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CAST

Masaharu Fukuyama Tomoaki Shigemori
Kôji Yakusho Takashi Misumi
Suzu Hirose Sakie Yamanaka
Shinnosuke Mitsushima Akira Kawashima
Mikako Ichikawa Itsuki Sasabara
Izumi Matsuoka Akiko Hattori
Aju Makita Yuka Shigemori
Hajime Inoue Minoru Ono
Isao Hashizume Akihisa Shigemori
Yuki Saito Mitsue Yamanaka
Kotaro Yoshida Daisuke Settsu

CREW

Written, Directed and Edited by **Hirokazu Kore-eda**
Chief Executive Producers **Shinichi Ogawa, Chiaki Harada, Tom Yoda**
Produced by **Kaoru Matsuzaki, Hijiri Taguchi**
Associate Producers **Megumi Osawa, Satomi Otake**
Music by **Ludovico Einaudi**
Director of Photography **Mikiya Takimoto**
Lighting by **Norikiyo Fujii**
Production Sound and Re-recording Mixer **Kazuhiko Tomita JSA**
Production Designer **Yohei Taneda**
Set Decorator **Yutaka Motegi**
Set Designer **Saki Ozawa**
Stylist **Kazuko Kurosawa**
Hair and Make-up Supervisor **Katsuhiko Yuhmi**
Sound Effects Editor **Akihiko Okase JSA**
Casting by **Toshie Tabata**
Assistant Director **Shoichi Morimoto**
Script Supervisor **Chidori Yano**
Production Manager **Yu Kumagai**
Line Producer **Jun Ohinata**





THREE STRIKES AND YOU'RE OUT THE AMBIGUITIES OF JUSTICE IN KORE-EDA'S THE THIRD MURDER

by Alexander Jacoby

Hirokazu Kore-eda has long resisted comparisons to Yasujiro Ozu. Despite visual and situational echoes of Ozu's home dramas in films such as *Nobody Knows* (*Dare mo shiranai*, 2004), *Still Walking* (*Aruiitemo aruiitemo*, 2008) and *After the Storm* (*Umi yori mo mada fukaku*, 2016), the director himself has claimed to feel closer to Mikio Naruse, or even Ken Loach. And the comparison with Ozu is certainly unfair in one sense. Whereas Ozu, at least in the sound era, made the same kind of film again and again, producing numerous subtle variations on the motifs and characterisations of the domestic drama which was his speciality, Kore-eda has worked frequently in other genres. His career started in television documentary. The premises of both *After Life* (*Wandafuru raifu*, 1998), set in a posthumous limbo, and *Air Doll* (*Kuki ningyo*, 2009), about a blow-up doll that comes to life, are fantastic. *Hana* (*Hana yori mo naho*, 2006) was a mellow, slightly comic riff on the *jidai-geki* (period film). *The Third Murder* (*Sandome no satsujin*, 2017), which won Best Picture, and scooped Kore-eda himself a remarkable hat trick of prizes for Best Director, Best Screenplay and Best Editing, at the Japan Academy Awards in March, 2018, marks another departure, this time into the territory of courtroom drama.

Kore-eda's film begins with what appears to be an open-and-shut murder case. The opening scene depicts the crime, apparently committed by Misumi (Kôji Yakusho). Misumi has confessed to a charge of murder and robbery. Enlisted by his baffled colleague Settsu (Kotaro Yoshida), defence lawyer Shigemori (Masaharu Fukuyama) takes over an investigation into the precise circumstances of the killing, hoping to secure a more lenient penalty. But Misumi repeatedly changes his story, and, as the drama develops, the facts of the case become increasingly uncertain. Critic Peter Bradshaw writes that the film "is about fighting a losing battle to establish the facts, and to grasp a truth that appears to change shape and disappear over the horizon." Reaching, perhaps inevitably, for a comparison with another canonical Japanese director, he suggests that "it might be [Kore-eda's] homage or theme-variation on Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), about the crime, which refuses to reveal itself objectively." Kurosawa certainly does seem to be evoked in the repeated shots of lawyer and client confronting each other on either side of a prison grille – an image which recapitulates the final scene of his 1963 thriller, *High and Low* (*Tengoku to jigoku*). In one key shot, we even see Shigemori's face superimposed on that of Misumi, a direct homage to similar images in *High and Low*.



Another parallel between the two films is the threat of execution. Like the criminal in *High and Low*, Misumi faces a death sentence if convicted. Japan today is one of the few developed countries (along with Singapore, Taiwan, and the United States) to retain capital punishment, although the annual tally of executions is in single figures, since death sentences in Japan are now usually handed down only for cases of aggravated or multiple murder. Misumi, as the title of the film suggests, has already been convicted of two previous killings.

The film's subtle critique of capital punishment is expressed through its demonstration of uncertainty about precisely what has happened and why. When the film was premiered at Venice, Kore-eda commented as follows:

"I wanted to depict the lawyer's job properly. When I talked to lawyers [...], they told me: "Court is not the place to determine the truth." They said that nobody could know the truth[...]. If that's the case, I want to make a film about a legal drama where the truth isn't revealed. Usually a film reaches the truth in the end. However, in this film, only the judgement procedure concludes while the characters don't see the truth. It means our society condones an imperfect system that cannot maintain itself unless people judge people not knowing the truth. I think that the protagonist would feel terrified when he realises it."

The imperfection of the legal process is, literally, a matter of life and death in a county which retains capital punishment. The degree of support for the death penalty in Japan is hard to judge. Official government statistics tell us that around 80% of Japanese favour its retention, a rate of support which actually seems to have strengthened slightly in the fifty years since Nagisa Oshima began his polemical *Death by Hanging* (*Koshikei*, 1968) with statistics suggesting 71% in favour. Indeed, some have claimed that public support hardened in the wake of a number of dramatic, high-profile crimes in the 1990s, most notably the Aum Shinrikyo terrorist attacks on the Tokyo subway in 1995. However, other recent surveys have suggested a much lower rate of support. Criminologist Mai Sato conducted a study in which half the participants were informed of the specific realities of execution, as well as the possibility of a wrongly convicted suspect being put to death. Perhaps unsurprisingly, only a little over a third of the informed participants expressed support for capital punishment; more startling was that less than half of the uninformed group did so. These figures diverged dramatically from the official ones and suggest that the government statistics may not accurately gauge public opinion. Kore-eda's film is a participant in a national debate which, like the case he dramatises, may be less open-and-shut than it at first seems.

To focus too strongly on the death penalty as an issue, however, is to suggest that *The Third Murder* is primarily a polemical film, which is not the case. Its critique of capital punishment emerges naturally and subtly from the film's observations on the ultimate impossibility of discerning the unambiguous truth about human behaviour and motivation, and from its careful, near-documentary depiction of the actual procedures of the courtroom. Committed to achieving verisimilitude and himself lacking a legal background, Kore-eda invited a group of lawyers to enact trial scenes and courtroom scenarios in a preparatory process which took several months. He thus familiarised himself with the legal language needed to write a convincing script, as well as with a lawyer's cast of mind. "My normal thought processes," he commented in an interview, "are very different from the lawyers' thought process and I think that it was really important that I invest that much time and energy in doing it."

Kore-eda himself, then, has chosen to present the film as a departure in his oeuvre, and its viewers may be inclined to agree. But *Sight and Sound* reviewer Michael Leader points out that the film's theme - "the distances between events as experienced, remembered, communicated and comprehended", is not in fact a new concern for the director, who had explored similar issues in the television documentary *Without Memory* (*Kioku ga ushinawareta toki*, 1996) and in his second fiction feature, *After Life*. We might add that Kore-eda's first fiction feature, *Maborosi* (*Maboroshi no hikari*, 1995), also starts with an ambiguous death and traces an attempt on the part of the living to understand what happened, and that *Distance* (2001), his third, also focuses on people dealing with the aftermath of a murderous crime: in this case, the relatives of members of a criminal cult who poisoned the Tokyo water supply, causing many deaths, before committing mass suicide. In a sense, then, Kore-eda is returning here to the themes of the early stages of his career.

Kore-eda forges some subtle connections with the rest of his oeuvre by inserting some characteristic motifs into the drama, which are subtly reshaped in their new generic context. For instance, the motif of food, which recurs in Kore-eda's domestic dramas, is deployed here with new significance. The murder victim, a businessman, ran a canning factory, and we learn that he may have been corrupt, having traded in mislabelled, poor-quality flour. When Shigemori considers a trip to the town of Rumoi (where Misumi's own daughter resides) on the northern island of Hokkaido, discussion in his office moves to the culinary delicacies on offer there. Shigemori's secretary (Izumi Matsuoaka) remarks that the crab is likely to be delicious; Shigemori retorts that Rumoi is actually famous not for crab but for octopus. Here, and particularly in the face of Shigemori's expressed reluctance to go to Hokkaido, the concern with food suggests a cynical detachment from the case. Moments later, the assistant, having glanced at photographs of the corpse, which was doused in petrol and set alight after the murder, quips, "No *yakiniku* [barbecued meat] for a while."



In fact, a few scenes later, we see the investigators discussing the case over a dinner of *yakiniku*, with the meat sizzling visibly, and noisily, on the tabletop barbecue. Again, the detail suggests a hardened, distanced, purely professional attitude to violent death. Part of the film's interest lies in the way in which it traces a movement away from this professionalism, towards a new emotional commitment on Shigemori's part to uncovering the true facts of the case and to his client's welfare.

The casting, too, is significant in forging links with Kore-eda's earlier work, as the film gathers together some of the director's established "family" of actors. Shigemori is played by Masaharu Fukuyama, who had also taken the lead role in *Like Father, Like Son* (*Soshite chichi ni naru*, 2013), where he had played, in Mark Schilling's words, "another self-centered and conflicted member of the elite". Like his character in the earlier film, he is a distant father (in this case, to a teenage daughter). Suzu Hirose, as the murdered man's daughter, reappears from *Our Little Sister* (*Umimachi Diary*, 2015). Isao Hashizume, playing the small but crucial role of Shigemori's father, had acted in *I Wish* (*Kiseki*, 2011) and *After the Storm*.

Such casting advertises the film's status as part of Kore-eda's oeuvre, but there are also some significant thematic overlaps. For instance, Shigemori's father is a retired judge, who had tried Misumi for the murders he committed some decades earlier, and now regrets his leniency: "Because of my compassionate ruling, someone else had to die." Having believed at the time that Misumi's unhappy childhood and poverty were extenuating circumstances, he now insists that an inborn difference separates those who are capable of killing from those who are not: "Some people are more beast than human." This scene again links the film to *Like Father, Like Son*, a film centrally concerned with the question of nature versus nurture, in which the character played by Fukuyama also has a father (albeit one not played by Hashizume) who insists on the primacy of the former over the latter ("It's all about blood, in humans as well as in horses").

Not all the main actors are familiar from the director's earlier films. Playing the accused Misumi, Kôji Yakusho was making his debut for Kore-eda. However, his performance here is part of a prolific and distinguished acting career in modern Japanese cinema. International fame came with Masayuki Suo's *Shall We Dance* (*Sharu wi Dansu?*, 1996), but Yakusho has been most consistently associated with the films of the younger Kurosawa, Kiyoshi, for whom he starred in the horror thriller, *Cure* (*Kyua*, 1999), amongst other films. Indeed, if the visual echoes of *High and Low* suggest a home to Akira Kurosawa, the casting of Yakusho suggests a tribute to his namesake Kiyoshi, whose films have frequently been discussed by Japanese critics in terms of ambiguity. The way in which *The Third Murder* makes the audience increasingly uncertain of what actually happened might be taken as a homage to

Kiyoshi Kurosawa's style of cultivated ambiguity. Ambiguity is visually encapsulated here in the telling final shot, filmed from above, of Shigemori standing indecisively at a crossroads. In the end, the film is arguably interested less in resolving the questions it poses, either about the actual course of events or about the morality of the death penalty itself, than in charting the irreducible ambiguity of human conduct and the limits of our ability to understand it. As Yakusho himself has said of the character he plays: "He's like a three-dimensional puzzle. Not that I had anything in common with him, but human beings really have those sorts of multiple layers."

Alexander Jacoby is Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies at Oxford Brookes University and author of A Critical Handbook of Japanese Film Directors: From the Silent Era to the Present Day.





AN INTERVIEW WITH HIROKAZU KORE-EDA

***The Third Murder* is a suspense-filled legal drama. Where did your inspiration come from?**

Firstly, I wanted to depict the job of a lawyer properly. Then when I talked to lawyers, the legal supervisor of *Like Father, Like Son* (*Soshite chichi ni naru*, 2013), everyone told me: "Court is not the place to determine the truth." They said that nobody could know the truth. I thought: "That's interesting." I then thought if that is the case, I want to make a film about a legal drama where the truth isn't revealed.

You went through many rounds of trial and error when writing the script.

In the past, I have made films from a perspective where the characters were not judged. In other words, I have filmed without an omniscient perspective. However, the genres of suspense and legal drama don't work without an omniscient perspective. Even so, I still didn't want one, so I struggled with this conflict.

There is a real sense of tension when we watch the lawyer (Masaharu Fukuyama) interview the murderer (Kôji Yakusho).

We did script readings with Fukuyama and Yakusho before we started filming. The scene in the interview room was really wonderful. At first I thought I didn't want many interview room scenes because they would be too static. In my previous family dramas, I thought about how I would move people in space. For this film, the interview room divided by glass basically contained people sitting down. However, when I saw the two of them interacting, I thought that the scene could be very emotional. So, I added more scenes in the interview room. After I saw the actors at work, I could see the framework of the film.

The cinematography is very powerful, drawing on film noir visuals but with a texture all of its own.

This time I aimed for the look of a crime film. I emphasised the contrast between light and shadow, not the natural light that I have used before. I received suggestions from the cinematographer Mikiya Takimoto, and also shot in CinemaScope. With CinemaScope, close-ups are very effective: the scene with the three lawyers walking side-by-side, for example, looks awesome. I think it worked out very well.



How did you imagine the composition?

I had in mind the image of 1950s American crime dramas. First I asked Takimoto to watch *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945). We discussed films that used CinemaScope well, such as *Seven* (David Fincher, 1995) and several films directed by Paul Thomas Anderson, as well as Akira Kurosawa's *High and Low* (*Tengoku to jigoku*, 1963). We studied how to capture things in CinemaScope without losing a sense of tension.

The film reveals the fact that “judgment” is decided regardless of “truth”.

Usually a film reaches the truth in the end. However, with this film, only the judicial procedure concludes, while the characters don't see truth. It shows that our society condones an imperfect system that cannot maintain itself unless people judge others without knowing truth.

In recent years you have created your films by digging deep into your own experience. With *The Third Murder*, did you want to do something different?

Yes. I wanted to take an entirely different approach. At some point, a time will come where I can't take on new challenges, so it was a great fun being able to work on this type of film at this time.







ABOUT THE TRANSFER

The Third Murder is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with optional 5.1 and 2.0 audio. The film was prepared in High Definition by Wild Bunch and provided to Arrow Films.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by James Blackford
Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni
Production Coordinator Liane Cunje
Technical Producer James White
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Blu-ray Mastering Digital Cinema United
Design Obviously Creative
Artwork Peter Strain

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Chris Edwards, Anthony Nield, Alexander Jacoby



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