185 minutes; 5,069 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by MacMillan Films.

Producers: Tomoyuki Tanaka and Ryuzo Kikushima. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, Masato Ide, Hideo Oguni, and Ryuzo Kikushima, after the novel *Akahige shinryodan* by Shugoro Yamamoto. **Photography:** Asakazu Nakai and Takao Saito. **Art direction:** Yoshiro Muraki. **Sound recording:** Shin Watari and Hisashi Shimonaga. **Lighting:** Hiromitsu Mori. **Music:** Masaru Sato. **Assistant Director:** Shiro Moritani.

Cast:

KYOJO NIIDE (AKAHIGE/RED BEARD)	Toshiro Mifune
NOBORU YASUMOTO	Yuzo Kayama
HANDAYU MORI	Yoshio Tsuchiya
GENZO TSUGAWA	Tatsuyoshi Ehara
OSUGI	Reiko Dan
THE MAD WOMAN	Kyoko Kagawa
ROKUSUKE	Kamatari Fujiwara
OKUNI	Akemi Negishi
SAHACHI	Tsutomu Yamazaki
ONAKA	Miyuki Kuwano
GOHEIJI	Eijiro Tono
TOKUBEI IZUMIYA	Takashi Shimura
OTOYO	Terumi Niki
KIN	Haruko Sugimura
CHOJI	Yoshitaka Zushi

"After finishing Sanjuro, *I was looking for another project and happened to read Shugoro Yamamoto's novel* Red Beard's Cure. *At first, when I began working on the script, I intended to give it to Hiromichi Horikawa to direct, but as I wrote I became more and more absorbed in it until finally I decided to direct it myself.*

The scenario is completely different from the original novel. One important role, for example—Terumi Niki's Otoyo—isn't even in the novel, but as I wrote I was reminded of the quality of Nelli in Dostoyevsky's The Insulted and the Injured. *I tried to impart something of Nelli to the character who became Otoyo in our film.*

. . . I was determined to experiment with Red Beard, *to try to push movie-making to its very limits. By this I don't mean techniques or mechanical possibilities, but rather its content and its power to move audiences. I wanted to convince the public that movie-making was not on a downward trend. . . I wanted to make something that my audience would* want *to see, something so magnificent that people would just have to see it."*

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In the latter days of the Tokugawa Shogunate (around the middle of the 19th century), a young doctor full of "Dutch learning," as the study of Western medicine and science was known at the time, becomes an intern at a charity hospital run by a benevolent tyrant known as Red Beard. The hospital, at Koishikawa in downtown Tokyo, is an outpost for hopeless cases, mostly tubercular patients. The inmates are victims of poverty, neglect and exhaustion, and the dynamic Red Beard offers them hope as well as medical treatment. The young doctor, Yasumoto, at first uncooperative and resentful of his lowly assignment, comes to take a different view of his profession: his job must be more than analyzing the physical symptoms of disease, he realizes; he must treat the human spirit as well.

Once again Kurosawa presents us with a medicine man as his hero. Red Beard, like Sanada in *Drunken Angel* and the reticent Fujisaki in *The Quiet Duel*, is not a nice man to all appearances. But, like the other doctors, his brusque demeanor hides a deeper goodness. And here, more than in the earlier two films, the doctor is meant to be seen as a teacher, a wise man, a model human being who does not talk about compassion but demonstrates it in all his actions.

"Like the hero of Sanshiro Sugata, *like the detective in* Stray Dog, *and the shoe manufacturer in* High and Low, *the young doctor learns:* Red Beard *too is the story of an education. Kayama learns that medical theory (illusion) is different from a man dying (reality); that—as the picture later reveals—what he had always thought himself (upright, honest, hard-working) must now be reconciled with what he finds himself to also be (arrogant, selfish, insincere); and, the most important, that evil itself is the most humanly common thing in this world; that* good *is uncommon. . . .*

After Red Beard *had opened, was still playing to packed houses, and was proving to be indeed just the kind of picture that people would want to see, something 'so magnificent that people would just have to see it,' I told Kurosawa that I sensed that he had come to some sort of conclusion, some sort of resting place. He had pushed his style to what appeared to be its ultimate. At the same time he had continued and, it would seem, completed the theme which has been his throughout his entire film career. It might even be called the summation of his work because in* Red Beard *he had vindicated his humanism and his compassion, he had shown that only after the negative (evil) has been fully experienced can the positive, the good, joy itself, be seen as the power it still remains; that this wisdom was offered in a film filled with true sentiment, with the fact that in all of our glory, in all of our foolishness, we are—after all—human; further, that evil itself is merely human, after all, and that the good then lies in our realizing this and acting upon it.*

Kurosawa listened to all of this patiently but when I was about to launch into examples, he gently interrupted me with: "Well, I don't know much about all of that—there might be something in it. I don't know. What I do know is that every picture I've done has come out of something that has happened to me personally. . ."

—Donald Richie
THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA

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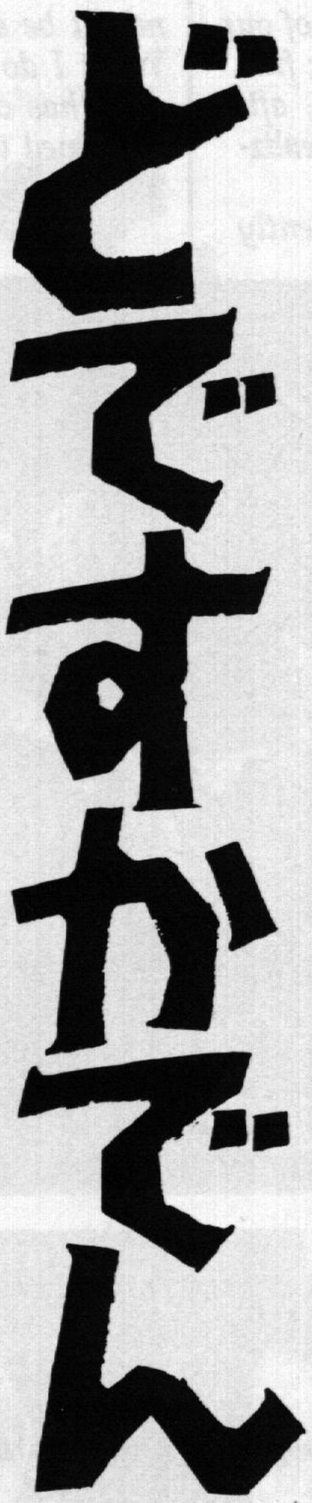
1970

DODESKADEN

Dodeskaden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AWARDS: Moscow Film Festival—Soviet Filmmakers Association Special Award
Japan Cultural Festival Award

A Yonki no Kai/Toho Production. Released October 31, 1970.
126 minutes; 3,447 meters
Distributed in the U.S. by Films Incorporated (Janus Collection).

Producer: Yoichi Matsue and Akira Kurosawa. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa, Hideo Oguni, and Shinobu Hashimoto after a collection of stories by Shugoro Yamamoto. **Photography:** Takao Saito and Yasumichi Fukuzawa. **Art direction:** Yoshiro and Shinobu Muraki. **Sound recording:** Fumio Yanoguchi. **Lighting:** Hiromitsu Mori. **Music:** Toru Takemitsu. **Assistant director:** Kenjiro Omori.

Cast:

ROKU-CHAN	Yoshitaka Zushi
OKUNI, *his mother*	Kin Sugai
SHIMA	Junzaburo Ban
His wife	Kyoko Tange
His guests	Michio Hino
	Tappei Shimokawa
	Keishi Furuyama
MASUDA	Hisashi Igawa
TATSU, *his wife*	Hideko Okiyama
KAWAGUCHI	Kunie Tanaka
YOSHIE, *his wife*	Jitsuko Yoshimura
RYOTARO	Shinsuke Minami
MISAO, *his wife*	Yoko Kusunoki
KYOTA	Tatsuo Matsumura
His wife	Imari Tsuji
His stepdaughter	Tomoko Yamazaki
OKABE	Masahiko Kametani
THE BEGGAR	Noboru Mitani
His son	Hiroyuki Kawase
HEI, *the blind man*	Hiroshi Akutagawa
OCHO, *his wife*	Tomoko Naraoka
TAMBA	Atsushi Watanabe
KUMAMBA	Jerry Fujio
THE THIEF	Sanji Kojima
THE VEGETABLE MAN	Masahiko Tanimura
THE PAINTER	Kazuo Kato
THE OLD MAN	Kamatari Fujiwara
GIRL	Akemi Negishi
BAR GIRL	Michiko Araki
COOK	Shoichi Kuwayama

". . . If you were to ask what sort of mood I was in when I directed this picture, I think I'd have to say I was emotionally drained. It is a story of slum dwellers, but by that time there wasn't a single slum left in Tokyo that I could use for a location. What we did was to build a "location set" at a garbage dump in Horie-cho in the Edogawa ward of Tokyo. In the midst of all that refuse we spent our days building roads, piling up the junk, and building a set of strange looking houses. As we worked on the set, the film itself gradually took shape.

When we started shooting and finally got Roku-chan's trolley running, everything proceeded in a very relaxed atmosphere. I've never been so relaxed working on a film. Even in the snapshots I see myself smiling; there's not one of me with an angry look. In any case, I was always telling the staff to make things light, bright, and cheery. Even the dignified music I had asked Toru Takemitsu to compose came out light, bright and bouncy."

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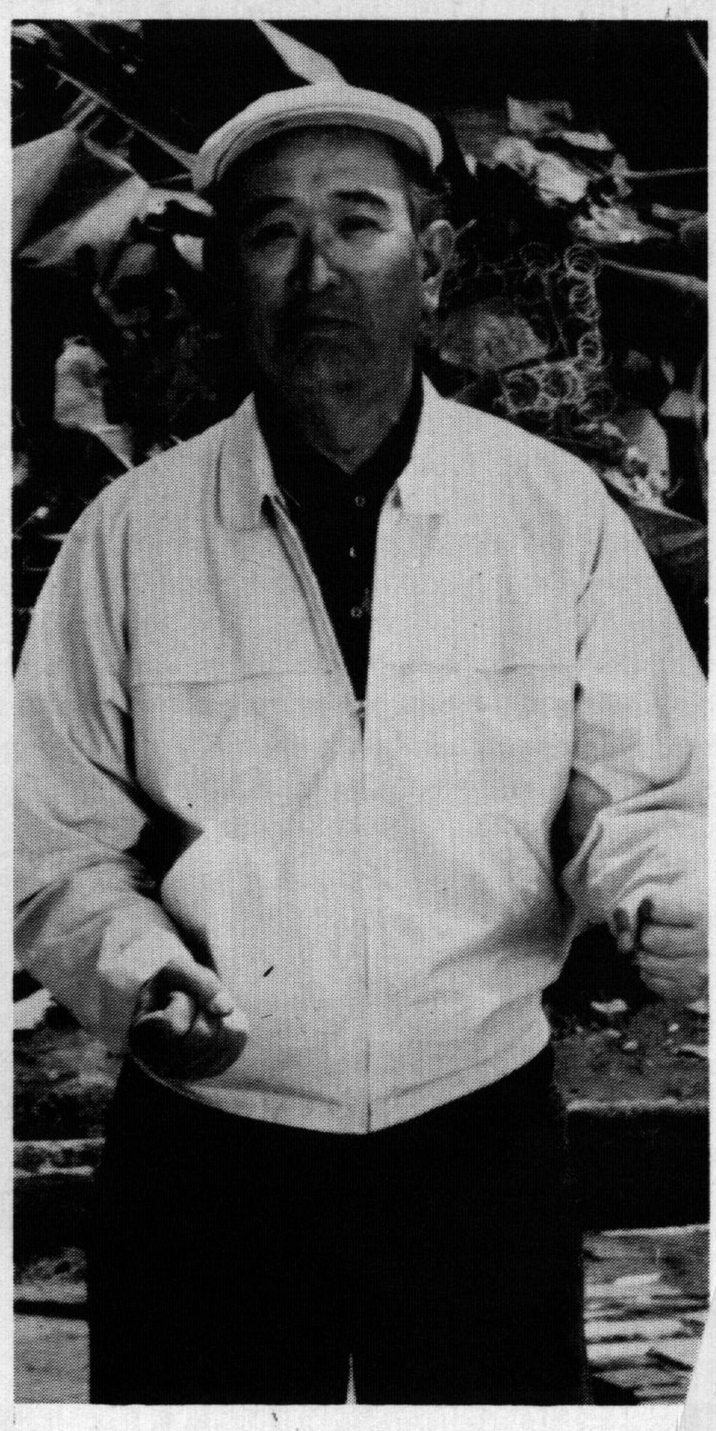

Kurosawa has often said that a question running through all of his films is "Why aren't human beings kinder to each other?" He has never given that question more direct expression than in *Dodeskaden*.

His first film in color—brilliant primary colors—is about the residents of a Tokyo slum. One of the denizens of the area is a retarded boy (Yoshitaka Zushi, who played the little thief Chobo in *Red Beard*) with dreams of becoming a streetcar motorman. He chugs his way through the neighborhood's scrap heaps imicking a trolley's clacking: "*. . .do-den, dodeskaden, dodeskaden. . .*"

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DERSU UZALA

デルス・ウザーラ

AWARDS: Moscow Film Festival—Gold Medal
International Film Critics Award
Academy Award—Best Foreign Language Film

A Mosfilm/Nippon Herald Production. Released August 2, 1975.
140 minutes; 3,830 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by New World Pictures

Producer: Nikolai Shizov and Yoichi Matsue. **Screenplay** by Akira Kurosawa and Yuri Nagibin from Vladimir Arseniev's novel. **Photography:** Asakazu Nakai, Yuri Gantman, and Fyodor Dobronravov; **Art director:** Yuri Raksha. **Sound:** Olga Bulkov. **Music:** Isaac Swarts. **Assistant directors:** Teruyo Nogami, Vladimir Vasilev, and Norio Minoshima.

Cast:

DERSU UZALA	Maxim Munzuk
VLADIMIR ARSENIEV	Yuri Solomine
His wife	S. Danilchenko
His son, Vova	Dima Kortishev

". . . All the Soviet film people applauded at the end of the first screening of the completed film. At that moment I felt very relieved, and could finally tell myself that everything had turned out alright.

It was difficult to leave all those I'd worked so hard with for so long, and it made me very sad to think that with the film completed the staff and the actors would all go off to other jobs.

Looking back on it now, the toughest part of this picture was capturing Nature on film. It's not as though you can just go out whenever you want and say ' roll 'em!' For another thing, autumn that year in Siberia was very short. Of course, there wasn't anything we could do about that so we just fixed the script and used every technique at our disposal to get what we needed. I think what we got is unusually interesting, too."

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In the early years of this century, a Russian army captain and his teams of surveyors come upon an old Mongolian hunter in the forests of Siberia. The old man, Dersu, agrees to become their guide. He teaches them not only how to find their way through his vast and rugged terrain, but his simple philosophy of life: respect all living things, for all of Nature's elements possess the spirit of life; man cannot conquer Nature but can survive only by living in harmony with it. At the end of the mission, the captain and Dersu part tearfully.

Five years later the captain and his men return to Siberia. By happy coincidence they once again find Dersu. During this expedition, Dersu shoots at a tiger that has been following the group and soon falls into deep depression: His hostile action has offended the gods of the forest. It also becomes apparent that the old fellow is losing his eyesight. Believing he is no longer welcome in the forest, Dersu accepts the captain's offer to live with him in Khabarovsk. Despite the hospitality of his hosts, Dersu is unsuited for life in "civilization". He returns to the forest. The captain receives a telegram saying the old hunter has been found dead and he hurries off to bury his friend.

The familiar Kurosawa themes are here—the teacher/pupil relationship, the value of kindness—in a new setting. Kurosawa has always said that he prefers extremes of climate, which is evident in so many of his films—the stifling heat of *Stray Dog*, the torrential rains of *Seven Samurai*, the rolling fog of *Throne of Blood*—where climate served as a metaphor for his characters' predicaments. But here, climate *becomes* the theme. In every sense of the word it is his most atmospheric film, and Nature is its protagonist.

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1980

KAGEMUSHA: THE SHADOW WARRIOR

Kagemusha

AWARDS: Cannes International Film Festival—Grand Prize

A Toho/Kurosawa Films/Twentieth Century Fox Production.
Released April 24, 1980.
159 minutes; 4,341 meters.
Distributed in the U.S. by Films Incorporated (20th Century Fox)

Executive Producers: Akira Kurosawa and Tomoyuki Tanaka. **Associate producer:** Teruyo Nogami. **Executive producers of the international version:** Francis Coppola and George Lucas. **Assistant producer** (international version): Audie Bock. **Production coordinator:** Inoshiro Honda. **Screenplay:** Akira Kurosawa and Masato Ide. **Photography:** Takao Saito, Masaharu Ueda, Kazuo Miyagawa, and Asakazu Nakai. **Art direction:** Yoshiro Muraki. **Sound recording:** Fumio Yanoguchi. **Lighting:** Takeshi Sano. **Music:** Shinichiro Ikebe. **Assistant directors:** Hideyuki Inoue, Takao Ohgawara, Takashi Koizumi.

Cast:

SHINGEN TAKEDA AND HIS DOUBLE	Tatsuya Nakadai
NOBUKADO, *Shingen's younger brother*	Tsutomu Yamazaki
KATSUYORI, *Shingen's son*	Kenichi Hagiwara
TAKEMARU, *Katsuyori's son*	Kota Yui
YAMAGATA, *commander of Takeda Clan armies*	Shuji Otaki
NOBUHARA BABA, *Takeda Clan general*	Hideo Murata
MASATOYA NAITO, *Takeda Clan general*	Takayuji Shiho
DANJO KOSAKA, *Takeda Clan general*	Osamu Sugimori
MASATANE HARA, *Takeda Clan general*	Noboru Shimizu
KASUSUKE ATABE, *Takeda Clan general*	Koji Shimizu
NOBUSHIGE OYAMADA, *Takeda Clan general*	Sen Yamamoto
SOHACHIRO TSUCHIYA, *Shingen's servant*	Jimpachi Nezu
ZENJIRO AMEMIYA, *Shingen's servant*	Kai Ato
JINGORO HARA, *Shingen's servant*	Yutaka Shimaka
OKURA AMARI, *Shingen's page*	Eiichi Kanakubo
MATAICHI TOMONO, *Shingen's page*	Yugo Miyazaki
OKUNOKATA, *Shingen's consort*	Mitsuko Baisho
OTSUYANOKATA, *Shingen's concubine*	Kaori Momoi
NOBUNAGA ODA	Daisuke Ryu
IEYASU TOKUGAWA	Masayuki Yui
KENSHIN UESUGI	Toshihiko Shimizu
SHINGEN'S DOCTOR	Kamatari Fujiwara
SPIES	Toshiaki Tanabe
	Yoshimitsu Yamaguchi
	Takashi Ebata
SNIPER	Akihiko Sugizaki

"In the climactic battle scenes, the samurai of the Takeda clan go toward their death as if it were a kind of festival. These men were Buddhists. They believed in the existence of another world. If their life here below was worthy and admirable, their place in the afterworld was secure. Through their choice of clothing, armor, and decorated helmets, they expressed their sensitivity to beauty as well as their aspirations for life after death. It's an aestheticism which dates back to the 13th century. When a warrior-chief thought that he might die in battle, he put on his most beautiful costume so that his death would be a thing of beauty.

I didn't intend to glorify war or give the impression that it is beautiful. That's an extremely dangerous attitude. In shooting the battle scenes, all our efforts went toward making them as realistic as possible. But out of that horror—weirdly enough and absolutely involuntarily on my part—a beauty emerged. A terrible beauty."

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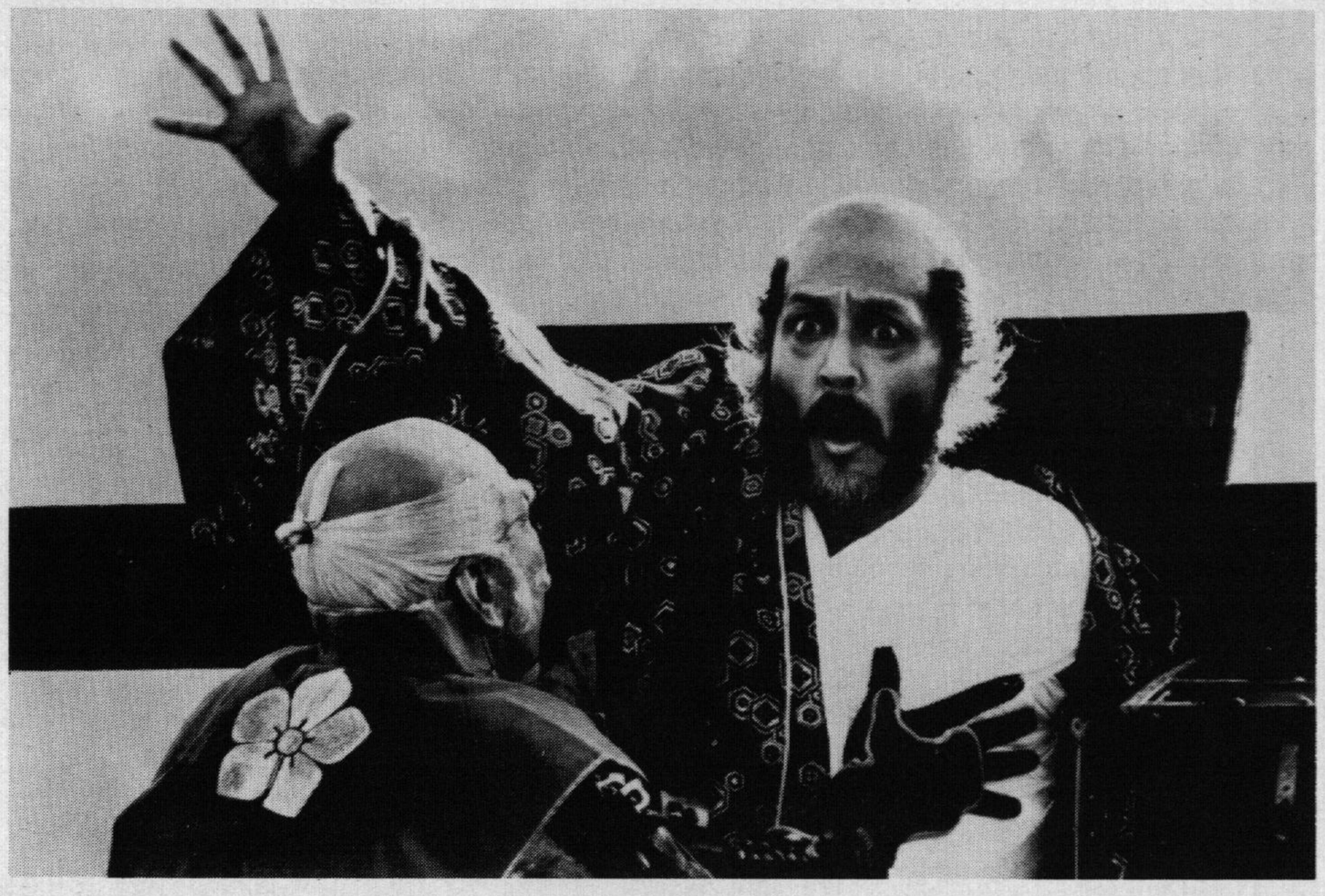
The 16th-century warlord Shingen Takeda frequently used doubles to take his place in battle. His brother Nobukado had frequently served in that role, but ill and weary of the burden of such deception he finds another man, a condemned thief, who bears an uncanny resemblance to Shingen. Nobukado and Shingen offer the thief a chance to redeem himself by becomng Shingen's "shadow warrior" or *kagemusha*. When Shingen is shot by an enemy marksman as his army lays seige to a castle, the double is pressed into urgent service. On Shingen's death, his masquerade can no longer be merely play-acting. In order to conceal the death of their leader and maintain morale in Shingen's armies, as well as to deceive the enemies of the Takeda clan, the double stands in at all of Shingen's public appearances. For three years the ruse works, until the double—at first so uneasy in the role—grows fully into it and even begins to delude himself into believing he is really Shingen. And so do all around him. Only Shingen's favorite horse knows the difference, and exposes the imposter by throwing him from the saddle.

His usefulness ended, the double is banished and leadership of the Tākeda clan is formally transferred to Shingen's son Katsuyori. Wild and impulsive, Katsuyori disobeys his father's famed dictum "to remain still as the mountain" and moves his armies out of their firmly entrenched position to attack the smaller forces of the great warlords Nobunaga and Ieyasu. Nobunaga, always fascinated by new military technology, had equipped his army with rifles imported from Europe. Wave after wave of the previously invincible Takeda cavalry is slaughtered by the superior firepower. The deposed double, demented by the massive death and destruction and still convinced that he is Shingen, wanders onto the battlefield and is slain.

In his last three films, Kurosawa's abiding interests are given their most direct and forceful expression. *Kagemusha* uses the full sweep of a dramatic moment in Japanese history to repeat his favorite theme that appearances are deceiving. Kurosawa here refines the theme by adding that deception can be made reality, until human aspirations and lust for power outstrip ability.

". . . Kagemusha is an extraordinary film, the culmination of Kurosawa's life work as an artist, a rebel, and above all a moralist. . . . The fierceness and energy of Kagemusha burst through the screen as if it were the roar of a young lion. Its dynamically pulsating canvas of 16th-century Japan derives some of its inspiration from Shakespeare's chronicle plays and some from John Ford's cavalry westerns, but Kurosawa's personal signature is inscribed on every physical and spiritual contortion of his characters. At times the film seems to settle into an eerie calm as if the director had finally risen above the bitter struggle of life and his career, but it is only the calm before the next Kurosawa storm. . . ."

—Andrew Sarris
SATURDAY REVIEW



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The Japan Film Center, a unit of the Japan Society, is dedicated to encouraging interest in the cinematic art of Japan. Located at Japan House in New York City, the scope of its activities is wide and varied. Over the past decade, the Japan Society has become the foremost center for Japanese films in the United States, and it is the objective of the Japan Film Center to carry forward the Society's leadership in presenting Japanese films and enriching the general appreciation of one of the world's great cinemas.

Films have provided a superb window on Japanese life and history, and through them Americans have deepened their knowledge and understanding of Japan and its people. As an art form, the Japanese cinema is rich and diverse, reflecting the genius of great directors, sensitive writers, skilled cinematographers, and fine actors and actresses. It is unique in its consistently high level of artistry and technical skill, and it captures with unfailing honesty a sense of life as it was lived in Japan's historical past or as it is lived in the Japan of today.

The Japan Film Center presents in regular, year-round programs both the classic masterworks of Japanese cinema as well as new films of high quality. All types of films are included in the Center's programs: theatrical films, documentaries, animation, and experimental films. Film series are developed to feature the work of a single film artist or to highlight a significant theme in Japanese history or culture. When feasible, such series are circulated to other appropriate centers across the United States to encourage the widest use and appreciation of fine Japanese films.

Among the varied functions of the Japan Film Center are the following:

- Film festivals and retrospectives of the work of leading directors, actors, scenarists, and cinematographers
- Meetings and discussions with the personalities who have made Japanese cinema the wonderful art that it is: great directors like Kurosawa, Ichikawa, Shinoda; actors and actresses like Mifune, Nakadai, Hidari, and Takamine
- Distribution of information about Japanese films of all sorts, and sponsorship of significant publications and research about Japanese films
- The development and circulation of series of Japanese films
- The translation and distribution of important Japanese films that are unlikely to receive commercial distribution but nonetheless merit exposure to English-speaking audiences
- Showcases and premiere screenings of the newest Japanese films prior to commercial distribution
- Screenings of noncommercial Japanese films: documentaries, TV films, educational films, experimental films
- Seminars and lectures about film classics or special film-related programs
- The preservation of endangered classics of the Japanese cinema through the development of a film archive.

Program Book designed by Dana Levy

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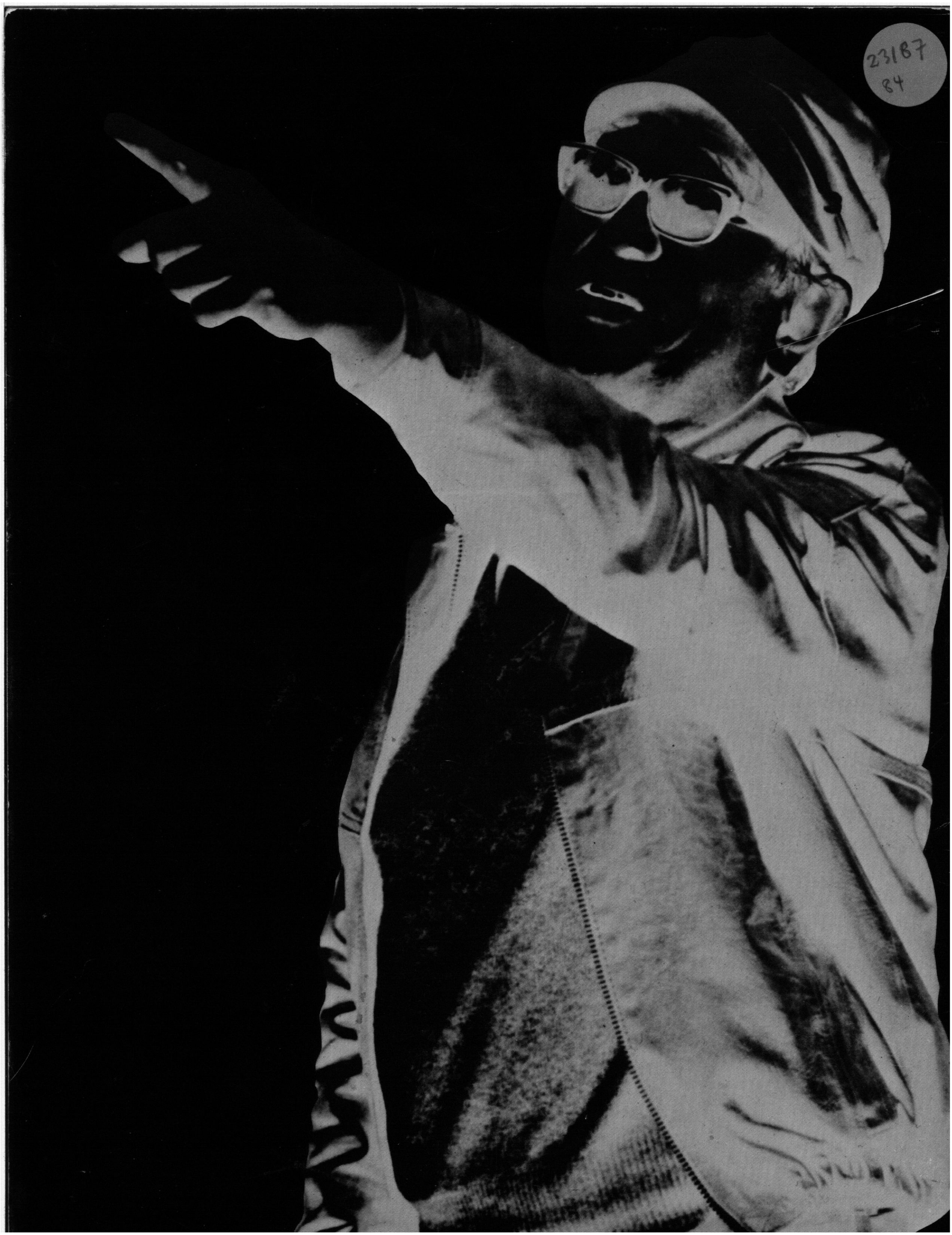

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