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Reflection on Kurosawa Akira's Movies

Tian (Tim) Huang
Bard College, th6677@bard.edu

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Reflection on Kurosawa Akira's Movies

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by

TIAN HUANG

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Introduction	-----pg 4
Reflection on Kurosawa' movies	-----pg 6
Bibliography	-----pg 29

Introduction

The first time I had a film class was in my high school. That was the first time I learned about how to make a movie. I became obsessed with making movies. I watched *Seven Samurai*

for the first time in that class. I was so impressed by this special story: a bunch of farmers hired starving *ronin* to protect their village from bandits. Although those samurai have become *ronin*, they still value their honor very much, but they are willing to fight for farmers against very fierce bandits. This story is very fascinating. In addition to the plot, the performance by actor Mifune Toshiro is also quite impressive to me. Then I came to know the director's name Akira Kurosawa for the first time. Then I started to watch more and more Kurosawa's movies, like *Rashomon*, *Throne of Blood*, *Heaven and Hell*, *Yojimbo* and so on.

Kurosawa has a very significant influence on me because that was the first time I started to watch black and white Asian movies. I used to think the black and white movies are very boring, but Kurosawa completely changed my mind. The shots in his movies are all so beautiful and elegant. What's more, Kurosawa always makes his ideas very clear in his shots. In addition to his skillful techniques, Kurosawa's script always has a very profound theme. Like in *Seven Samurai*, Kurosawa expresses the idea about two different classes' conflicts and harmony. The theme in *Heaven and Hell* is about the gap between rich and poor and the problem that derivatives. Kurosawa's movies often focus on the phenomenon in Japanese society because he experienced the Japanese WWII period and the postwar period and had a clear understanding about the problems in Japanese society. In addition, Kurosawa also contained a lot of Japanese traditional culture in his movie, like the figure of samurai and *bushido*, and the Noh play and Kabuki play. Kurosawa displays what real Japanese culture looks like in his movie. Due to this factor, Kurosawa's movies gained a lot of respect from the international film industry because western people not only tried to learn from Kurosawa's techniques, but also had great curiosity in the eastern culture. Probably, Kurosawa is the most famous Asian director in western people's perspective. Another famous Japanese director Kitano Takeshi once talked about his interview

with European people: “For Europeans and Americans, the first thing that comes to mind when it comes to Japanese movies is Akira Kurosawa, and those European and American journalists always like to ask me, ‘What do you think of Akira Kurosawa's movies?’” (Kitano, 169) This proves how influential Kurosawa is in the international film industry. His influence not only comes from his technique, but also his loyalty to the national culture.

Reflection on Kurosawa's Work

For Akira Kurosawa’s early films, he generally used standard lenses and deep-focus photography, like in the movie *Seven Samurai* (1954). He prefers this kind of film technique in many adaptation movies of *Shakespeare: Ran* (1985), and *Throne of Blood* (1957). However,

before Kurosawa started to make these kinds of epic movies, his topics focused more on the Japanese postwar society, like *Drunken Angel* (1948) and *Stray Dog* (1949). The deep-focus shot seldom occurs in these movies. Instead, Kurosawa intends to focus more on the details in the shots and uses a wide range of metaphors.

For example, in *Drunken Angel*, there is a dirty pool which serves as a cue in the whole movie. It is not only a pool that produces TB bacteria, but also represents postwar Japanese society. Matsunaga, played by Toshiro Mifune, in this movie is a symbol of the people who lost their belief after the war and lived a chaotic life. Matsunaga believed in the yakuza. He thinks they are loyal and they cherish the friendship. However, after his boss came out of the jail, he lost his place he had in the town and no one respected him, and finally he understood that he was just a tool used by his boss. Kurosawa used many metaphors in the shots to describe this. When Matsunaga was holding a flower, he threw it into that dirty pool after he met his boss, and Kurosawa shot a close shot to the flower covered by the dirty water. Figure 1 is a metaphor implying that Matsunaga's life is going to be changed in a negative way.



Figure 1. A flower in the dirty pool. A hint to Matsunaga's life afterward.

When Matsunaga is lying on a doctor's bed, the doctor is playing with some puppets and the shadows of the puppets reflect on the background of Matsunaga, implying that he is just a puppet to him in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Yakuza Matsunaga is lying on the bed. The shadow of the puppet is on the wall.

After that, when Matsunaga and the doctor were talking near that dirty pool, Matsunaga looked at a doll in that pool and had a close shot. This shot implies that Matsunaga is in danger now and he could not get rid of the yakuza just like the puppet could not get rid of that pool. This is just like the Japanese people who believed in Militarism and thought of their Emperor as a god. However, after Japan was defeated, their belief started to collapse. People started to forsake their traditional ideology while their life gradually became chaotic. However, the ending of this movie implies Kurosawa's hope for the next generation. The girl who also had TB got cured and became healthy. In addition, when Matsunaga was stabbed by his boss, he rushed to the door and faced the sunlight. Then there is a close shot of his face lit by the sun (Figure 3). This is also a metaphor implying that although he died in the end, he finally got rid of the yakuza and faced the bright side.



Figure 3. Matsunaga was dead, turned his face to the sunlight and covered by white painting.

Stray Dog is another movie that Kurosawa made after *Drunken Angel* during the postwar period. The movie is about a cop who lost his gun and the experience of finding that gun. In this movie, Kurosawa used a lot of skillful film techniques. First, the opening line “You have lost your gun?” directly point out the main plot. The opening line in a movie has very significant meaning, like the opening line in *The Godfather 1*: I believe in America. It implies the theme is about the conflicts between two different cultures. And the line in *Eyes Wide Shut*: “Have you seen my wallet?” which implies that the movie is about money. Kurosawa presented his movie in a more frank way to the audiences.

In the scene when the cop and his *senpai* and the female thief talk together. There are some very skillful film techniques. When Murakami and his *senpai* arrived at that female thief’s house, they sat down and talked together. In this shot, there are only two people, so Kurosawa made the composition of the frame to be half and half for two people, but Murakami sat in the front part of the shot, showing his identity as the main character.

Then that woman comes to the house. When the woman hasn't arrived in the room, her shadow first appears on the wall which Murakami faced, so Murakami sees her shadow first and turns his head, then his *senpai* also sees her. Then the camera moves to the new female thief. The shadow on the wall is a very smart technique that Kurosawa used to move the camera in a very smooth and natural way so that the audiences won't feel abrupt about the appearance of a new character. After greeting each other, Murakami's *senpai* asked if she knew him. In this frame, the composition changed to 3 parts for each person, the female thief who faced audiences standing in the center of the frame. Murakami and his *senpai* are back to their audiences, so they are in the left and right side of the frame. Then the woman started to walk toward Murakami and said that she didn't know him. At this time the camera moves toward Murakami and thief, and makes *senpai* out of the frame to emphasize these two characters are having conflicts.

Next, the woman sat down, the camera moved to the same direction when there were only Murakami and his *senpai* in the frame. However, this time there were three people, so the frame was cut into three parts. Murakami and the thief were sitting in the front part because the main conflicts were between them, so Kurosawa made them sit in the front part to allow audiences to look at their facial expression clearly. The thief was talking, Murakami was looking at her nervously. The *senpai* was sitting behind them in the back part of the frame, asking the thief questions. Then the thief left. The shot began when these three people were set in the same frame to the point when the thief left. There was no cut at all. It was a whole long take without a single cut but the composition changed from the one in which the thief was in the center to the one in which Murakami and the thief were sitting in the front. This shot shows how skillful Kurosawa's film techniques were. There was nothing abrupt in the change of the composition in this shot. The female thief was an important character in this shot because Murakami and hid

senpai came to look for her and asked her about the gun. Consequently, the camera moved with her and used her as a cue to change composition. It is very impressive that Kurosawa was able to make such a move in one single shot. Kurosawa was extremely strict about the position of actors. Another famous Japanese director Kitano Takeshi once said: “Mr. Kurosawa has to rehearse dozens of times before the official start of shooting. Some people say that even if the actors stand off ten centimeters he will be really mad, I believe this is true.” (Kitano, 159)

What is more, it seems like Kurosawa likes to make imperceptible hints in the movies. They were all very tiny details. Audiences would only notice them when Kurosawa revealed their functions. In the very beginning of the movie, Murakami was shooting with his colleagues in the police station. Murakami didn't hit the target because he's too sleepy and the weather was too hot and he shot at the tree. He was laughing and joking when he said this to his colleagues, and didn't take it seriously. At this point, this mis-shooting bullet was only a negligible thing in the movie. However, after the first gunshot case took place, Murakami needed to find the same type of his bullet to check if the gun used in that case was his lost gun. Consequently, the bullet in the beginning now became an essential clue to find the lost gun. Murakami went to the tree he shot at and got the bullet, and finally knew that the gun used in that case was his gun.

There was another similar hint in this movie. When detective Sato was asking the female thief who was the one collecting guns, she refused to answer. Then Sato turned to Murakami and said when a woman wouldn't want to answer this kind of question because that person was her lover. Murakami and Sato found Harumi and asked whether she knew about that murderer. She refused to answer. At that point, the movie didn't directly tell the audiences they were lovers, but audiences could infer that they were lovers because of Sato's words. Then finally their love relationship was revealed. Indeed, every detail and line in Kurosawa's movies has its own

function. There is nothing trivial in Kurosawa's movie. Kurosawa intended to make this kind of hint to be very imperceptible and make audiences feel surprising but reasonable when he reveals its function.

In addition, this postwar movie also exposed some social phenomena in Japanese society and it has several metaphors. First, there were a lot of lines and details that show the weather was very hot. Like the narratives often said, it was hot weather, and we can see the characters in this movie were always sweating and wiping their sweat. Kurosawa didn't emphasize meaningless points. Therefore, it could be a metaphor for postwar society. During this period, Japanese people were agitated and frustrated. The formal traditional belief had been forsaken. People were not able to pacify their heart, and their everyday lives were chaotic, like the unbearable hot days in summer. Also there was a very tiny detail in the dialogue between Murakami and his *senpai*. Murakami showed the picture of that thief to his *senpai*. His *senpai* said "she used to wear *wafuku*, now she wears a suit and perm her hair, time has changed." This is a very tiny detail in the movie, but I think it contains profound meanings. Traditional Japanese ideology was forsaken, and people started to accept the fashion from western countries. This is also one of the significant phenomena in the postwar period.

Also, there was another interesting composition that Kurosawa used in a postwar movie. In *Stray Dog*, officer Sato and Murakami went to investigate the lost gun in Figure 4. They took a boat. The shot of them standing on the boat was very interesting. The frame was divided into three parts: two parts were dark, which were two sides of the door frame. The part in the middle was very bright, which contained officer Sato and Murakami. This kind of composition put the two main characters in the center, and utilized the contrast of black and white to emphasize them. This was a very skillful composition because the main characters would appear in a picture

frame, and the contrast of different colors immediately would attract audiences' eyesight. Interestingly, Hitchcock really likes to use this kind of technique in his films, but there's no evidence that shows that he is inspired by Kurosawa.



Figure 4. Two main characters are in the center. The door frame and the contrast of color them emphasize them.

In addition, the opening scene of *Stray Dog* in Figure 5, which is a set of shots of a sweating dog, actually caused big troubles. There was a woman from an animal protection organization who watched this movie, and she protested this scene. She thought that Kurosawa definitely used some kind of drugs on this dog to make it sweat. However, Kurosawa actually saved this dog. This is a wild dog that was going to be executed by the police station. Kurosawa saw it and he wanted to use it to shoot the opening scene, so he saved this dog from the police. During the shooting, he tied this dog to a bicycle and made it run with the bicycle. That's why the dog looked tired and kept sweating, but the American woman still believed that Kurosawa abused that dog: "After a woman from ASPCA watched this movie, she made a serious protest, and even sued us for giving a healthy dog a shot of Rabies Virus."(Kurosawa, 280) In the end,

Kurosawa was forced to apologize to her. He said that was the time he felt shame for being a citizen in a defeated country in his autobiography.



Figure 5. This is the stray dog saved by Kurosawa. It is sweating. An American woman believed that Kurosawa shot the virus to this dog.

Akira Kurosawa prefers a more frank way of shooting movies. In his autobiography, *Something like an Autobiography*, he talked about the song he sang in primary school: the Japanese Navy song. He said “The lyrics are surprisingly straightforward, concise and accurate. I told my assisting directors to learn from these songs to make storyboards.”(Kurosawa, 61) However, despite his frank way of telling the story, Kurosawa was also a very revolutionary director. He liked to use a lot of innovative ways of shooting.

For example, Kurosawa talked about the experiences when he was shooting the *Rashomon* with his cast. *Rashomon* is a story about how various people talk about a murder of a samurai in their different perspectives. The scene of the murder takes place in the forest, which is the most parts of the movie. Consequently, to exploit the combination of sunlight and shadow in the forest would be a very significant and difficult problem for shooting. After much

consideration, Kurosawa decided to shoot toward the sunlight. During the last century, to shoot toward the sunlight was still a kind of contraindication, people believed shooting in that way would make the sunlight focus on the film tape and destroy it. Even nowadays to shoot toward the sunlight is still considered as something that a photographer should avoid doing because there will be halation occurred on the image which is caused by the sunlight, and it will make the whole image look blurred and influence the whole composition of an image in a negative way. However, Kurosawa decided to break this rule and his cinematographer Miyagawa did an excellent job. In the beginning of *Rashomon*, there is a scene where a peasant, played by Shimura Takashi, walks through the forest and gets the samurai's package. The shot shows the combination of the lights and shadows on the trees and the peasant's face, making the forest look like a mysterious maze. This could also be an implication of the peasant who is confused by the murder because the opening line of the whole movie is: "I really don't understand." said by the woodcutter. The woodcutter tries to understand why different people have totally different descriptions of that murder, and his thoughts was just like him walking along the huge and intricate forest. The scene in the forest and the way of shooting toward the sun was a big success.

One of the reasons that influences Kurosawa's creative way of shooting is because he was repressed for too long by the Japanese government during WWII. During the war, the government and the military will interfere with the media, like movies and newspapers, to make sure the contents were appropriate for the war. In this case, there were a lot of limitations for Kurosawa's movies. Once the government ordered Kurosawa to cut a whole scene from his movie because a pattern of wheels occurred in one shot. The government said it would make people think it's a Chrysanthemum, which was the symbol of the Japanese Royal Family. And when Kurosawa was making the movie *Horse with Yamamoto Kajiro*, the government ordered

them to cut one scene because in that scene people are drinking in the daytime which was against the law in Japan during that period: "Army Provincial Horse Bureau gave us an order. We need to cut this scene because it is against the prohibition of daytime drinking."(Kurosawa, pg150)

This kind of order given by the government was very unreasonable to the film makers, but there was no other way for them except to obey it. Furthermore, there was a group of special film supervisors who were set by the government to examine if there is anything inappropriate in the movie, such as blasphemy to Japanese Royal Family or Mikado, or spreading the anti-war attitude. Most of the members in this group were not well educated. According to the description in Kurosawa's autobiography, they are "ignorant and erotic." Once they ordered Kurosawa to delete a line which said "the gate of the factory is widely open to welcome the workers." The reason that supervisors want to delete this line is because they associate the widely opened gate to women's organs. "They described the words of the script as erotic, such as "the doors of the factory are open and waiting for the students who come to do voluntary work."(Kurosawa, 160)

This seems to be very ridiculous but Kurosawa had no choice but to delete this line at last. However, after the war was finished, Kurosawa finally gained his freedom to create movies as his wills and had the chance to try many creative ways. In addition, after the war was over, these supervisors who were organized by the government had lost their powers. Kurosawa now had the right to disobey these people.

The great success of Kurosawa was not attributed to him alone; his most important actor and friend Mifune Toshiro was also very essential to his movie. Mifune Toshiro was known as the last samurai of Japan. The documentary *Mifune: The Last Samurai* describes them as the most influential Japanese film producers. They influenced *The Magnificent Seven*, which is adapted from *Seven Samurai*, and the *A Fistful of Dollars* which is exactly a plagiarization of the

Yojimbo and Kurosawa sued this movie later. These all prove that Kurosawa and Mifune not only changed the image of samurai in Japan, but also influenced the way that Westerns were made.

The documentary said that “together they changed the Japanese film industry.”

During the early period of Japanese film history, the movies were relatively simple and crude. In 1896, the film was first introduced to Japan. Japanese people were very interested in this kind of new invention, and they started to make movies immediately by assimilating it into their own culture. The early Japanese black and white silent movies are almost all inspired by the kabuki play, which is a traditional Japanese dance drama. Consequently, the performances in these movies were all basically the action of dancing. In addition, due to the defects of technology and the limited comprehension of film during that period, the movies were made in a more theatrical way which only contained one angle of shots and unrealistic performance. However, after several decades, a new form of samurai movies became popular in Japan, which is the Chanbara. The Chanbara was a kind of sword fighting movie. It had a more violent and realistic performance compared to the early Japanese movies in 1900. The name Chanbara originated from “the sound of the sword hitting with each other and making the sound of chan chan, barabara.”(7min 08s) The topic of samurai has always been quite prevalent in Japan because of bushido. Bushido literally means the way of a samurai. It is a moral code that has existed in Japan for thousands of years. In the early period of Japanese film history, around 1900s to 1920s, the idea of samurai was mostly based on the kabuki play and the noh performance. The actors all had very dramatic and even strange make up. The samurai in these movies all fight for their idealization, like bushido or some other things like vengeance. The samurai figure was still feudal during that period. However, Kurosawa and Mifune changed this obsolete idea of samurai in Japan, and even influenced the idea of western movies.

The samurai character he played, like the one in *Seven Samurai*, *Yojimbo*, and *Sanjuro*, has a more complicated personality. For example, the Kikuchiyo in *Seven Samurai* is a fake samurai, who is actually a peasant but he stole a samurai sword and his family book. He knew how peasants suffered the war and the bandits, so he insisted on joining the samurai group to fight the bandits. This combination of samurai and peasant is a very innovative figure compared to the former image of samurai because peasant and samurai are considered as two distanced classes in Japanese society. There are always some conflicts between these two classes due to the feudal system in Japan. Samurai despised the peasants. In Kikuchiyo's perspective, samurai were no better than bandits because they also robbed and killed the peasants. However, although samurai treated peasants brutally, the agriculture of Japan all depended on peasants, and they were forced to supply food for samurai. Consequently, the peasants had deep hatred against samurai. In *Seven Samurai*, the seven samurai and peasants initially had a disagreement because Kikuchiyo brought the armor from other samurai who were killed by peasants. The peasants would kill the samurai who's alone. Consequently, this caused a division between the two groups. Nevertheless, Kikuchiyo was a farmer. He understood why farmers hate samurai so much. This bizarre character started to become the balance between farmer and samurai. Kikuchiyo was a very significant figure created by Kurosawa and Mifune because it changed the stereotype of samurai in Japanese movies.

In addition, there was a very interesting scene at the end of *Seven Samurai*. A daughter of farmer fell in love with a young samurai, and they had sex at last. This thing is considered a forbidden thing to do during feudal society because these two classes are opposed to each other. Just like the father said: "How can a daughter of a farmer sleep with a samurai!" However, it seems like Kurosawa prefers to break the stereotype and created a line to reply to his father: "

There's nothing wrong as long as they love each other." This also implies that people should forsake the feudal idea. In addition to the unique identity of Kikuchiyo, there were also some differences between Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* and the former image of samurai. The samurai would ask peasants for food when they were really hungry, and they would even help peasants fight against bandits even though this was a very dangerous thing to do. The samurai in Kurosawa's movie did not simply fight for the code of bushido, the samurai became a sensitive character who had a sense of justice and was willing to sacrifice for peasants. In other movies *Yojimbo* and *Sanjuro*, in which Mifune played characters of samurai, the samurai helped other people simply because he had the sense of justice, and the samurai did not even ask for compensation although he took an extremely high risk. This kind of righteous figure not only changed the idea of Japanese audiences, but also influenced the story in western movies. For example, one of the most classical characters in western movies was the cowboy actor Clint Eastwood, who was a great success in American film history. However, not many people knew that this cowboy character was created based on Mifune's figure. The cowboy was a skillful gunner and he had a sense of justice, just like the samurai that Mifune played. In addition, the samurai that Kurosawa and Mifune created had a very significant factor for individualistic heroism. For example, the samurai in *Yojimbo* was not only a very mastered swordsman, but also knew how to use strategy to fight. He exterminated two gangs in a town by himself. This kind of legendary hero was very welcomed by the western movies during the mid-20th centuries. That's why Kurosawa and Mifune were also very famous in foreign countries.

Another important movie that made Kurosawa become internationally well-known was *Rashomon*. Kurosawa said: "Surprisingly, this film became the gateway to the world for me as a filmmaker." (Kurosawa, 302) *Rashomon* was a very unique movie. It has a very sophisticated

script. In Kurosawa's autobiography, he recalled the experience of explaining the script to his three assistant directors: "After my three assistant directors finished reading *Rashomon's* script, all of them came to see me and asked me for explanations." (Something like an autobiography) Kurosawa didn't feel very surprised about their confusion. He explained that "This script writes about the human's nature, which is to lie in order to live. People would embellish themselves even after they die. This script is like a painting that shows the most unchangeable and inherent nature in a human's heart. You all said you cannot understand this script because it describes the most complicated element of a human's heart." (Something like an autobiography). After giving this explanation, there was still one director who could not understand the script. This script not only talks about the most sophisticated part of a man's heart, but also it makes audiences introspect themselves and admit that they always lie in order to embellish themselves in other people's perspectives. In the movie, the bandit lied about how he fought with the samurai. He even complimented how skillful the samurai was in order to emphasize his courage and power. In fact, when the bandit spoke for the first time, audiences could feel how arrogant he was. He refused to admit that he was caught by a fisherman. He tried to defend his powerful figure by saying that the fisherman caught him only because he fell from the horse only because he was sick. The woman lied because he tried to defend her chastity. She lied that after the bandit raped her, he took the sword and left. The woman begged forgiveness for the samurai, but samurai did not forgive her, and his wife killed him when she fainted. When the story turned to samurai, Kurosawa used a very surprising way to let him present his perspectives because the samurai was already dead, which was to ask a witch to bring his soul back. The samurai lied that he was not murdered by the bandit, he committed suicide. He lied because he was a samurai and he had to follow bushido. In addition, the samurai was already dead, but he still tried to embellish himself.

This plot probably wanted to emphasize Kurosawa's idea of "people would lie even after they die."

However, in the end, the movie revealed that even the woodcutter who's telling the story and feeling confused by this case was also lying because the woodcutter stole the sword and he tried to defend his honesty. At last, Kurosawa used the woodcutter's perspective to reveal the fact to audiences. Everyone was lying in order to embellish themselves. Due to this special script, this movie had a lot of repeated settings because although what happened in the forest was different in four people's perspectives, most parts of their description were similar. As a result, most part of the movie was shot in the same place, such as the forest and the government's house where the trail took place. In order to avoid the visual fatigue and attach more diversity in the same settings, Kurosawa used many different kinds of angles, lighting and other film techniques, especially to use different compositions to make the images become refreshing to the audiences. For example, when the recall scene was in the woman's perspective, there were a lot of close shots and different lighting on her face. When the recall scene was in the samurai's perspective, the samurai was always put in the domain position in a frame. There was another movie which had the similar characteristics of *Rashomon: Twelve Angry Men in 1957* directed by Sidney Lumet. Almost 90 percent of this movie was shot in one single scene—a small office in the court. However, the audience would not feel the visual fatigue after watching this movie because the director also used different angles to eliminate the sense of repetition. Both of these movies used a similar technique which is to use different characters' perspectives to create different compositions in the same *Mise-en-scène*. For example, after different characters give their description, the scene in the forest will make each character occur in the main position. In addition, the director gives close-up to twelve men's hands, feet and faces in order to make the

shots become more refreshing to the audiences. Consequently, the more limited the space of a scene is, the more difficult it was for a director to shoot a scene. However, Lumet and Kurosawa both used a lot of different kinds of techniques to overcome the limitations. In addition, Kurosawa's *Rashomon* was produced seven years earlier than *Twelve Angry Men*. This also showed Kurosawa's revolutionary idea about movies.

In addition to the lighting techniques in the opening scene of *Rashomon*, Kurosawa also used very skillful lighting in other parts of the movie. For example, in the scene of a woman telling the officer about what happened in the forest in her perspective. There was a shot of woman's close up after the bandit raped her. She took the dagger and she wanted to save her husband. She said she loved her husband so she wanted him to forgive her. However, her husband's eyes were so indifference that she was afraid of her husband who wouldn't forgive her, so she felt very conflicted and hurt. In the shot of her close up, she walked forward then backward to her husband, the light and shadow on her face kept changing as she walked in Figure 6. A moment of her face full of light, and a moment of her face full of shadow. The use of light implied that her mind also kept struggling about if she's going to save her husband.



Figure 6. The light and shadow keep changing on woman's face, reflecting her thoughts.

Also, in the ending scene, when the monk knew that even the woodcutter was lying to him. He completely lost the faith of people's heart. When the woodcutter wanted to take the infant from him, he thought the woodcutter wanted to take the infant's clothes away. However, the woodcutter explained that he already had six children. He wanted to adopt this baby. Then the monk finally believed that there were still good people in this world, and he gave this child to the woodcutter. Then there was a shot of the woodcutter holding the baby while leaving the gate of Rashomon. The light was very interesting in this shot. It was raining intensely before the woodcutter left, but after the woodcutter held this infant, the weather became sunny. The light of the woodcutter's face became very bright. This also gave some optimistic hope to this gloomy movie.

However, this was a very controversial ending. There were a lot of different explanations of this ending. Besides this optimistic perspective, there was another very popular but gloomy

opinions about the ending. A lot of audiences believed that the woodcutter was so destitute, how could he even afford taking care of six children? As a result, the woodcutter probably lied to the monk again about he's going to adopt that infant. He might sell this infant later or even eat this infant. This kind of explanation of ending was also very popular because it was also very suitable to the theme of this movie: People would always lie in order to survive. In addition, in the beginning of the movie, the tramp talked to the woodcutter and the monk, the Rashomon gate they were sitting under was once a habitat of ghosts. However, human beings were so evil and greedy that even the ghosts were frightened and escaped from Rashomon Gate, and there were still a lot of unknown bodies on the gate. According to what this tramp said, it would not be very striking that the woodcutter lied to the monk at last. What's more, Kurosawa's *Rashomon* is adapted from Akutagawa Ryunosuke's "In the bamboo forest." However, the name of this movie is from Akutagawa's other novel "Rashomon," which describes a tramp who robbed an old woman's clothes after he saw this old woman taking away a dead woman's hair. Consequently, that kind of gloomy perspective that the woodcutter would finally eat that infant was actually more suitable to the original novel. However, I think that what Kurosawa wanted to express in the ending was that there was still hope and kindness exist in the chaotic world because he used a very apparent change of the lighting on the woodcutter's face which implied his kindness. In addition, the sun shining after the rains also implied that after knowing that the woodcutter lied to him, the monk was going to distrust other people, but the woodcutter finally gave him a little hope. His emotion was just like the weather, which rained intensely. But the sun came out.

Rashomon's great success also had a huge impact on the Japanese film industry during that period because it won awards from the Oscar and Venice Film Festival. The foreigners gave very high compliments to this movie. However, the Japanese film reviewer thought this was only

because the western judges had an intense curiosity about this kind of eastern style movie. This made Kurosawa feel really confused: “I cannot understand. Why do people of this nation have no confidence in their own culture? Why do they have so much respect for what is foreign and so little regard for what is their own?”(Kurosawa, 301) This was also the reason why Kurosawa wanted to make *Stray Dog* and *Drunken Angel* to reflect the chaotic society and unconfident emotion of Japanese people. All of their former ideology was forsaken so they started to have more respect on the foreign culture. “The trend in post-war Japan was to swallow liberalism and democracy whole, thinking that this was all that was needed.” (Kurosawa, 235) This may be the reason why Japanese film reviewers had little regard for *Rashomon*. However, Kurosawa respected Japanese culture. He often combined the elements of many Japanese traditional cultures like noh and kabuki. He displayed what is real Japanese culture on the international stage. To sum up, the reason that Kurosawa was honored as a master of film and had so much respect from the world, was not only because of his unique understanding of film and script, but also his confidence in his own culture and the achievements of bringing the Japanese culture to the international film industry.

I really respect the way Kurosawa made movies. I tried to use his film techniques in my movie. The story I chose to adapt was *Spring Bird*, written by Kunikida Doppo. This story was about a primary school teacher, who moved to a new place and met an imbecile kid. The child's name was Rokuzo. His disability was due to heredity from his mother. The teacher had great sympathy for them, so he tried his best to help Rokuzo. He spent time with him to teach him how to count or just play with him. However, in the end, Rokuzo died because he tried to imitate the bird and jump off a small hill. This was a story between an adult and a boy. I think Kurosawa's movie *Red Beard* was a very good reference for my movie. The Red Beard is about a young

doctor who went to a clinic and met an old doctor who is called “red beard.” This movie contains several parts, which were the stories about different characters that the young doctor met in the clinic. One of the characters was a little girl named Otoyō. She was tortured by an old madam in a brothel. Her body and mind both suffered too much for her age. She was saved by the doctors and moved by the young doctor’s kindness. In the end, she was cured both physically and mentally. This story was partly similar to *Spring Bird*, which was also about an adult trying to save a kid.

During the process of my movie, a quiet knotty problem occurred: I could not find an actress to play the role of Rokuzō’s mother. This was an essential character because the teacher started to know Rokuzō through his mother. This role was like a middleman between the teacher and Rokuzō. However, the condition for me was quite limited. Consequently, I solved this problem by using a kind of transition which Kurosawa used in *Red Beard*. When the young doctor started to take care of that little girl, he started to write a diary and record the girl’s health. Kurosawa shot the doctor’s diary and combined the image with the doctor’s voice, then he used these kinds of shots to make transitions between different scenes in that story. It was a very suitable way for me to use because the teacher is like a doctor to Rokuzō, who tried to cure his mental illness and make him become a normal boy. In addition, I was able to ignore the role of Rokuzō’s mother by simply making her occur in the teacher’s diary. In this way, the connection between different scenes was not too abrupt. In addition, adding the teacher’s narrative would make the audience feel his emotion toward Rokuzō more deeply because some of the teacher’s ideas and his emotions could be displayed by words.

Another film technique I learned from Kurosawa was the use of people’s shadows. Like I mentioned earlier, there was a shot in *Stray Dog* in which the two police officers were having a

talk, then a woman walked toward them. However, Kurosawa did not give the woman a shot at first. He shot a woman's shadow on the wall and the officer who saw that shadow had a clear reaction. This was a very tricky method to inform the audience about the coming character because the former shot was two people's talking. If the shot directly cut into a new character, then the audience might feel awkward. I used this method in the scene where Rokuzo was drawing the birds under a tree, then the teacher walked toward him. I made the teacher's shadow reflect on Rokuzo's notebook at first, so the appearance of the teacher in this scene would not be too abrupt. In addition to these techniques, I made reference to a scene in *Stray Dog*. There was a scene when the police officer found the dancer Harumi, she wore a beautiful dress and started to dance insanely. This was a very impressive scene to me because it contained a kind of craziness that appeared awkward to me. During the process of my film production, I wanted to make a scene to show how Rokuzo loved birds. I tried several different ways but all of them seemed to be so plain and simple. Then I started to learn from this scene. I made my actor stand up and suddenly imitate a flying bird. This also seems to be awkward but it also emphasized Rokuzo's autism.

Many directors learned from Kurosawa's film techniques. Numerous techniques that Kurosawa invented still work for movies today. Kitano Takeshi once said: "In accordance with the earlier 170,000 2800 frame image kind of argument, I shot the picture that is called empty. Mr. Akira Kurosawa's film does not have a waste shot." (Kitano,169) This is because Kurosawa makes very elegant compositions in every shot with elaborate lighting and the positions of the actors. However, besides these techniques, Kurosawa's movies have very profound themes. For example, the theme in *Drunken Angel* and *Stray Dog* is to reveal the problems in Japanese postwar society. The theme in *Rashomon* is to reveal the most complex part of a human's nature

with the depiction of their lying. Unlike many other Japanese people in his period who blindly followed the newly emerged ideology, Kurosawa insisted on displaying his idiosyncratic techniques in the movie. This also inspired me. Kurosawa's ideology that only the national culture was international will always influence me.

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