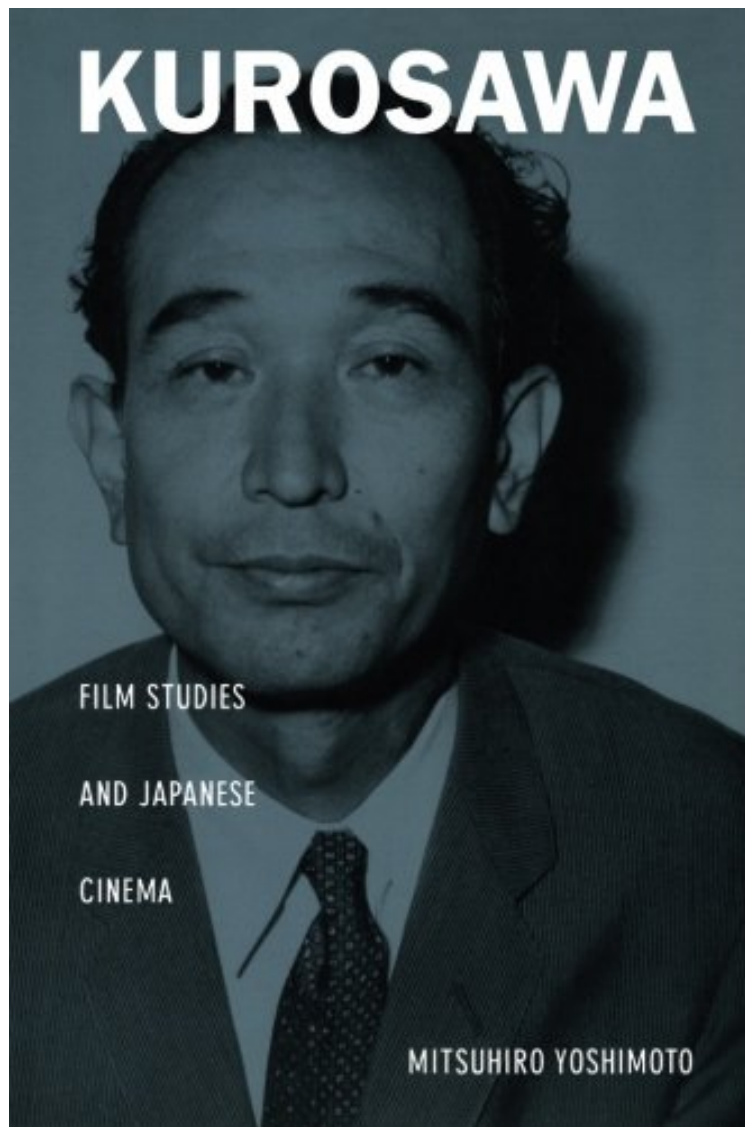


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Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema (Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society)

Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto

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Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto : Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema (Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema (Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society):

10 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Japanese Cinema in Search of a Discipline By Etienne RPSometimes a marginal position in a faculty department or a personal discomfort with established disciplines can

provide an impregnable view on the academic world. The tools that academics use for cognition and recognition-- assigning people a place in the academic field, distinguishing between major and minor subjects, establishing traditions and ruptures in a particular area of inquiry--are turned inwards and become revealers of one's own position. By understanding his or her own social conditions of production and the position he or she occupies in society, the scholar is able to expose the whole social space that players fully caught in the game can only partially reveal. This act of reflexive lucidity is often perceived as an unforgivable aggression by insiders, who confuse analysis with denunciation, precision with envy, and realism with cynicism. Pierre Bourdieu, who applied this kind of reflexive sociology to the French academic world, was thus the object of constant criticism. Although he doesn't quote Bourdieu, Matsuhiro Yoshimoto applies a similar methodology to the field of Japanese film studies. By putting Japanese cinema in search of a discipline, he not only reveals the limitations of film studies as an academic discipline, but also the difficulty in aligning a study of a Japanese filmmaker with other intellectual pursuits in the humanities, such as literary criticism, Japanese scholarship, area studies, comparative literature, post-structuralist theory or the new, post-disciplinary discourse of cultural studies. As noted in his introductory chapter, Japanese cinema played a significant role in the establishment of film studies as a discrete discipline and in the legitimation of cinema as an object of serious academic research. Yet the history of American scholarship on Japanese cinema also reveals the impasse in which the discipline has fallen. From the cult of the auteur that started with Rashomon's Kurosawa to the theoretical turn of post-marxist or structuralist scholarship and the identity politics of cross-cultural studies, Yoshimoto documents the analytical flaws and methodological shortcomings in scholarly discourse on Japanese cinema (and as he wryly notes, "dropping theorists' names [Derrida, Lyotard, Lacan, Barthes] or their key terms [différend, méconnaissance, punctum, grand récit] does not make an analysis of Japanese cinema automatically theoretical.") If film studies and their mechanical application of what passes as theory in humanities departments have exhausted their critical vein to the point of being "totally repetitive and uninteresting", then can one anchor the study of Japanese cinema in another supporting discipline? Unfortunately, none is in a position to offer much to the kind of film criticism that the author has in mind. For Yoshimoto, Japanese studies suffer from the original sin of their contribution to the wartime effort and the postwar attempt to "modernize" Japan. Besides, because film cannot be either "translated" or "annotated," traditionally trained literary scholars do not know what to do with Japanese cinema. Movie critics who see in Japanese movies a reflexion of abstract values and Japaneseness are not of much help either. Comparative literature seems at first a more welcoming discipline, but failed to develop a strong body of research methods and results and recently suffered from the onslaught of cultural studies. Indeed, it is under this last label, conceived as post-disciplinary practice or "a tactical intervention in the structures and practices of the established disciplines", that Yoshimoto decides to record his study of Kurosawa movies. This introductory chapter on Japanese Cinema in Search of a Discipline is itself worth acquiring the book. But the remainder is even more fascinating: after having cleared the space from unwanted clichés and cumbersome interpretations, Yoshimoto then attempts to build his own strand of film studies through a fine-grained and detailed analysis of each and every movie directed by Akira Kurosawa. Each chapter, of variable length, provides a unique perspective to Kurosawa's movies. The book will prove a valuable read not only to film studies scholars, but also to every Kurosawa fan who will discover more reasons to revere their favorite director. 14 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Much more than a study on Kurosawa By Michael Although the book covers every film of Kurosawa's career, this is not a work of 'auteur' criticism. In fact, Yoshimoto addresses the very shortcomings of such an approach in the introduction of his text. As suggested by the book's secondary title, the work tackles something much more broad in scope and does so more critically than any other work related to the films of Kurosawa. First and foremost, what sets this work apart from most studies of either Kurosawa or more generally Japanese cinema (that are published in English) is Yoshimoto's close and careful attention to history. Not only does he 'historicize' both Kurosawa-as-author and his catalogue of films but he also does the same to the recent tradition of criticism on Japanese cinema that has become so popular in Western academia. He convincingly critiques the previous work of Donald Richie, Noel Burch, Stephen Prince (and more briefly David Desser and James Goodwin), and his analysis of Western criticism on Japan as falling into 3 phases (humanist - formalist/marxist - 'cross-cultural') is most helpful. When I suggest that he 'historicizes' these three methods of critique, I mean he demonstrates how these approaches perhaps worked not to better illuminate the objects 'Kurosawa' and 'Japanese cinema' but to 'naturalize' or legitimate other historical developments 'outside' the intended object of scrutiny. For instance, Yoshimoto argues that humanist and auteur forms of criticism (that were popular in the 1960s) when applied to Kurosawa's films did less to interpret the films-themselves and instead worked to legitimate the contemporaneous formation of 'film studies' as a proper field of scholarship. He goes on to critique the other phases of critical approach in a similar fashion. Yoshimoto also performs historical critiques of other interpretive frameworks that are often assumed to make sense of Japanese film production. He puts into question the category 'samurai film' as assumed by critics like David Desser by demonstrating its 'orientalist' function in recent 'cross-cultural' discourse. He challenges careless appeals to 'zen' that do less to make sense of films and more to 'essentialize' certain contingent aspects of Japanese culture. Also, he reads the typical grouping of Japanese film into two genres, 'jidai-geki' and 'gendai-geki', in the context of current historical struggles by showing this division to function as a kind of effacement

of certain contradictions and invasions that took place in recent global events. These are only some of the enlightening points made throughout this book - mainly the ones that really stuck with me. As stated before, this book is more than an investigation of Kurosawa - this is a convincing challenge to the practice of 'Japanese film studies' as a discipline. However, in relation to Kurosawa, the highlights (in my opinion) are his readings of 'Stray Dog', 'Seven Samurai', 'Throne of Blood', and 'High and Low'. Personally, I wish there was more on both 'Rashomon' and 'Yojimbo' - but that, in no way, alters my high opinion of this work. By far, this is the best work on Japanese film I have ever read. His writing is clear - his arguments are convincing, and his ideas are original. This is a 5 star work of scholarship. Also, I recommend reading his article "The Difficulty of Being Radical: The Discipline of Film Studies and the Postcolonial World Order" in 'boundary 2' (Autumn 1991).³ of 9 people found the following review helpful. a relatively in-depth compendium into cinema history...By R.J. Lozada the book is structured in a straight-forward manner. with its frame-of-reference established from the very beginning, this text then progresses forward film-by-film in Kurosawa's career, and much of Japanese cinema history and general Japanese history. where this text adds and others deny is its dedication to pick at each film and argue and stress points, utilizing examples from films in a relatively-in-depth manner. Kurosawa's films are contextualized not only from humanities-type critique, but from literary and cinema theory, as well as an admirable effort into the muddled language of post-structuralism, etc. however, there are some disappointments when some films aren't covered heavily as compared to others, but this was probably to save on redundancy. This book is a necessary for those not familiar with Kurosawa's works and desire an extensive analysis, and it can also act as a good springboard into general literary and cinema theory.

The films of Akira Kurosawa have had an immense effect on the way the Japanese have viewed themselves as a nation and on the way the West has viewed Japan. In this comprehensive and theoretically informed study of the influential directors cinema, Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto definitively analyzes Kurosawa's entire body of work, from 1940s Sanshiro Sugata to 1990s Madadayo. In scrutinizing this oeuvre, Yoshimoto shifts the ground upon which the scholarship on Japanese cinema has been built and questions its dominant interpretive frameworks and critical assumptions. Arguing that Kurosawa's films arouse anxiety in Japanese and Western critics because the films problematize Japan's self-image and the West's image of Japan, Yoshimoto challenges widely circulating clichés about the films and shows how these works constitute narrative answers to sociocultural contradictions and institutional dilemmas. While fully acknowledging the achievement of Kurosawa as a filmmaker, Yoshimoto uses the director's work to reflect on and rethink a variety of larger issues, from Japanese film history, modern Japanese history, and cultural production to national identity and the global circulation of cultural capital. He examines how Japanese cinema has been invented in the discipline of film studies for specific ideological purposes and analyzes Kurosawa's role in that process of invention. Demonstrating the richness of both this director's work and Japanese cinema in general, Yoshimoto's nuanced study illuminates an array of thematic and stylistic aspects of the films in addition to their social and historical contexts. Beyond aficionados of Kurosawa and Japanese film, this book will interest those engaged with cultural studies, postcolonial studies, cultural globalization, film studies, Asian studies, and the formation of academic disciplines.

A tour-de-force reading of Kurosawa's films. Yoshimoto adds greatly to current Kurosawa scholarship and to situating the construct Japanese Cinema in a way that it has not been situated before. E. Ann Kaplan, author of *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze*