

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## No regrets for our youth (1946)

Akira Kurosawa

### OVERVIEW

This was Kurosawa's fifth film. It has its roots in the so called Takigawa incident (1933), which is itself viewed as a classic statement of democratization, as the U.S. and other forces were to discuss and embrace the term during the U.S. Occupation of Japan. In other words Kurosawa is reaching directly into the history into which his own personal and creative life was founded. It is noteworthy that a grappling with personal history comes first in the thinking of this engaged creator. He is reaching out, here, into a space in which the modern Japanese consciousness was just beginning to formulate itself.

The Kyoto University incident, which drew such national interest to itself, began in 1933, when as we know the global international geopolitical climate was heating up. (In the West we were fretting over developments in Germany and the Sudetenland.) The incident opened when the University of Tokyo Law Professor, Takigawa Yukitoki, gave a series of lectures on the responsibility of the judiciary, to take account of the social roots of deviance when dealing with individuals brought before them. The climax of the argumentation, over the positions taken here, came in May 1933, when the Minister of Education, fearing the spread of Marxist ideology, ordered Professor Yukitoki fired for spreading Marxist ideology. The lasting impact of the incident was that the baselines against Communism grew more firmly defined in the East. The battle lines between Marxism and the capitalist west were sharply drawn, and Kurosawa (born 1910) was just coming into full maturity as such events as the Takigawa incident occurred.

*Auteur* The author's work in the present film, which was released in 1946, just after the conclusion of the War, involved Kurosawa far more than he wanted in the intricacies of the creative life of Japan under the United States occupation, which was determined to enforce 'democratic values'--interest in civil rights, women's freedoms, and the evils of militarism.

*Film* Kurosawa's producer and co-writer, Keiji Matsuzuki, had been a student of Professor Takigawa at Kyoto, and wanted to produce a film about the incident itself. In December 1945 he travelled to interview former participants and students of the Incident, people whose vibrant participation in the incident had shaped their own future lives. The film itself provides the starkest black and white imagery of the attentively listening Japanese cadets, to whom it was evident, that they were listening to material of explosive interest. It cannot go without interest, furthermore, that Kurosawa has etched into our eyes, through the beginning of the film, the bleak pointillist-pictorial pressures of the Japanese script.

*Historical background* The present film, which shows us Kurosawa as an historian of himself and of his culture, is at the same time a kind of memoir. That he can pull off this difficult skill, writing himself as history, is a key to the whole range of his creativity. The present film helps us realize that Kurosawa is inherently historical awareness. He is not a historian, who stands apart and observes, but an intensely living individual whom history is.

### SYNOPSIS

The script enters onto the incident, at Kyoto University, in which many cadets find themselves drawn to the classroom teaching of Professor Yagihara, who is speaking of the Japanese judicial system, and recommending, against orthodox procedure, that legal practice should extend itself into considerations of the accusers' socio-economic background. The hint of Marxism. In these ideas, is frightening enough, to the University authorities, to get Professor Yagihara fired. Prior to that outcome, however, the Professor's daughter has been ardently courted by two of his students, the fiery radical, Noge, and the equitable

Itokawa. The latter goes on into a government job as a prosecutor, but Noge is jailed on grounds of suspected sedition, for four years. Itokawa eventually gets news of his fellow suitor--who has been out of jail for a year--and tells Yukie. the Professor's daughter, Noge is invited to the Professor's house for dinner. In an emotionally charged conversation, Yukie realizes how deeply she still feels for Noge; learning that he is now about to leave for China, she begs him for one more meeting together.

Yukie moves to Tokyo, where for several years she works at menial jobs. One day she runs into Itokawa, who tells her how get in touch with Noge. Their seemingly imperishable love blossoms. They spend several years together, and get married. (Kurosawa is a master of time; he controls cinematographic techniques for collapsing time and space, while at the same time insinuating the presence of what is missing.) Things do not go smoothly. Yukie becomes aware, gradually, that Noge is still involved in subversive activities--the kind for which he was previously jailed--but she is intentionally kept in the dark about the real nature of what is going on. The authorities move in on Noge just before his plans are to go into effect, and both he and Yukie are taken into custody. Noge is once more imprisoned, but Yukie is released, after some rough interrogation, on the grounds of ignorance. Her other old suitor, Itokawa, has a lot to do with getting her released.

Yukie's parents travel into Tokyo to see her, and because the Professor himself intends to represent Noge in court. It turns out, however, that Noge has died the day before, news which crushes Yukie. She takes Noge's ashes to his parents, who are farmers living out in the country, It turns out, however, that Noge's parents have become pariahs in the village, thanks to the suspicion that their son was a spy, although Yukie, who claims to be Noge's wife, repeatedly assures them that their son was a wonderful person. Yukie persists in her efforts to persuade Noge's parents, living with them through the cold winter, even as she herself is feverishly ill. She struggles through the harvest with her mother in law, struggles even while running a high fever.

At the end of this arduous harvest season, when all the crops had been gathered, vandals broke into the family storage bins, and stole their crops. This breaks the spirit of Noge's father, who turns to Yukie as a true daughter-in law and family member.

After the War, Yukie's father is freed of all suspicions and reinstated as an honored academician, while Yukie herself is totally reconciled with her farmer family. In the end, in fact, Yukie decides that the most valuable work she can make of her life is on the social-agricultural level. She returns to Noge's parents, no longer to play the piano, her youthful passion. But to work toward social goals, like women's enfranchisement and land reform, ideals the U.S. occupying forces were heavily recommending for Occupied Japan.

## CHARACTERS

*Yukie Yagihara*, daughter of Professor Yagihara, and the most fully realized character in the script. From the outset, pressed by ardent suitors, she is dramatic, overblown in her emotions, and of very decided opinions. From the start she is particularly drawn to Noge, the more flamboyant--and radical-- of her two main suitors. Her relation to this risk taking young man sets a track for her own flamboyant life course, which, to the end, remains faithful to the path set by Noge.

*Noge*. One of the two intense suitors of Yukie, whom he knew through Professor Yagihara, his teacher in the University of Kyoto. Noge is from the start a person of strong feelings, political as well as Romantic. And in fact it is his political ardor that generates much of the substance of the film. Noge is a strongly committed anti militarist, at a time when the Japanese are putting their full energies into their war machine.

*Professor Yagihara* is father to Yukie, and an influential voice, at the University of Kyoto, for new social perspectives, such as the view that criminal trials should take account of the social background of the accused. The Marxist implications of this position lost the Professor his teaching post. He remains a true friend and ally to Noge, long after the young man's incarceration.

*Madame Noge* is the mother of Noge, and for a long time refuses to accept Yukie into her family as a stepdaughter.

*Madame Yagihara*, wife of the Professor.

*Mr Noge*, Noge's father.

*Itokawa*, Noge's close friend and fellow student at the University in Kyoto. He intercedes several times in behalf of Noge and Yukie.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Yukie is one of the deepest human portraits in Kurosawa's work. We know her first in the highly cultivated home of her academic father's work, at the University of Kyoto. She is a brilliant young lady, well school and disciplined, addicted to playing classical piano. She is intrigued by the two cadets who pursue her, Itokawa, a prudent and thoughtful lawyer to be, and Noge, a risk taker, a radical, and a young talent destined for difficulties and conflicts. Her personal preference, ultimately, is for Noge but she knows that decision has pain written all over it. In the end, after having been married for several years to Noge, she leaves him, realizing that he was still involved in dangerous anti-government schemes. As she is trying to come to terms with this disturbing news, she receives news of his death. Devastated, she takes Noge's ashes to his family in the country, explaining that she is his wife, and extolling him in the most passionate terms. By the film's end she has won her way into Noge's family. For the rest of her life she will devote herself to community business, and women's possibilities.

## THEMES

**Academia** The movie opens onto scenes of an old fashioned military University, the University of Kyoto. The date is the late thirties, war is in the atmosphere, and ideologies circle dramatically on all sides. The sense is strong, that historical calamity rules, yet that the power of thinking stands as a stay against power.

**Militarism** The impending powers are assembling their strength, and daily life is suffused with the breakdown of the old world. It is a familiar mood to the world of cultural history.

**Village Life** In Japan, as elsewhere in the world, the old agricultural foundation of society is just holding on. By the end of the present film, as of *Seven Samurai*, we take a close look at the pathos of the last hold of village life.

### **Marxism.**

We see from the firing of Professor Yagihara that even the suggestion of a Marxist perspective strikes fear into established society. Marxism is the creative and dangerous element in the present situation.

**Passion** Yukie is an embodiment of human passion ; whether it be toward men . ideas, or loyalty to the piano, she reminds us of the intensity of human passion.

**Subversion** In an era fraught with quasi secretive national movements, spying becomes an omnipresent fact of life. One side penetrates the hidden secrets of another. This is the dark world in which Noge disappears..

**Agriculture** The traditional mainstay of a culture, even in times of war, as we see in the present film; a decisive corridor of social action.

## SCENES

We open with a scene of protest, at Kyoto University, against the Japanese invasion of Manchuria.

Distinguished Professor Yagihara is relieved of teaching duties because of his opposition to militarism, and traces of Marxism in his lectures.

Within Professor Yagihara's household we track the progress of two of Yukie's suitors, one impetuous Noge, the other the conservative Itokawa. Both men will throughout their lives play decisive roles for Yukie.

Itokawa becomes a prosecutor for the government, while Noge goes to prison for four years.

Itokawa learns that Noge is a free man, and he informs Yukie.

Noge returns to Tokyo, while Yukie, who cannot forget Noge, follows separately, for several years plunging, alone, into a variety of menial urban jobs. Eventually she and Noge meet and marry, remaining close for several years.

Yukie is aware that Noge is continuing his clandestine illegal activities, and in fact the authorities arrest Noge the night before his plans come into effect. Yukie is interrogated, but with Itokawa's help she is released.

Yukie's parents come to Tokyo to support her, but by the time they arrive, Noge has been found dead.

Yukie takes Noge's ashes to his parents, who are farmers. She presents herself as his wife, but his parents are suspicious of her.

Ultimately Yukie wins over Noge's parents, and remains in the village with them, devoting herself to farm issues and women's advancement.