



Toshiro Mifune

Actor

Birth	Apr 1, 1920 (Tsingtao, China)
Death	Dec 24, 1997 (Tokyo, Japan)
Genres	Drama, Adventure, Action

Born in China to Japanese parents, Toshiro Mifune hoped to become an assistant cameraman after serving in World War II, but was deflected from this goal when he won a talent contest sponsored by Toho Studios. With no prior acting experience, he launched his movie career in 1946 and, two years later,

worked for the first time with director Akira Kurosawa in *Drunken Angel*. In later interviews, Kurosawa said that, although worried about the untrained Mifune's lack of artistic discipline, he "still...did not want to smother that vitality." The director eventually came to realize that Mifune's willingness to do and try anything before the camera was — for him, at least — preferable to the introspection and motivation-searching practiced by other Japanese actors.

Mifune's raw, unbridled masculinity was ideal for such Kurosawa films as *Rashomon* (1950) and *The Seven Samurai* (1954). But as he matured artistically, the actor proved he was no one-trick pony, as demonstrated by his low-key, carefully crafted performance as a tormented business executive in *High and Low* (1963). The first internationally popular Japanese film star since Sessue Hayakawa, Mifune was held in as high esteem by the film industry as he was by the public, winning *Venice Film Festival* awards for his performances in Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1960) and *Red Beard* (1965). Mifune's ability to shift from macho to subtle sensitivity was very similar to the work of Clint Eastwood, who, ironically, played the Mifune-character role in *A Fistful of Dollars*, the 1964 remake of *Yojimbo*.

In addition to his work for Kurosawa, Mifune starred in Hiroshi Inagaki's *Samurai Trilogy*, and was occasionally seen in English-language productions (often dubbed by his favorite voice-over artist, Paul Frees). The actor's non-Japanese efforts included John Frankenheimer's *Grand Prix* (1966) and Steven Spielberg's *1941* (1979); he also played Admiral Yamamoto in *Midway* (1976) and was teamed with another major male action star, Charles Bronson, in *Red Sun* (1971). Beginning in 1963, Mifune produced theatrical and TV films through his own company, and, in 1964, made his first (and only) attempt at directing with *The Legacy of the 500,000*. Mifune died in 1997. — **Hal Erickson**

