

The classic and the contemporary of Japanese cinema: A comparative study of family relationships in *High and Low* and *Like Father, Like Son*

Introduction

I grew up loving film. My exposure to foreign language films has widened my perspective, thanks to their wonderful direction and the sensitive themes that emerge across cultures. Cinema is a unique medium that can move viewers who may not share a common language. Each audience member's interpretation of a movie is a result of the viewer's circumstances and worldview, which drives their relationship with the movie's characters. Growing up in a multi-generational household in India, I developed a deep appreciation of films that my family consumed in their childhood days, particularly Hindi language films. This motivated me to diversify my cinematic viewing to include movies rooted in overseas cultures. These experiences have empowered me to develop insightful character study, examination of technical aspects, and consideration of symbolism that inform my own interpretation of two works of Japanese cinema.

In this paper I analyze *High and Low* (1963) and *Like Father, Like Son* (2013), two films with comparative themes from different periods. The former is directed by Akira Kurosawa, who is Japan's most celebrated director, and one of world cinema's finest filmmakers (Ferrari, 2021). Research suggested that Hirokazu Koreeda's *Like Father, Like Son* (2013) bore similarities to *High and Low*, in terms of realism, exploration of class differences, and the moral dilemmas faced by the main characters. Placing these excellent movies by two proficient directors in dialogue, reveals shades of commonality, as well as comparable explorations of Japanese cultural and contextual concepts despite their generational differences.

Filmmakers, Film Summaries & Approach

Akira Kurosawa (1910-1998) is perhaps Japan's most celebrated filmmaker, and one of world cinema's finest directors. His films are heavily inspired from Hollywood works, especially westerns of directors like John Ford. Kurosawa is best known for his samurai epics like *Seven Samurai* (1954), *Yojimbo* (1961), and many more, but equally impactful are his works that explore human nature, such as *Ikiru* (1952) and *High and Low* (1963) (Sharp, 2015). Kurosawa bought the rights to the novel, *King's Ransom*, by Ed McBain (on which *High and Low* is based) and remodeled it according to his Japanese context (Eggert, 2017). *High and Low* is considered one of Kurosawa's most influential works. It earned a Golden Lion¹ nomination in Venice and is featured on the list of IMDb's 100 best movies of all time (Syversen, 2025).

High and Low (1963) is set during postwar Japan. It revolves around a wealthy shoe executive named Mr. Gondo, who stakes his life savings to achieve control over National Shoes. His plans collapse when Shinichi, the son of his chauffeur Aoki is mistakenly kidnapped instead of his son, Jun and the kidnapper demands a hefty ransom of 30 million yen from Mr. Gondo. After much hesitation, Gondo eventually pays up the ransom and Shinichi is returned safe and sound. The second half of the movie focuses on the investigation undertaken by the police to nab the kidnapper, who is later identified as Takeuchi.

It is fitting to place Hirokazu Koreeda's (b. 1962) film *Like Father, Like Son* (2013) in dialogue with Kurosawa's *High and Low*, as Kurosawa's *Ikiru* (1952) inspired Koreeda to become a filmmaker. Now one of Japan's most celebrated, Koreeda's films mainly focus on the theme of family, often highlighting moments of highs and lows, as if conversing with

¹ Top prize awarded at the Venice Film Festival

Kurosawa's work. Koreeda depicts ordinary family lives and brings us closer to his characters by highlighting their struggles. He tends to use water as a symbol to demonstrate his characters' decisions to let go of the past (Xu, 2021). The film, *Like Father, Like Son*, was critically acclaimed in Japan and abroad. It won the Jury Prize at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival (Festival de Cannes, 2013) and was nominated for many awards at the 37th Japan Academy Film Prize, including picture of the year, best director, best screenplay, best actor, best actress, best supporting actor (winner), and best supporting actress (winner), music, and cinematography (Japan Academy Film Prize, 2025).

Like Father, Like Son (2013) is set after the "Lost Decade" period in Japan². It tells the tale of a wealthy couple who discovers that their son Keita, and the child of a couple from a humble background, Ryusei (who is in fact, their biological son) were switched at birth. The couple is then faced with a very crucial decision: they must either continue raising Keita, or exchange him for Ryusei. Their choice forms the rest of the film's story.

Given that the characters in both films encounter a life-changing, family dilemma from a socioeconomic lens, it's interesting to compare these movies set during two distinct periods in Japan's history. It can inform us how relationships between family members have socioeconomically evolved. The films raise the following questions:

High and Low: If someone devotes their entire life to loyally serving us, do we treat them like family or do we still consider them as mere employees?

² "A period marked by economic stagnation from 1991 to 2011 in Japan" (Halton, 2024 : Source - <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/l/lost-decade.asp>)

Like Father, Like Son: What truly defines a parent, raising a child, or merely giving birth to a child? The conflict between nature and nurture is highlighted in this movie.

My goal is to explain the evolution of the change in family dynamics from postwar Japan to post lost decade Japan via these films.

Literature Review

To inform my own primary observations of both films, I consulted several background sources. These include critical analyses of both directors' work, of both films, as well as basic background relevant to Japanese family structure and interactions.

“High and Low,” an essay by Brian Eggert (2017)

Brian Eggert's essay on *High and Low* emphasizes the film's notion that one must be judged by their actions, not by social factors. The first half of the film is set mostly in Mr. Gondo's apartment. He makes a covert plan to buy out National Shoes and become its director - and receives the consequent phone call informing him that his chauffeur's son has been kidnapped for a high ransom. He must choose between his fortune or the kidnapped child. This first half is akin to a play. Mr. Gondo eventually pays the ransom and the child is returned safe and sound, but it is up to the police to catch the criminal. The police investigation is the core of the film's second half. Eggert also discusses Kurosawa's direction, and the usage of handheld cameras which make the audience connect deeper with the story.

“Film Retrospective: *High and Low*,” by Hakon Magnússon (2022)

Hakon Magnusson's review discusses the symbolisms that the film suggests: one instance is the word 'High' which alludes to the “rising middle class that emerged from post-war Japan, and the 'Low' referring to its counterpart, the increasingly desperate poor population.” It also

highlights the air-conditioned home of Mr. Gondo, contrasting it to the perspiring lower-middle class who use desk-fans (a classic example of this being the police station), and Takeuchi, the kidnapper, stating that his inability to sleep arose from the extreme summer heat. This review clarifies that Takeuchi's main motive behind the kidnapping was his envy of Gondo's lifestyle (and less his need for wealth), which drove him to discredit Gondo.

Cannes Film Review: '*Like Father, Like Son*' by Maggie Lee (2013)

Maggie Lee's review of *Like Father, Like Son* (2013) discusses the plot. A rich architect, Ryota Nonomiya, is a compulsive worker who doesn't devote time to his family and maps his son Keita's future to be a successful one. Only his wife Midori spends time with Keita. They receive news that Keita and another baby boy, Ryusei, were switched at birth. They meet Ryusei's carefree, unkempt, happy family. The father, Yudai Saiki, runs a small suburban appliance shop. The families try exchanging the kids as an experiment. At one point, Ryota offers to buy both kids, which deeply offends the Saikis. The review talks about Ryota's workaholicism, which is a Japanese norm. This alludes to *doryoku* (effort) to climb the social & corporate ladder and the act of maintaining unquestionable lifelong loyalty to one's firm.

"*Like Father, Like Son* tackles the meaning of family" by Helen Chao (2018)

Helen Chao (2018) highlights the contrast in the lifestyle of the two families – the rich family doesn't spend time together, while the poorer family can spend all the time in the world together. Ryota's actual son Ryusei embodies his traits, unlike Keita. Also Midori adheres to Ryota's discipline, as expected by Japanese wives. Chao also raises a concern that the boys are exchanged without their consent, showing how controlling Japanese parents are over their kids.

The Japanese Family in Transition by Firdous Nilofer and Hidayat Soomro (2011)

Firdous Nilofer and Hidayat Soomro (2011) discuss the new Civil Code that Japan adopted after World War II. Also, economic growth led to more nuclear families that were smaller. The husband was the breadwinner, while the wife managed the house. It also describes the intimacy in a mother-child relationship.

Analyzing the Films

High and Low and *Like Father, Like Son* show viewers how family relationships have changed drastically from postwar Japan to post-lost decade Japan, especially when viewed through a socioeconomic lens. Since economic growth in Japan is forcing people to work harder to climb the social ladder (*doryoku*), they struggle to find a balance between giving their family a better life or spending quality time with them. In *High and Low* we barely see any interactions between Mr. Gondo and Jun, mainly because he is compelled to take a decision concerning the life of his chauffeur's son, which has socioeconomic and ethical ramifications. However we will observe how this kidnapping incident affects Mr. Gondo's relationship with the other characters, mainly his wife, secretary, chauffeur, and the board of his company National Shoes. *Like Father, Like Son* came out 50 years after *High and Low*, yet similar themes emerge. This period witnessed huge advancements in Japan's economy which is creating plenty of opportunities, this in turn escalates the competition among students and working professionals, which explains the amplified work culture percolating in the film's professional and academic environments. In *Like Father, Like Son*, the couple from a humble background is able to devote quality time to their children, as opposed to the affluent father who is too engrossed in his work to spend time with Keita and serves as a controlling figure in Keita's life. With economic development, competition

has increased on many fronts, so children are pressured to surpass their peers, a pressure is visible in screening processes like entrance exams and in weighing the ransomed ‘worth’ of a child. Both *High and Low* and *Like Father, Like Son* reflect these family disconnections despite the generation between them.

Symbolism highlighting family relationships/visual symbolisms

In *Like Father, Like Son*, the individual priorities of the two families manifest in the children growing up in two starkly contrasting environments. The supposedly poorer family, the Saikis, isn’t really impoverished. They do not lack material possessions, but they lack the latest style and fad, i.e., they repair the old and reuse it. They own a car, a shop and living quarters. They have leisure time and embark on family trips. Like the wealthy Nonomiyas, the Saikis also have three kids, but the father (Yudai), unfettered by the prospect of socioeconomic progress, dedicates time to them. This is diametrically opposite to the wealthier family, who clearly have a better material quality of life, especially living in a posh, high-rise apartment. The Nonomiyas send Keita to a good school which can open a plethora of opportunities for him. However, Ryota Nonomiya, who expects qualities like strong work ethic, academic and professional excellence, both from his son Keita and from himself, spends no quality time with Keita—only his mother Midori does.

On the other hand, in *High and Low*, Mr. Gondo, whose house, perched atop a hill, overlooks the city, lives the opulent life of a corporate executive. One consequence of high economic growth in Japan was the rise in the number of nuclear families with fewer children—a “family mode more suitable to employed—worker households” (Nilofer & Soomro, p. 33, 2011). This idea is prevalent in both films—where Jun is the only child of Mr. Gondo, and Keita is the only child of Ryota and Midori. This doubling is visible in *High and Low* also. In the concluding

scene of *High and Low*, Gondo and Takeuchi (the destitute kidnapper) meet face to face, with the latter on death row. They are “separated only by glass and cage wire”(Eggert, 2017). Yet each person’s reflection can be seen when the other’s face is directly shown. This symbolizes the similarity that lies between the two people who started off with nothing, but faced their destinies arising from their respective choices.

The visual symbols in *Like Father, Like Son* mainly represent the evolution of the relationship between Ryota and Keita, especially during the climax - they convey the idea that quality time, not blood, serves as the bedrock for a healthy relationship. Ryota sees the pictures that Keita took of him, and breaks down. These photos symbolize Keita’s love for his father Ryota and the lost time between the two. There is another poignant scene where Ryota chases after Keita, who is heading away from the Saiki family of his own volition. Both are separated by a partition in the middle of the road. Ryota acknowledges that he wasn’t a good father, he also mentions having quit piano, so he realizes it is wrong to force Keita to play the piano³. As the two continue walking, the partition comes to an end, and both reunite emotionally. This partition depicts the disconnect between Ryota and Keita earlier in the film, and its end suggests a new start for them, where Ryota makes amends for not spending enough time with Keita earlier.

Koreeda’s methodical direction in the film enables the audience to connect more deeply with the story. He uses visual cues to convey relationships between characters and the world around them. We as audiences also feel drawn more to the characters (Xu, 2021). One example is when Ryota and his brother visit their parents’ house for lunch one afternoon, there is a shot that shows all four characters sitting on the mat and conversing while eating. The camera is

³ Being forced to take piano lessons is another indicator of socioeconomic status

placed at the eye level of a spectator sitting on the mat. This is known as the ‘tatami’ shot (tatami is a Japanese mat), a technique invented by Ozu, used in his 1953 masterpiece *Tokyo Story*. The tatami shot enables the viewer to witness the scene as if it were a daily ritual happening right beside them. It is an effective shot that enables the viewer to savor the scene (Aguilar, 2023). This instills *omoiyari* (empathy) in us for the characters. Also, Koreeda’s use of water as a visual motif in the scene’s backdrop to express his character’s decisions to let go of the past is beautifully shown in *Like Father, Like Son*, where the two families take a picture together by the seaside. The rich family is posing in a very stiff manner whereas the poorer family poses in a carefree, relaxed manner. This jarring juxtaposition, coupled with the physical separation of the two families, conveys the class differences.

The film ends with both families spending time in the Saiki (the poorer family) home. The message conveyed is that relationships are really cultivated by spending time with your loved ones, and supporting them in moments of weakness, not always judging or disciplining them. It is not through giving birth that one truly becomes a parent, but through the actions of understanding and caring for one’s child. Ryota was a disciplinarian earlier who never truly understood Keita’s feelings. Over the course of the film, he realizes his mistake and decides to start a new chapter with Keita. There is a glaring difference in the attitudes of the two families, the rich family values hard work and order, whereas the poor family values enjoying life, and spending time with loved ones. Yudai Saiki is a procrastinator by nature. He doesn’t frontload all his work into the present, instead choosing to space it one day at a time so that he is available for his family. Ryota works for a large firm and is packed with meetings and project work – he aspires for career success but ends up compromising family time.

Japanese cultural concepts in *Like Father, Like Son* & *High and Low*

In *Like Father, Like Son* and *High and Low*, concepts like traditional family bonds, gender roles in the family, child rearing practices are central to contextual analysis of the film. Further, Japanese cultural expectations like *omoiyari*, failure of *nemawashi*, educational competition, *doryoku*, and *amaeru* feature prominently.

In *Like Father, Like Son*, the importance of family relationships in the less affluent family is evident when the members pay respects to the deceased great-grandfather. This act of honoring one's ancestors symbolizes showing more traditional feelings toward family bonds held by this family, and helps the members stay rooted to their culture. This ritual takes place at a Buddhist altar, or *butsudan*, "where the memory of the ancestors is preserved. These altars are found in most houses that have been allocated the responsibility for the care of departed forebears and thus the family grave" (Hendry, 2019, 37-38). Such altars demonstrate the importance placed on family relationships by the members of this family.

Fewer scenes in the Nonomiya family show family connection. However, one scene featuring Midori and Keita on a train reinforces a customary Japanese child-rearing practice. In asking Keita's wishes to leave Ryota with her, she "encourages the child one step at a time down the path toward her goals for him. If the child rebels, she tries to protect her relationship with him rather than forcing the issue at the cost of alienating him. Japanese mothers are free of ego-based assertions of authority over their own children" (White, p. 96, 1987). Midori suggests this to Keita because she notices how Ryota is barely spending time with them. For several years he had even sacrificed his Sundays to work on his project, a testament to tremendous *doryoku* (effort) at the expense of his family. Although *nemawashi* typically refers to gaining consensus before reaching decisions in Japanese work culture, we might view Midori as seeking Keita's

consensus in this way (Davies & Ikeno, p. 160, 2002). A further failure of *nemawashi* is visible in the context of the strained relationship between Ryota and Keita where the disciplinarian father expects Keita to excel not only in academics but also in piano, an extracurricular he doesn't enjoy. There is a lack of consensus between the duo when it comes to Keita's interests, possibly emphasizing Ryota's immersion in work culture.

It is instructive to apply the concept of *amae* (dependence on indulgence) that is associated with sweetness and describes a child's attitude toward his parents, especially the mother (Lebra, p. 54, 1976). This is clearly seen in *Like Father, Like Son*, where Keita has an *amae* relationship with Midori and develops one with both his biological parents & with his biological siblings. However, Ryota's actual son Ryusei doesn't develop the same *amae* for his biological parents since they've hardly connected on an emotional level. At one point when Ryusei is instructed to stay with Ryota and Midori, he runs back to his foster parents because he misses them terribly. This may be the most poignant depiction of how Ryota's competitive work life disconnects him from his family.

Competition in society has increased overall from the 1960s to the 2010s, which may affect the differences in social acceptance across domains. This is shown in the film by screening tests, i.e., barriers to entry that only accept deserving candidates, ranging from joining a group to enrolling at an institution. This notion is clearly visible in the opening scene of *Like Father, Like Son*, where an interview of Keita and his family is being conducted. In response to one question, Keita describes a camping experience, which is later revealed as an answer he was taught to memorize for the interview at cram school. In his article, "*Where Children Rule*," Nicholas Kristof criticizes the Japanese education system due to the pressure that parents and teachers put on students by pushing them to cram schools and countless drills to succeed in exams. Greater

emphasis is placed on preparing students to tackle exam questions than on teaching them how to learn. This proves costly in the long run, where Japanese students can excel in an English grammar paper but cannot hold a simple conversation in English (Kristof, p.40, 1997). Additionally, despite the rising costs of *juku* (cram school), many parents send their children in the hope they will attend a good university and get a stable job. This economic advancement and the need to create citizens who will bring value to the country manifests in the form of entrance exams for educational institutions, a barrier that tests academic proficiency. Children are heavily pressured to study for the sake of cracking these exams—and Keita's character reflects this trend.

Similar to *Like Father, Like Son*, Japanese cultural and contextual concepts are central to the plot in *High and Low*. *Nemawashi*, *omoiyari*, and the role of the upper-middle class housewife and mother drive central actions and meaning in the film, especially decisions concerning the astronomical ransom amount, the kidnapped child's safety, and Mr. Gondo's relationship with his company board.

One instance of *nemawashi*, or consensus-building, in *High and Low* is when police inspector Tokura suggests that the press run a story describing the suitcase containing the ransom. All of the parties agree that such a story will help the police nab the culprit. Conversely, an example in which we notice the absence of *nemawashi* is in the opening scene of *High and Low*, when Mr. Gondo disagrees with a faction of his company on the quality of shoes produced. He prefers making higher quality shoes, which although expensive to make and yielding smaller profits in the short term, will become a long-term success. The faction, however, wants immediate profit. This contrast shows a failure of *nemawashi* due to discord between the parties, and suggests Gondo's willingness to act without consensus. This forces Gondo to perform a secret leveraged buyout of National Shoes, unbeknownst to the faction. Also, it tells us that

Gondo is a passionate businessman whose life revolves around making pristine footwear and is a strategic entrepreneur—one willing to patiently wait for long term profits instead of chasing immediate gains. The harmony between Gondo and the faction is irretrievably broken, never to be restored, showing us the absence of *nemawashi*. An example in the film which demonstrates the abandonment of the Japanese cultural concept of lifelong loyalty to a firm is when Kawanishi (Gondo's secretary) sells out Gondo by informing the faction both about Gondo's covert buyout plan, as well as the kidnapping, in return for a promotion.

The idea that conflict with prescribed roles shows us, as viewers, the limitations of those roles, is underscored via another concept evident in this film called *omoiyari* (a strong form of empathy). Mr. Gondo's wife is a homemaker who dotes on their son, Jun. At this time in film and culture, the housewife is portrayed as obedient to her husband, but in *High and Low*, Mr. Gondo's wife challenges that role. She persuades her husband, who was unwilling to pay the hefty ransom of 30 million yen, to do so out of concern for Shinichi's (the son of Gondo's chauffeur, Aoki) life. So she doesn't always comply with her husband's wishes but convinces him to think about the problem from other people's perspectives (especially the public and Aoki). Mrs. Gondo tries to convince her husband to be empathetic to Aoki's and Shinichi's condition, and to pay the ransom. After initially refusing, Gondo is actually persuaded toward *nemawashi* and reluctantly pays the ransom.

In *High and Low*, we don't really see any moments between Mr. Gondo and his son, Jun, showing the role of the absent father, in contrast to the families in *Like Father, Like Son*. When the kidnapper calls Mr. Gondo claiming to have abducted Jun, the anxious parents immediately prepare to pay up the large ransom; Mr. Gondo even states that he can always raise more money later to buy out National Shoes. However, when Jun immediately appears (the kidnapper

mistakenly abducted Shinichi instead), Mrs. Gondo hugs her son and cries out of relief. This is an indication of the mother-son bond. However, Mr. Gondo, although relieved, is disgusted since he believes it was a prank call, dismissing it as a “sick joke,” before realizing that Shinichi was mistakenly abducted. Jun has a minor role whereas Shinichi plays a more important role in the film, since the second half focuses on the police investigation and Shinichi’s statements describing the places he had seen when he was kidnapped. Shinichi’s disclosures eventually aided the police to catch the culprit.

Other symbolism in the films

Non-visual symbolism also feature prominently in both films. Such symbols help viewers appreciate the various interpretations of the film’s titles, which touch on not only their plots, but also on the evolution of characters as the stories progress.

High and Low

The title, *High and Low*, refers to the disparities between the rich and the poor, but the words symbolize more than just class differences. The word “high” in the title could also indicate that despite losing his fortune, Gondo finds more joy in his work, and will persevere to make his new company grow, showing that he hasn’t lost all spirit. Also, the country hails him as a hero for choosing the boy over the company, emphasizing Gondo’s high integrity and character. The ‘low’ could indicate not only the heinous kidnapping or Takeuchi’s failure to truly bring down Gondo, but also to the sordid underbelly of Japanese society at the time, of which Takeuchi is a member.

Eggert (2017) adds that the film’s symbolism ranges from Gondo’s opulent high-rise apartment to Takeuchi’s impoverished slum-dwelling in order to highlight the contrast in social

class. The story starts off ‘high’ in Gondo’s apartment, and later, takes us around the city as part of the police investigation, from streets to dope alleys to police stations & hospitals. The audience also feels like detectives, eager to catch the culprit, who ends ‘low’ in the prison cell.

Like Father, Like Son

The title film’s title change across cultures is also symbolic. The English title for the film, *Like Father, Like Son*, conveys the idea that a relationship marked by love and respect surpasses a relationship that is only defined by blood. Each father wasn’t raising his biological son, but the bond created in the process was invaluable. Also, the title could imply that the son takes after the father. Ryusei is a very jovial child, akin to Yudai’s carefree nature. However, Keita is brought up in a household that emphasizes order like how Ryota maintains discipline at office, even sticking to a work routine at home.

Interestingly, the Japanese title is very different from the English title. It is *そして父になる* (*soshite chichi ni naru*), which translates to “and then (he) becomes my father.” This essentially captures the entire story where both families realize the kids have been swapped, they then exchange the children, before reuniting with the child they initially traded away. This reunion is a result of both parties realizing their mistake, which lead to the fathers developing deeper bonds with the child they initially traded away.

Cultural Concepts, Symbols, and Effect on Viewers

The two films bring out both visual and non-visual symbolisms which not only capture the relationship between the characters but also compel us to think about how we view these films. The astute direction helps the audience relate with the stories more deeply and effectively

conveys several concepts related to Japanese culture. Competition in society has increased overall from the 1960s to the 2010s. This is shown in the film by screening processes, i.e., barriers to entry that only accept deserving candidates, ranging from joining a group to enrolling at an institution.

Based on my analyses, there is pressure on children to perform as per parents' expectations as seen in Keita's case. Cram schools prepare students to do well in exams (putting them under severe pressure to perform) to help them get into good universities, a ticket to a good job, which in turn will serve the economy. The advancing economy requires people to put in the effort (*doryoku*) to ensure they climb the corporate ladder and achieve greater social mobility. Amidst this is a struggle to achieve a work-life balance, exemplified by Ryota. He works hard to ensure his family doesn't lack comforts. Yudai is a counterpart to Ryota, showing no desire to upgrade his standard of living, content with his lifestyle.

The difficulty in achieving a balance is also seen in *High and Low* where Mr. Gondo stakes his familial assets to buy out National Shoes, in the hopes of producing quality shoes, making long term profits and becoming a wealthier individual which would further uplift his family's fortunes. He is stuck in a quandary between his work (gaining control over National Shoes) and his life (his fortunes, along with Shinichi's life).

Both these films, despite being so starkly different from one another, share the theme of family, which make them a fascinating pair for analysis. *Like Father, Like Son* truly emphasizes the importance of mutual love and respect that completes a family. *High and Low* on the other hand shows the importance of valuing another person's life, even if they aren't your loved ones, seen in the way that Mr. Gondo sacrificed his fortune to save Shinichi's life.

With respect to *High and Low*, beyond the film itself, a key further discussion point is Kurosawa's use of a foreign novel on which to base the screenplay. This is a good example of *iitoko dori*, the use of beneficial elements of foreign cultures, re-contextualized to fit one's own use. Kurosawa bought the rights to the book, *King's Ransom*, by Ed McBain and remodeled it in his Japanese context (Eggert, 2017).

Conclusions

Japanese cultural and contextual concepts help viewers to examine and discuss the symbols across two films created by two prominent directors of different generations. Yet, what is not culturally-contingent is the role that cinematography plays in ensuring audiences connect with their stories as a shared visual language across cultures. Film can transcend cultural boundaries by connecting like-minded viewers whose cinematic perceptions are influenced by their personal circumstances. Both films, *High and Low*, and *Like Father, Like Son* illustrate how the relationships between characters, especially the familial dynamics, becomes strained by competition, both professionally and academically. The pressure experienced by these characters when it comes to balancing relationships alongside ensuring upward social mobility, can be directly felt by the audience. These filmic moments highlight the tension between tradition and progress and compels viewers to reconsider how one should strive for a work-life balance.

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