

Cinematic Cocoon with Kitano as the Pupa : Ineluctable Duality and Self Reflexive Representation of Kitano's *Kids Return*

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Abstract

This article is the sequel prior to the article “Dual Rehabilitative Cocoon: Reconciling Position and Critical Reception of Kitano’s *Kids Return*”. (1) Focusing of the film’s text, in order to identify the cinematic shield, this article inevitably deals with the duality: first, it analyses the film’s potent structure, style and presentation, along with Kitano’s total detachment of his social cachet, and second, it analyses Kitano’s self-reflexive elements and their representation in the film. In doing so, the manner in which the cinematic and self-reflexive elements have coexisted as one is synthetically demonstrated. After identifying the protective structure and discussing it analytically, the article deals with the following question in the hope of providing further insight: What was his rehabilitation in the film?

Key Words: film studies, authorship theory, reception studies, film criticism, close textual analysis

Absence of ‘Beat’ and the Inclusion of Two Protagonists

One of the most significant and highly problematic aspects of the film is the physical absence of ‘Beat’ Takeshi, whose appearance and idiosyncratic performance has been established as an emblem of his early cinema. In fact, at the time of the film’s release, there was only one film in which ‘Beat’ Takeshi did not make an appearance, namely, *A Scene at the Sea* (1991), which was a youth genre-oriented film. Moreover, and more importantly, *Kids Return* is the only film in the entire second project in which ‘Beat’ Takeshi does not appear. The absence of ‘Beat’ as an important character in the film implies a less significant commercial appeal to the market. This is because Kitano’s cinema always utilised the idiosyncrasies and popularity of ‘Beat’ Takeshi as an actor. Owing to the popularity of Japanese foremost media persona ‘Beat’ Takeshi, Kitano’s cinema has more or less sustained the least profit and the minimum promotion fee. The original book which was tied in with the film’s release played an important role in the fair commercial success of *Kids Returns*. As an author, Kitano is fairly prolific and his books are lucrative in that many of them are usually reprinted shortly after the first publishing. Presumably, the tie-in of the book with the film’s release was a marketing strategy of Office Kitano: not only was the book required to secure the total profit of the film but also it was expected to lure the readers of the book to the

cinema. Successful or not, this new marketing strategy of selling films with tie-in merchandising began with *Kids Return*. Further, the risk of commercial failure was complemented by 'Beat' Takeshi's absence in the film.

Some of the Japanese film critics and journalists consider the film to be Kitano's first work that is aimed at commercial success, which almost automatically involves the intention of appealing to a wider audience. However, the absence of 'Beat' can be considered as a great risk resulting in commercial failure, which Kitano cinema cannot bear anymore. At the time of the film's release, Kitano's recovery from the accident as well as his physical condition could not have been an obstacle towards his acting, as is evident by Kitano's appearance as a hit man in Takashi Ishii's *Gonin* (1995) around the same time. Nevertheless, it could be identified, particularly by his face, that he had not yet physically recovered. Thus, it is fair to assert that Kitano was sufficiently ready to perform as an actor at the time of the film's production. In the other words, Takeshi Kitano the director consciously sacrificed 'Beat' Takeshi the actor in the opening work of his second project.

In order to understand why Kitano made this choice, it is, more importantly, necessary to elucidate the manner in which the absence of 'Beat' functioned. Two specific roles that the absence of 'Beat' played have been identified. In general, the absence of 'Beat' Takeshi serves to avoid the sheer third-rate criticism against 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano and the discussion of Kitano's incompatible identity: 'Beat' Takeshi and/or Takeshi Kitano. Thus, his absence blurs the analysis of the film in that the lack of an appearance by 'Beat' effectively eludes discussion pertaining to him, thereby pointing towards the more cinematic elements. In other words, the absence of 'Beat' allows us to focus more on the film's diegetic and cinematic aspects rather than on Kitano's symbiotic representation and the paratextual status of the film in accordance with a discussion of authorship. Thus, the absence of 'Beat' is an understandable decision in that it helps to avoid such elusive paratextual criticism, which has almost always been targeted at Kitano and his cinema.

The other role played by the absence of 'Beat' is almost a counter effect. Kitano opted for two young actors, Ken Kaneko (Masaru) and Masanobu Ando (Shinji). This decision of his to select two young fresh actors was similar to 'kill two birds with one stone'. First, it served as ideal bait for the media attention, and hence, its expansive media exposure became a functional promotional strategy before the film's release. Second, Kitano succeeded in avoiding unnecessary media attention which enabled him to stay behind the screen as purely a director. Since Kaneko was not yet an accomplished screen actor and it was a screen debut for Ando, in many senses, the absence of 'Beat' in the first work of the second project seemed to be a declaration of Kitano's directorial independence and his 're-debut' as a director. In addition, more importantly, keeping himself behind the screen and working purely as a

director can be interpreted as Kitano's cinematic rehabilitation.

When considering the film's diegetic space and the two protagonists, Masaru and Shinji, instead of a singularly important 'Beat' Takeshi, which is presented in his earlier films, it can be stated that having two main young male protagonists is the first time with respect to Kitano cinema. Further, it is also the first time that the protagonists have a completely understandable sense of purpose and equivalently as well as alternatively drive the narrative forward. In addition, when closely examining the protagonists and comparing them with those in his earlier works, we find that the protagonists in this film, particularly Masaru, are extremely talkative. In short, the protagonists in this film communicate with the audience and are considerably verbose; as a result, the cause-and-effect chain is clarified and the narrative becomes descriptive. On the other hand, in his previous works, the protagonist is customarily laconic and poker-face (sometimes having impaired hearing); this was recognized as Kitanoesque and became the trademark of his cinema. Thus, the ability of the protagonists to express and elucidate yields a clearer sense of cause-and-effect and drama with respect to the film, and more importantly, it effectively guides the conventional film viewers into becoming emotionally involved in accordance with the character's motive. In this sense, as part of synergism that supported the film's fair commercial success and led the film critics to consider the film as Kitano's first commercial film, the film could be interpreted as the most receptive film that Kitano has ever made.

When considering the non-diegetic aspect of the film, with respect to the role of the protagonists in the film, it is symbolic, but remarkable nevertheless, that the two protagonists' on-screen status corresponds with Kitano's off-screen status. In *Kids Return*, the two juvenile protagonists end their poignant reminiscences of childhood and search for a sense of purpose in the world of adulthood. Meanwhile, Kitano as an actor-director suffered considerably both cinematically with the disrepute of *Getting Any?* and physically with his motorcycle accident. Consequently, when making the film *Kids Return* as a next project, he sought his new directorial autonomy by placing 'Beat' behind the screen. Cinematically speaking, it is not only the on and off-screen correspondence but also Kitano's new directorial venture in the use of two protagonists that can be identified. Although a detailed and textual analysis of the correspondence between the two protagonists and Kitano and 'Beat' Takeshi through the schematic use of colour has been discussed in the latter part of the article, Kitano as a director began to utilise and control two contrastive and almost dichotomic protagonists in *Kids Return*. As a result of the absence of 'Beat' Takeshi as a protagonist, this directorial venture is visually equivocal; the later three films in his second project are more obvious due to the appearance of 'Beat' Takeshi as one of dichotomic protagonists. However, the protagonists in *Kids Return* correspond with the other pairs in the later three films of the second project.

Thus, it could be interpreted that the *Kids Return* is Kitano's way of practicing handling double protagonists without the appearance of the phenomenal and idiosyncratic 'Beat' Takeshi, who seemed to be uncontrollable by the director Kitano in his earlier works, particularly in *Getting Any?*. In a sense, this equivocality can be interpreted as part of the defensive cocoon in that it prevents Kitano from being identified and criticised with respect to 'Beat' in his rehabilitative work.(2)

Apart from the absence of 'Beat' Takeshi, the other thing that makes the film unique among Kitano's oeuvre is the genre of the film. Since nobody would reject a buddy or coming of age oriented narrative, Kitano opted for this genre. As the narrative progresses, the two young protagonists merely attempt to identify their own ways and purposes in life; the film ends with sheer defeat for both of them. Although *Kids Return* falls into the conventional genre of youth-oriented films, it is unique and difficult to compare to similar youth-oriented films due to the following two reasons. First, it is neither of the two heterosexual characters in the narrative shows any affiliation to any other heterosexual character, and second, there is no intervention of a third heterosexual character between the two male protagonists. Typically, both these aspects are presented in the narrative of youth-oriented films. Another aspect that makes *Kids Return* different from the conventional genre of youth-oriented films is the absence of some elements typical to youth-oriented films, to some extent.

Unlike most conventional male-buddy and coming age genre film, this film does not possess a heterosexual or female-oriented plot and there is no intervention from a third character between the two young male protagonists. Keiko I McDonald states the following with regard to Kitano's *Kids Return*: 'Interestingly enough, he leaves out the aspect of sexual challenge his predecessors took full advantage of it.'(3) While the later three works of his second project deal with two men as the main protagonists, there is a definite intervention or essential function of a third heterosexual character in the narrative. As the title of the film implies, in comparison with the other works of his second project, the aspect of male pairing and its bond can be interpreted as being considerably immature, precedent to the stage of youth, literally implying 'kids'. Thus, the homosocial bond between the two young main characters seems to be at a premature stage, yet it also seems to be rather unshakably strong when they are in their late teens. In this respect, outside the diegetic space, the protagonists' relationship in the film is comparable with the relationship between Kitano the film director and 'Beat' Takeshi the actor, which is also strong but still premature during the making of *Kids Return*. In other words, the stage of Kitano's directorial career can be identified as a transition from youth to maturity, namely, at the stage of rite of passage. In this context, it is understandable why Kitano opted to cast two young fresh actors as the protagonists as this enabled him to fulfil one of the central themes of his second project. More importantly, the

two young protagonists are endowed not only with the driving force behind the story but also with multi-dimensional motifs that embody Kitano's directorial attempt in the narrative of the film.

Paratextual Function and Structure of Colour

Like his other films, *Kids Return* makes magnificent use of Kitano's gift for colour imagery.(4)

Among Kitano's new directorial style in *Kids Return* and the cinematic elements that he incorporates in the works of his second project, the most salient element of the film is the use of colour and its effective function. The colour scheme of blue in Kitano's earlier works was established as 'Kitano blue', and this schematic use of blue was salient and almost emblematised by *Kids Return*. As is seen in the works of his second project in which there are two protagonists, the colour scheme in *Kids Return* and the other three later works is also doubled. With regard to the schematic use of colour in Kitano cinema, Daisuke Miyao points out that the counter colour scheme against blue is prevalent even in his earlier works such as *Violent Cop* (1989).(5) Miyao's critical comment with regard to the use of colour in Kitano cinema is basically derived from the following comment made by Kitano pertaining to his film-making strategy.

When you have dark blue next to light blue, it doesn't stand out in anyway. To make a colour stand out you have to bring, a completely opposite colour next to it. That's why I wanted the base colour to be blue and then use other colours to punctuate the look of the film – give the film an edge.(6)

Miyao also takes cognizance of the function of the colour scheme in *Kids Return*. In Kitano's earlier works, the use of colour and the representation of red is used as a counterpart of blue which is the base colour covering the whole film, and red is often used to represent blood and violence. Even though the colour blue is overt as a basic background in the film, red is presented not as a counterpart but more as an equivalent colour to blue, with both these colours functioning together. The relationship between blue and red, as displayed in the film, is parallel and dichotomous. The opening sequence of the film symbolically demonstrates Kitano's new colour schematic use and confirms the equivalency of the two colour dichotomy. Prior to the title shot, Shinji is in a dark blue jacket. In the next sequence, the narrative moves back in time. Here, we see Masaru is in a red shirt and Shinji's blue shirt is covered by his school uniform. Furthermore, the overtly exposed colour, that is the red worn by Masaru, is the driving force of the bicycle. This indicates that the colour is the essential element of the narrative's driving force.(7) In this sense, the pairing is not only of

the protagonists but also of the colours in the film. Moreover, the use of a two wheel bicycle further adds to the theme of duality. In fact, this visual characteristic of the colours continues from the beginning to the end of the film. Since the presence of colour and its dichotomy is a salient feature in the film, it becomes difficult to ignore the debates on them as one of the principle focuses of analysis. Utilizing the colour and its function as a basic focus, the latter part of this article elucidates the narrative structure, and in so doing, consequently, highlights the paratextual elements in the narrative.

Colour Narrative and its Shift

When viewing the vivid images in red and blue, it can be identifiable that a shift and transition of these two colours visually embodies the story and even forms the structure of the narrative. Following the scenes in which red and blue are potently represented in the film, several pivotal points which shift the tone, function, relation, and representation of the colours can be identified. More importantly, a close look at the pivotal events and the narrative transition unearths the parallel progression of the narrative and its cause-and-effect chain (See Figure 1).

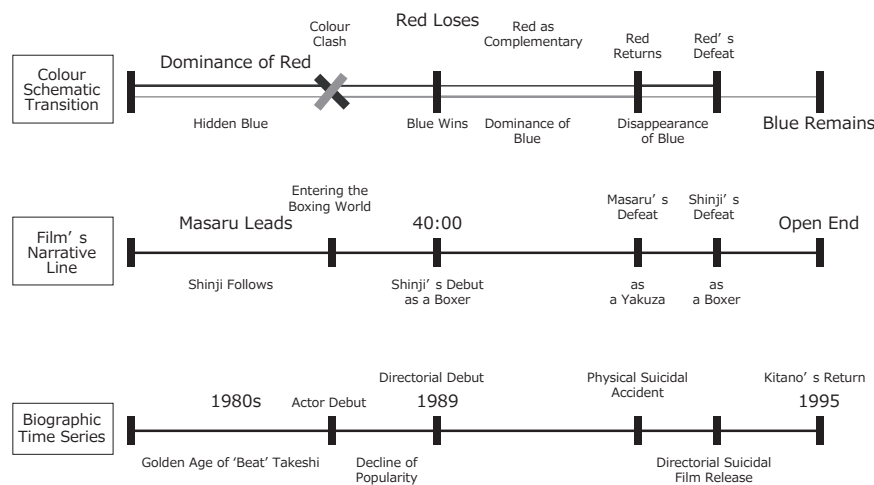


Figure 1

Along with the narrative, the colour scheme shifts between red and blue, when a pivotal event occurs, and vice versa. Although this is a simplified view of the basic colour transition, it can be said that red is the dominant colour at the beginning of the film, and the dominance continues until blue stands against red. This corresponds to the sequence wherein the boxer in a blue jacket appears in front of Masaru and Shinji to avenge his beaten brother and Masaru in red is beaten up. This is the first colour clash between red and blue. After this clash and the corresponding sequence, boxing becomes a part of the film's narrative, and more importantly, blue becomes more visually prominent when red and blue are often juxtaposed with each other. While Masaru is still represented by red, Shinji gradually envelops himself with blue. While the dichotomic presentation of red and blue is visible as the background in the boxing gym, it is the first moment of Masaru in red and Shinji in blue are almost equally juxtaposed with each other. The next pivotal point in the narrative development is when Masaru and Shinji spar with each other in the boxing gym. Masaru in red is unexpectedly defeated by the usually subservient Shinji in blue. This is the second colour clash, and again, red is defeated by blue. Simultaneously, it is also the moment when the power equation between Masaru and Shinji is altered. In addition to the previous colour schematic transition after the colour clash, another colour schematic shift occurs when blue takes over red and becomes visually dominant, while red is more subtly framed and becomes an almost complementary tone. In this respect, the colour relationship between red and blue is reversed at the time of the second colour clash (See Figure 1).

If the colour scheme was the narrative's driving force, red ceases to represent Masaru when he enters into the yakuza underground world; this suggests that Masaru's yakuza story is no longer the central plot in the field of colour dichotomy between red and blue. Prior to the second colour clash, Masaru is the one who forwards the narrative as he is always guiding the other protagonist, Shinji. However, when Masaru steps away from the boxing world, Shinji becomes the central driving force of the narrative which is endorsed by the red-blue colour dichotomy. At this point, upon examining the colour transition, it is observed that Masaru is represented by white and Shinji is represented by both red and blue. Symbolically speaking, since white towel represents in the boxing world signifies opting out of a match, Shinji in red and blue is still in the match of the narrative, and conversely, Masaru in white is out of it. (8) Once red and blue come together in Shinji, providing a visual colour balance and stasis, the narrative develops in a straight-forward manner at a smooth pace, as Shinji hones his talent as a boxer. Miyao has also addressed this moment of colour balance and its function as follows.

After Shinji knocks Masaru out at the gym, Shinji starts to put on red gloves. While he is waiting for his debut match, he wears a blue and red jacket. He beats a boxer wearing red pants. Then, he starts to wear a red parka in his daily life.(9)

In addition to Miyao's comment, the scenes wherein the colour red and blue are the most balanced correspond to Shinji's most glorious moment in his boxing career (See Figure 1).

The most crucial moments of the narrative are when the colour schematic shifts as well. As Masaru and Shinji's careers begin their downhill path, blue starts disappearing and red becomes dominant again. Shinji's boxing outfit visually suggests the shift as it becomes completely red in colour. As has already been observed twice in the development of the film's narrative, once the colour equilibrium is visually fractured, namely, the balance between red and blue, and red becomes dominant, defeat is around the corner. Similar to when Masaru lost his red colour and began to be represented by white, Shinji comes to be represented by white corresponding to his serious defeat as a boxer. After his defeat which represents the failure of his boxing career, Shinji visually loses all red and blue, and is surrounded by white (See Figure 1). As has been observed in the case of Masaru, the colour white literally functions as a side step away from the main course of the narrative. When Shinji is represented with white, it signals the end of the story.

The balance of colour between red and blue affects not only Shinji's progress in his boxing career but also Masaru's yakuza status. In terms of the narrative structure and the two protagonists, the storyline of both Shinji and Masaru are synchronised with each other along with the scheme of colours used to represent them. In this respect, although Masaru remains a protagonist along with Shinji, nonetheless he is represented by white after his physical separation from Shinji. In terms of the gravity of the red and blue schematic shift, the white Masaru seems to be attached to red and blue intermittently, as can be observed at the boxing gym which visually consists of a red and blue dichotomy. While Shinji's colours, red and blue, are in balance. Masaru also seems to be affected by this balance. This can be determined by seeing how his progress up the yakuza's career ladder corresponds to the quick rise of Shinji's boxing career. However, once Shinji falls into the dominance of the colour red and fails his boxing career, so does Masaru, who not only fails to be a yakuza boss but also gets expunged from the family. Masaru's failure is represented with a bloody red colour. Miyao refers to the colour spectacle at the climax of the narrative in the following manner.

Kids Return's climax becomes a spectacle of colours because of the contrast between blue and red. Shinji in red pants is one-sidedly beaten on a blue mat, and Masaru bleeds in a blue light at night.(10)

The colour is schematically positioned and visually oriented with the narrative structure, although the narrative development and storyline is considerably simple and straight-forward and contains a clearly identifiable cause-and-effect chain. Duality and thematic dichotomy is an autonomous cinematic aspect in the films of Kitano's second project as is the colour dichotomy of red and blue in *Kids Return*.

Schematic Synchronisation outside the Diegetic Space

Elucidating the synchronisation of the colour scheme and its transition with the narrative development allows us to discover another hidden pattern. It is the synchronisation of Kitano's own biographical time series with the colour and the narrative's transitional line (See Figure 1). This analysis steps out from the diegetic realm to a non-diegetic space but I consider it to be potentially visible and worth exploring as a part of the close visual and textual analysis. Besides, this could also be one of the confirmations of self-reflexivity in the film. For example, similar to the manner in which the directorial gaze is used as in the opening sequence, self-reflexivity, which shifts between the cinematic and non-cinematic realms, is one of the salient elements in the works of Kitano's second project. In this respect, it is considerably important to estimate the synchronisation of Kitano's bibliographical time series with the colour and narrative's transitional line. Although a precise examination of the degree of synchronisation is not the intention, the synchronisation with Kitano's bibliographical time series with the colour and narrative's transitional line is convincing.

In so elucidating the synchronisation, if we considering 'Beat' Takeshi as Masaru, who is represented by red, and likewise the alter ego of 'Beat' Takeshi, Takeshi Kitano the director, as Shinji, who is represented by blue, it becomes more visually and schematically comprehensible. The first pivotal point of the colour scheme could be interpreted as 'Beat' Takeshi's first encounter with the cinematic realm as an actor. Correspondingly, within the diegetic realm, it is also represented by the boxing world in the film's narrative. Just as Masaru enters into the boxing world, 'Beat' Takeshi made his debut as an actor in the film *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* (*Senjyou no Merii Kurisumasu*, 1983) by Nagisa Oshima. With regard to the relationship between 'Beat' Takeshi/Takeshi Kitano and Masaru/Shinji, just as Masaru discovered boxing first, similarly 'Beat' Takeshi first crossed the threshold of the cinematic realm.

Accordingly, the next colour transition and pivotal narrative event, which is the manifestation of Shinji's capability as a boxer, can be interpreted as Kitano Takeshi's directorial debut in 1989 with *Violent Cop* (1989). Just as Shinji's entrance into the world of boxing is unintentional, but accompanied by Masaru, similarly Kitano's directorial debut was quite accidental and occurred due to the resignation of the originally assigned director, Kinji

Fukasaku, who was renowned for Japanese yakuza genre films and was the director of *Battle Royale* (*Batoru Rowaiaru*, 2000). In Japanese showbiz, while the personality and popularity of 'Beat' Takeshi as a comedian gradually waned, and he began to be recognised more as an idiosyncratic actor in the realm of cinema, the figure or persona of Takeshi Kitano as a film director became much more salient. While on the one hand, this corresponds to the blue's domination of the colour blue in the film and Shinji's replacement as the main focus of the narrative, on the other hand, Masaru reconciles his talent not with boxing but with the world yakuza, aiming at becoming a yakuza boss.

At the end of the narrative, Masaru's defeat as a yakuza and his physical paralysis corresponds to Kitano's near-death motorcycle accident, which physically enabled him to expose himself as a comedian and an actor, 'Beat' Takeshi, in the Japanese media. Likewise, Shinji's defeat as a boxer corresponds to the release of a problematic film called *Getting Any?*. The film consists of sequences of old-fashioned comic skits that look as if they have been taken from 'Beat' Takeshi's entertainment television programmes in the 1980s. It reveals how Kitano almost lost control of 'Beat' Takeshi who still remained a gigantic media personality, but strayed from media to media uncontrollably. Consequently, Kitano was dismissed as a film director and the film was nearly crossed off; this is one reason why his filmography outside Japan is hardly known or screened either. This can be seen in the colour scheme of *Kids Return* as well. The colour scheme in the film dramatically shifts between red and blue. When the colour red once becomes dominant again and Shinji is fully represented with it, the colour blue suddenly fades into the background, as is seen in the earlier part of the film. Immediately after the return of the dominance of the colour red, corresponding with Masaru and Shinji's almost fatal defeat, red and blue disappears and, instead, white covers them and becomes the dominant hue at the end of the story.

Along with the narrative's climax and the defeat of the two protagonists, the long flashback sequence ends. The film's finale links with the beginning of the film, which shows Masaru and Shinji cycling together on a bicycle. They return to the school yard and the only difference from their reminiscent school days is that this time it is Shinji who controls the handle and saddle, whereas Masaru controlled the handle and Shinji paddled the bicycle in their high school days. In accordance with the synchronisation of Kitano's bibliographical background and the film's narrative, these closing and opening sequences are again applicable to the colour scheme. Miyao writes 'when the flashback ends, this red-less situation remains. As in *Sonatine*, blue survives red.' As he illuminates the red-less situation, there is no red identifiable in those sequences, but blue remains on Shinji's jacket, while Masaru is colour less in the context of the film's colour scheme. Under the condition of the hypothetical synchronisation between the film's text and Kitano's off-screen background, this colour shift

still functions. The survival of blue could be interpreted to mean that Kitano and Shinji, represented by blue, barely survived, while 'Beat' Takeshi and Masaru, represented by red, were physically challenged. Moreover, it foreshadows that Kitano as a film director survived with *Kids Return*, although the future of 'Beat' Takeshi was still unknown at the time of the film's release.

Despite Kitano's confession that the film is for himself, very few people have explored the self reflexive elements of *Kids Return*.⁽¹²⁾ This hypothetical attempt to unearth the schematic synchronisation is hopefully a convincing verification of his statement. The film is not only the threshold of his second project but also a threshold to understand Kitano's rehabilitation through the works of the second project. Moreover, the film is the key to unearthing the core elements of his rehabilitation.

Conclusion

Kids Return is the threshold of Kitano's second project, and simultaneously, by elucidating the cinematic and non-cinematic elements of the film, it is clearly evident that the film is Kitano's declaration of directorial independence, under the guise of rehabilitation. A multitude of textually and non-textually salient elements in the film, which are presented in this and previous articles, proceed to the later three works of the second project to a great extent. On the surface, Kitano embodied a very simple straightforward presentation in terms of the narrative and genre orientation. However, at the same time, owing to the benefit of the defensive inter-media and cinematic membranes, Kitano also embodied experimental attempts in the film. The casting of the two protagonists and use of new dichotomic motifs represented by colour orientation are two of his prime experiments in this film. Thus, by providing a blind screen, which could be beneficial in order to appeal to the wide audience in and outside Japan, he attempted to establish his new directorial locus. In his previous works, the idiosyncrasy of the cinematic presentation, including his editing style, the combination of ultra-violence and taciturn characters, and the branded blue tone, was always illuminated from the viewpoint of the target. Therefore, it is a fact that his idiosyncrasies always encountered critical hostility, and also serves to jeopardize Kitano's directorial freedom of cinematic expression and consequently his career. Thus, in this film, a wounded Kitano devised protective armour so that his works could avoid and sustain any probable damage caused by the criticism. Moreover, in this respect, this film epitomises Kitano's rehabilitation.

Regarding the position of *Kids Return*, behind the shadow of the culminated renown of *Hana-Bi* (1997), the film has not been illuminated sufficiently in the critical framework. Nevertheless, the film can be interpreted as the utmost pivotal work of Kitano cinema as of

today from a number of viewpoints. The strategy of commercial appeal, promotion, and tie-ins are the salient points to focus on. After *Kids Return*, elucidating the legitimate place of his works ineluctably requires two perspectives, one of the market and the other of the critics. In this respect, the balance between commerciality and idiosyncratic Kitanoesque art in his cinema is derived from *Kids Return*, preceding *Hana-Bi*, and is a part of the rehabilitation of Kitano cinema. In other words, Kitano's pendulum with brand new armoured equipment began to swing within the balance between commercial and Kitanoesque art cinema. As Kitano confessed, the words of the closing dialogue between Masaru and Shinji are meant for himself,

Shinji: 'Do you think we're finished?'

Masaru: 'No way! We haven't even started.'(13)

It is certain that *Kids Return* is literally the overture work of his new directorial career under the guise of rehabilitation.

(13) Kitano, pp. 228-229.

(1) Ryuichiro Tsutsumi, 'Dual-layered Rehabilitative Cocoon: Reconciling Position and Critical Reception of Kitano's *Kids Return*'. *Sagami Women's University Bunka Kenkyu*, 2020, pp. 37-46.

(2) The opening of the film comprises a considerably symbolic sequence, shot, and camera position, all of which implicate Kitano's position and gaze as a director from behind the screen.

(3) Keiko I. McDonald, *Reading a Japanese Film: Cinema in Context* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), p. 221.

(4) Keiko I. McDonald, p. 228.

(5) Daisuke Miyao, 'Blue vs. Red: Takeshi Kitano's Color Scheme', *Post Script*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Fall (1998), 112-127.

(6) Makoto Shinozaki, 'Kitano Takeshi Interview', *Studio Voice*, Vol. 263, November 1997, pp. 38-43.

(7) Shinji and Masaru's hope are finished in the beginning of the narrative, although they restart their life at the end of the narrative. A time shift and colour juxtaposition before and after the title shot.

(8) White is one of the thematic colours among the works of his second project as well as in *Kids Return*. However, in this article, the discussion of white and its functional scheme is not developed further.

(9) Miyao, p. 123.

(10) Miyao, p. 123.

(11) Miyao, p. 123.

(12) Takeshi Kitano, *Yosei (Rest of Life)* (Tokyo: Rocking On, 2001), pp. 228-229