Time and History Within Rashomon: Film Analysis

Rashomon is a film that questioning the human natures, which was released in 1950 when was 5 years later of being defeated in World War II. In that historical background, what Rashomon meant in that specific time and how the postwar society affected Rashomon are things that worth to concern. Although most of Rashomon's writings focus on the film's handling of truth, which has been talked much in Kurosawa’s movie at all periods of his filmmaking life, at least four Western attempts have linked Rashomon to the postwar Japan's socio-political environment. James F. Davidson argued in his 1954 article 'Memory of Defeat in Japan: A Reappraisal of Rashomon,' although the film did not present a consistent theme in this sense. He thought this movie is “foolish to argue that the film is a complete or consistent allegory,' and many aspects pointing to this film reflect the military defeat and the subsequent US occupation of Japan. After all, I can list some ideas of Davison, which under my understanding, and I agree with:

- The outer layer of the story takes place at the door of the ruined Rashomon in the old capital of Japan. But in Akugatawa's original short story 'In a Grove,' which is the story that this movie’s plot really based on, but another story that was written by Akugatawa which is just called “Rashomon”. And the original Rashomon short story setting is a reference for Japan after the war.
- Although the film is faithful to Akutagawa's short stories, Taj?maru has a changed characteristic, in stark contrast to him and his fighters and their wives. In the original “In a Grove”, Taj?maru looks in style but in the film, he is an indifferent, rude one. He wrote: He is the least Japanese character after all. The characteristic is also an incarnation of Japanese folklore Oni or Ogre, often interpreted as a representative of foreigners. Taj?maru's rape of the beauty has transcended the obvious meaning.
- In reviewing past events, each character portrays themselves like that to protect the storyteller's self-esteem. However, they were eventually exposed as fraud. The irony of the heroic virtues found a natural response in the failed country, He said. The ideology and loyalty that existed until, the end of the war did not disappear in five years before the establishment of Rashomon. Make the failed society successful in accepting past and present challenges.

But there are few things that Davison didn’t mention about, that is, in Akutagawa’s original short story “Rashomon,' the chaotic society is not made by wars but natural disasters. In Kurosawa’s movie, he replaced the cause with a man-made event. In fact, every defendant claimed that they are responsible to the death of a warrior and they are guilty, even a woodcutter may be the reason to make samurai’s death. Why do those main characters lie in such a way that they making them sounds good yet still claim that they have that guilt? In the courtyard scenes, the judge is always in silence, and this silence in front of the characters’ confession, shows that Kurosawa appears to be making a point that says everyone is guilty, forgive us and don’t judge too harshly. The film appeared at a time when the Japanese war crimes trial is still going on. What most ordinary Japanese did was that claiming innocence, saying that it was the fault of the country’s leaders, and those two nuclear bombs eventually turned them into victims. But in Kurosawa’s way, everyone claims to be guilty.

Rashomon, in historical perspective, had been affected a lot by postwar society and Kurosawa made this movie to express his thought of postwar Japan situation in a certain level,

References

1. James F. Davidson, 1954, Memory of Defeat in Japan: A Reappraisal of Rashomon