

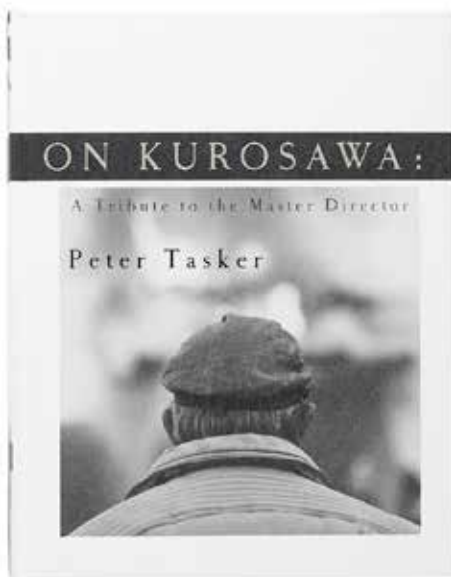


Zen Foto Gallery

A Fitting Homage to a Giant Creative Spirit

“ON KUROSAWA: A Tribute to the Master Director”

by Peter Tasker



Akira Kurosawa has influenced the world of film like few other directors in history. His many masterpieces, such as “Seven Samurai” , “Rashomon” , “Ran” or “Yojimbo” , are still revered and cherished by filmgoers and directors today. 2018 marks the 20th year since Kurosawa’ s passing, but his work remains as powerful as ever..

In this lavishly illustrated book, Tokyo-based author and financier Peter Tasker pays homage to one of Japan’ s greatest creative spirits. Through a series of essays, vignettes, poems and fictional excursions, Tasker explores the wealth of beauty and wisdom in Kurosawa’ s more than 30 movies, provides insightful commentary on Kurosawa’ s life, and sheds light on some of Kurosawa’ s lesser known forays. As Tasker reflects, “In today’ s world of fake news and competing historical narratives, Rashomon, with its multiple perspectives on the same bloody event, is more relevant than ever. Likewise, the kind of epic struggle depicted in Seven Samurai dates back eons in both Eastern and Western cultures. The film will continue to thrill as long as against-the-odds battles remain to be fought, which is to say as long as human nature remains as it is.”



About Peter Tasker

Peter Tasker is an expert on Japanese and Asian economics and the author of a number of critically acclaimed non-fiction and fiction books in English and Japanese, including “Inside Japan” (1987), “Japan 2020” (1997), “Buddha Kiss” (1997), “Dragon dance” (2003) and “Maximum Target” (2011). He has a keen interest in 1960s and 1970s Japanese culture and has translated numerous works by underground icon Shuji Terayama into English. He is a life-long fan of master director Akira Kurosawa's films.

About the Book

Hardcover binding

214 pages (incl. film stills, illustrations, and photographs by Akihide Tamura)

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About Zen Foto Gallery

Zen Foto was established by Mark Pearson in 2009 as a gallery and publisher of the photography of Japan and China. Among the more than 100 books published during this time, a number have been awarded major prizes, including the Ken Domon and Hayashi Awards.



For inquiries (incl. interview requests) please contact info@shashasha.jp

Reviews & Comments

“Kurosawa created works of unmatched power -- bold, challenging and entertaining art, far beyond what seems achievable in his time or any other time. Tasker’ s book explores and illuminates that. I’ m knocked out by the design and admire the intimate, anti-film book approach. It brings me closer to the artist and the person.”

— Steven Okazaki, director of Mifune: The Last Samurai

“Peter Tasker’ s *On Kurosawa: A Tribute to the Master Director* achieves something that didn’ t seem possible – a genuinely fresh perspective on this exhaustively documented filmmaker. Exquisitely designed, the book turns to the Japanese tradition of *zuihitsu* (random jottings) for its model, with poems, essays, quotations and even fiction to reflect upon each of the director’ s 30 films (plus others he wrote or were never made). Designed by Satoshi Machiguchi and lavishly illustrated, *On Kurosawa* is an essential, one-of-a-kind tribute.”

— Stuart Galbraith IV

Author, *The Emperor and the Wolf – The Lives and Films of Akira Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune*

“All in all, I must say that I really enjoyed Tasker’ s less conventional approach to Kurosawa’ s life and films. While some chapters certainly worked better for me than others, the book offers many fresh perspectives on topics that I feel I have become quite familiar with in the last twenty odd years of maintaining a Kurosawa website. It’ s always nice to be surprised in this way.”

— Vili Maunula, curator of the Akira Kurosawa Info website.

“The book is crafted with lots of photographs from which one almost “smells the blood and mud,” as Peter Tasker says he did when he had a chance-encounter with Kurosawa’ s *Seven Samurai* as a student film-addict one rainy night many decades ago. His book reminds one that the director was widely known as an extreme perfectionist. “Well done,” he would say.”

— Tomohiko Taniguchi, Professor at Keio University and Special Advisor to Prime Minister Abe.

“This is a beautifully designed and enjoyable book that sheds new light on Akira Kurosawa's body of work. The author's deep love for a master film-maker and his films shines through on every page.”

— Frederik L. Schodt, award-winning translator and author of *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* and other works

“Like viewing a mountain from several angles, *On Kurosawa* brings alive Kurosawa the colossus in a unique and freshly illuminating way. Peter Tasker calls Kurosawa a “gift from Japan to the world.” His book is truly a gift to us, Kurosawa’s admirers and students.”

— Fran Rubel Kuzui, filmmaker

“Kurosawa lovers have reason to rejoice. Peter Tasker’s *ON KUROSAWA* is a gorgeous and comprehensive anthology of the master’s works. In this essential volume, Tasker reflects and illuminates us on the brilliant, multifaceted work of Japan’s most important filmmaker.”

— Min Jin Lee, author of *FREE FOOD FOR MILLIONAIRES* and *PACHINKO*, finalist for the National Book Award.

“A visual tour of Kurosawa’s filmic legacy that reminds us of not only his domestic influence but also the global power his films and cinematic tapestry evoke.”

— Barak Kushner, Professor of East Asian History at Cambridge University.

“I learned a lot from this wonderful book. *That Drunken Angel*, one of my favorite all-time Kurosawa films, a graphic and moody depiction of the post Tokyo Underworld, is probably the first ever yakuza movie. That the greatest director in the world, who made many masterpieces including *Seven Samurai*, *Ikiru*, and *Rashomon*, went ten years at the peak of his power as a director without being allowed to direct a movie in Japan, until George Lucas helped put together the funding for *Kagemusha*, recruiting Francis Ford Coppola as co-producer. I also learned that Kurosawa had a ferocious temper and was a very heavy drinker, but also managed to read the massive novel *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy more than 30 times, and considered Fyodor Dostoyevsky his favorite author. These are just a few of the terrific insights into Akira Kurosawa and his world that you will glean from his handsomely produced book. Peter Tasker has done us all a remarkable service with *On Kurosawa*, which caused me spend the weekend after reading it watching Kurosawa films. We owe Peter a big debt of gratitude.”

— Robert Whiting, author of *You Gotta Have Wa* and *Tokyo Underworld*

The Samples

From the chapter “Drunken Angel” :

“Near the alcoholic doctor’s clinic there is a suppurating sump, where people throw rotting trash, broken dolls and mangled bicycles. The water breeds mosquitoes and typhoid. In the daytime street kids play there and in the evenings hookers assemble for a smoke and a chat before heading off to work.

One night, a young tough hunches on a wall playing a guitar. A man wearing a dark kimono approaches, his face lost in the shadow of his homburg hat.

“Let me have a go,” he says. The young tough hands over the guitar. The newcomer picks out a slow, melancholy melody.

“That’s a nice piece,” says the younger man. “What is it?”

The newcomer looks up. His face is creased like old leather. “It’s from before your time. It’s a song about murder.”

The melody floats through the open window of the clinic. Inside the doctor is treating a yakuza with a knife-wound to the hand. The yakuza can’t stop coughing. The doctor suspects tuberculosis. The yakuza is not interested in any diagnosis. He shoves the doctor to the ground and walks out.

The doctor fixes himself a cocktail of medical alcohol.

The sick yakuza dies an ugly, lonely death, as such a man must. The only sounds are the harsh rasps of his breath as he grapples with his mentor and killer, the two men rolling and slithering in a pool of spilt white paint.”

From the chapter “Reading Books” :

“Sanshiro Sugata Part 2 was made in 1945 when Tokyo was being methodically fire-bombed into a wasteland of ash and burnt-out rubble. It is more overtly propagandist than its predecessor. The Americanized Japanese who works at the U.S. embassy is a horrible little creep. Boxing – later to become wildly popular in 1960s Japan – is presented as a disgusting spectacle. In Sanshiro’s words, “they make men fight like dogs or cockerel.” Worse are the crowds, vampy foreign women and cigar-chomping males, laughing and cheering as a defeated man lies damaged on the ground.

For various reasons, Sanshiro finds it necessary to take part in one such event at the U.S. embassy, taking on famous prize-fighter William “the Killer” Lister. Needless to say, Sanshiro loses little time in dumping the lanky American on the canvas with enough force to end the bout then and there.

When he is presented with his winnings, an extraordinary amount of cash, he walks over to the other

corner and drops it in his defeated opponent's lap.

The unflattering portrayal of foreigners has displeased some American critics, but it is only one theme in the film. Judo's status as repository of noble values – humility, self-discipline and respect for your opponent – faces a greater challenge, that presented by the upstart sport of karate. The foreign boxers get off lightly compared to the karate-ka, who are depicted as shrieking lunatics who pick on little guys.

“I don't consider karate a martial art,” Sanshiro's sensei sternly declares. “You people don't respect the dojo.”

In the end there is reconciliation, but only after Sanshiro has taught them a hard physical and spiritual lesson.”

The poem “Red Beard” :

This progressive humanitarian doctor
Who has done so much to aid the poor
And teach his pupils noble principles
Suddenly loses it
He kicks, punches, gouges
Dislocates joints, snaps bones like twigs
Leaves a dozen enemies moaning and broken,
Yelling get the fuck out of my movie