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The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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Nagisa Oshima - A Retrospective
Sunday, April 23
3:00, 5:30

Death by Hanging (Koshikei). 1968. Directed by Nagisa Oshima. Written by Tsutomu Tamura, Mamoru Sasaki, Michinori Fukao and Nagisa Oshima after published accounts of the actual events. Photographed by Yasuhiro Yoshioka. Music by Hikaru Hayashi. Edited by Keichi Uraoka. With Kei Sato, Fumio Watanabe, Mutsuhiro Toura, Hosei Komatsuo, Akiko Koyama, Toshiro Ishido, Masao Adachi, and Yun-do Yun. A co-production of Sozosha and A.T.G. Distributed in America by Grove Press. 117 minutes.

In Tokyo in 1958 a young Korean was arrested for raping and murdering two young women. Four years later he was executed. The incident created a sensation. There were various reasons for this. One was that the criminal anonymously informed newspapers by telephone as to where the victims' bodies were hidden; another was that it developed that the criminal was extremely intelligent and very sensitive; yet another was that he was Korean, and hence focus of the usually undirected energy which bigotry and discrimination create.

Visited in prison by a Korean journalist, Pak Snun, he began writing her letters. During the course of these it became apparent that the reasons for his poverty, despite his willingness and intelligence, lay entirely in his Korean nationality, since no Japanese would hire him. Published, this collection of letters, created a sensation and attracted the attention of Nagisa Oshima who, at the time, said that it was the most outstanding book by a young man to appear in the postwar era.

In the resulting film many phrases from the letters are used, but Oshima was not interested in recreating a faithful reproduction of the incident. Rather, he wished to show the absurdity of this action, and of what happened afterwards. He wanted to show parallels between crime and law and order. He wanted to question whether Japan had any right to judge the young man. All of these are reasons for his choosing the striking dramatic mode which is the nexus of this film.

Tadao Sato

Translated from the Japanese;
edited by Donald Richie.