

Sanjuro

Tsubaki Sanjūrō, 1962, Japan

Film Overview



Roughly the Japanese equivalent of an American Western, Sanjuro brings to the screen an epic hero far more formidable than the celebrated tall men and top guns of the 19th century Yankee frontier. The charm of this fascinating Toho production, stylishly directed by Akira Kurosawa, is the personality of the hero, powerfully played by Toshiro Mifune. The story is set in the turbulent mid-1800s, and describes the remarkable manner in which one man, the warrior Sanjuro, destroys the wretched machinery of a corrupt ruling faction. He is endowed with an incredible sense of logic - a Gestaltian way of reasoning, invariably correct in drawing the simplest, most natural conclusions when others have jumped to theirs emotionally and illogically. As usual, Kurosawa doesn't compromise in the battle and brutality area. This one features a

rousing climactic duel between the title roleist and his chief adversary that outdoes the average Western showdown by a dramatic mile. -Variety.com reviewer

Akira Kurosawa is one of Japan's best-known filmmakers, responsible for such classics as *The Seven Samurai*, *Yojimbo*, and *Rashomon*. Though he is best known for samurai films, he also directed more modern-themed pieces such as *Ikiru* and *Dreams*. He is also well-known for his collaborations with Toshiro Mifune, who plays Sanjuro in this film and its 1961 prequel, *Yojimbo*.



Culture Notes

- **Rōnin:** Strictly speaking, Sanjuro is not a samurai proper but a *rōnin*, a term that refers to masterless samurai. Normally, a samurai served a feudal lord or daimyo, but he could become a *rōnin* if dismissed or if his master lost his title and land or died. In modern times, the term is also used to describe Japanese students who fail their college entrance exams and take a year off to study for the exams again. By contrast, the nine inexperienced swordsmen Sanjuro winds up helping are not *rōnin* but samurai in the official employ of the clan.

