

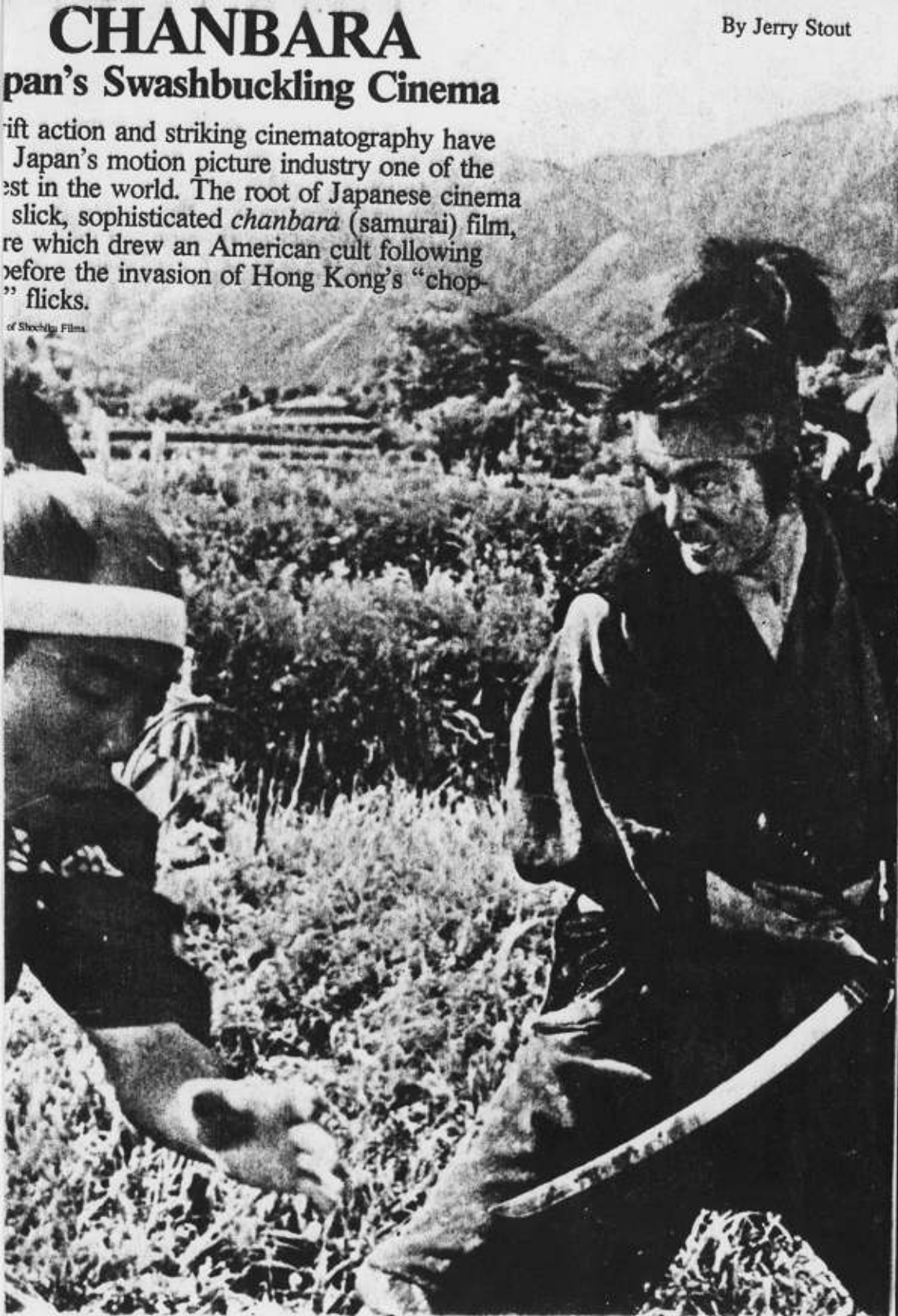
CHANBARA

By Jerry Stout

Japan's Swashbuckling Cinema

Swift action and striking cinematography have made Japan's motion picture industry one of the best in the world. The root of Japanese cinema is the slick, sophisticated *chanbara* (samurai) film, one of the genres which drew an American cult following before the invasion of Hong Kong's "chop-choy" flicks.

of Shochiku Films



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The Japanese have a penchant for categorizing everything from flower arrangements to karate styles to motion pictures. What the uninitiated American audience refers to as samurai films, the Japanese call *chanbara*, a word which simply means "sword swinging." It is, however, an expression which is used to describe a type of movie that comes under the general heading of period film or *jidai-geki*, a term used to designate motion pictures set in the period prior to the year 1868, the beginning of the reign of the emperor Meiji. Most films that can be classified as *chanbara* take place in the Tokugawa period or earlier; however, there are a few exceptions which are set during the Meiji period.

An excellent example of *chanbara* is the Zato Ichi series, a favorite in Japan since the early sixties. Originally a product of the once defunct, now resurrected Daiei studio, the first two films were in black and white, but all twenty-two subsequent productions have been in scope and gorgeous color.

Zato Ichi walks the back roads of old Japan trying to eke out an existence as an itinerant masseur—a profession then reserved for the blind—but making his real living through gambling. His keen hearing tells him which way the gambler's dice fall and whether they are loaded. He has been known to expose loaded dice by throwing them into the air, drawing his sword and slicing the suspect pair before they hit the ground. Although not a *ronin* (masterless samurai), but rather a *kyokaku* or *kenshi* (chivalrous commoner or swordsman), Zato Ichi is a master of *taido*.

The series star, Shintaro Katsu, has played the blind masseur since the series' inception. By the mid-sixties, the actor had taken to producing the series. Katsu—a canny businessman—linked the Zato Ichi character with other popular *chanbara* heroes; in such pictures as *Zato Ichi Meets His Equal*, the masseur meets an itinerant, one-armed Chinese swordsman (who had his own series in Hong Kong) played by kung-fu star Jimmie Wang Yu. The film features some exciting sequences in which Wang Yu uses Chinese swordplay against Japanese styles and, deprived of his weapon, uses kung-fu to protect himself from the swords of several *samurai*.

For another feature, Katsu recruited Toshiro Mifune to recreate his famous *chanbara* characterization in *Zato Ichi Meets Yajimbo*. With casting like that, it is no wonder that the Zato Ichi series is one of the most successful ever produced—anywhere.

Though a staple of the Japanese film industry since its beginnings, *chanbara* is not

taken too seriously by most critics, unless it is elevated through the efforts of a talented director. *Chanbara*, in a sense, is the Japanese equivalent of the American term "horse opera" as it is applied to westerns. As Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* is not a typical *chanbara*, though it is *jidai-geki*, neither is *The Ox-Bow Incident* a typical "horse opera," though it is a western. Ironically, according to Donald Richie and Joseph Anderson in their book, *The Japanese Film*, the first real Japanese motion picture star, Matsunosuke Onoue, was a *chanbara* actor as America's first movie star, Bronco Billie Anderson, was a cowboy actor. Onoue appeared in over 160 *chanbara* films directed by his discoverer, Shozo Makino, for the studio which was to become Japan's oldest motion picture company, Nikkatsu. By the time of his death, Onoue had appeared in over 1,000 films.

For the many years between the early beginnings of the Japanese motion picture industry to the period immediately following the end of World War II, cliché-ridden, conventional *chanbara*, starring former silent actors such as Kazuo Hasegawa and Utaemon Ichikawa of the Kabuki theatre, dominated *jidai-geki*. In a somewhat bombastic, stagey style, these stars punished evil-doers in bloodless, dancelike duels reminiscent of the theatre from which they came. During that time, the heaviest period material was the perennial chestnut, *Chushingura*, (*The Loyal Forty-Seven Ronin*) which, it is estimated, has been filmed almost every year since 1913.

Following the end of World War II, the American occupation authorities frowned on the production of *chanbara* films, which they considered to be too militaristic. In their place, the Japanese studios began to produce pictures with a gangster background which, before the war, were not permitted in Japan. The very novelty of the subject matter plus the lack of *jidai-geki* available to meet the needs of the adventure-seeking audience caused the gangster films to soar in popularity. It was this genre which evolved into what has become known as *yakuza* (gambler) films.

During this period, the army of occupation decided that about 200 of the films produced by Japan's wartime motion picture monopoly should be prohibited because of their feudal and/or anti-democratic content. In the spring of 1946, the prints and, unfortunately, some of the negatives of those films were burned. Among them were Inagaki's original *Musashi Miyamoto* and Kurosawa's first picture as a director, *Sanshiro Sugata*.

It was not until the West was exposed to Japanese motion pictures of the stature of Kurosawa's *Rashomon* and *Seven Samurai* and later, Inagaki's *Musashi Miyamoto* remake, the *Samurai* trilogy, that Occidental audiences became aware of *jidai-geki*.

Richie states that the post-war era pro-

duced almost no other exceptional period films before *Rashomon*. The picture, however, is not the standard *jidai-geki*, although technically, since it is set in the Heian era, it might be categorized as such. Despite misinterpretation, *Rashomon* was a financial success in Japan and, after winning the 1951 Venice festival prize and Special Foreign Language Academy Award, it became a *cause celebre*, internationally establishing Kurosawa as a director to watch. After *Rashomon*, the appearance of atypical period films became more frequent, and serious *jidai-geki* became a means of using the past to illuminate the present.

Kurosawa's next *jidai-geki* in 1954, *Seven Samurai*, was a complete departure from the romantic tradition. Instead of clean, bloodless, conventional duels by rather plastic heroes, the director created an entirely realistic environment into which he introduced a scruffy bunch of misfit, starving *ronin* (masterless samurai), willing to risk their lives not for any noble cause, but simply for a daily bowl of rice and a new adventure.

On the other hand, Toho's first color film, Inagaki's remake of his lost picture *Musashi Miyamoto*, called *Samurai* in its American release, presented a rather sentimentalized view of the legendary swordsman, played by Toshiro Mifune who, by this time, was well on his way to becoming the first internationally known Japanese motion picture star since Sessue Hayakawa.

The story of Musashi Miyamoto, a popular hero of Japanese film literature, based on the novel by Yoshikawa, blended myth and history, tracing the development of the real swordsman's character under the influence of priest Takuan and his subsequent search for *satori*. Inagaki took three films to tell the story. The first, *Samurai, Part I* won the Academy Award in 1954.

Over the years, interpretations have varied and many actors have played the role of Musashi, including Kinnosuke Nakamura, who started in Kabuki at the age of four and in films as a teenage *chanbara* star. Between 1960-65, Nakamura starred in five features for Toei called the *Musashi* series, directed by Tomu Uchida. A few years later, Toho reunited the same director and star to film a sixth which pinpointed a moment in Musashi's life when, according to this version, in order to defend himself against a farmer's chain and sickle, the swordsman devised his distinctive *ni-tooryu* (two sword) style of swordplay.

Possibly the two least romanticized approaches to the life and legend of Musashi Miyamoto were director Tai Kato's 1973 two part *Sword of Fury*, starring Hideki

Apparently a defenseless blind masseur, Zato Ichi (Shintaro Katsu) is actually a master of *taido*, sword-drawing technique. The Zato Ichi film series, popular in Japan since the early '60s, ranks among the most successful *chanbara* ever produced.

Photo courtesy of Shochiku Films.

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Takahashi who, although he belonged to the tradition of handsome Musashis, projected cold-blooded professionalism. It was, however, Rentaro Mikuni's interpretation in Yasuo Kohata's 1965 Toei version which departed from the clean-cut image and developed a scruffy slob, devoid of the moral influence of priest Takuan. The picture shows the swordsman as a selfish, boorish rapist whose main concern is creating a name for himself by winning—by any means possible. In his famed duel at Ichijoji temple, Musashi declares himself the winner through the technicality of killing the head of the clan... an eight-year-old boy. Accidentally discovering the two-handed sword method which he later perfected, he then goes on to destroy the clan.

Actor Rentaro Mikuni, who stars in this



In *Zato Ichi at Large*, Katsu uses his keen hearing and expert swordsmanship to escape from even the most hopeless situations. Katsu has linked the *Zato Ichi* character with other popular *chanbara* heroes, such as Toshiro Mifune in *Zato Ichi Meets Yojimbo*.

Photos courtesy of Shochiku Films





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version, has appeared in many of the most prestigious *jidai-geki*. He has the distinction of playing three different roles in three different versions of the Musashi story. It was he who played the swordsman's weakling friend in the Inagaki-Mifune *Samurai*, and he who played Baiken Shishido, the farmer chain and sickle master who almost defeated Musashi in Nakamura and Uchida's *Swords of Death*.

To many, the real Musashi, swordsman and *sumi-e* painter, who lived from 1582 to 1645, was the archetypal *chanbara* hero. According to Yoshikawa, the swordsman turned his back on the love of a good woman, hence rejecting the very foundation of the Japanese social system, the family unit, in order to become a knight errant. He dedicated himself to the refinement of his character, the obsession of his art and his search for enlightenment. A similar, yet more introspective and alienated fictional character was subsequently created by the late actor Raizo Ichikawa. As Nemuri, the samurai dressed in black, Ichikawa usually ended his films alone, staring transfixed at his drawn *katana*—meditating.

In 1957, Kurosawa again starred Mifune in an atypical *jidai-geki*, *Throne of Blood*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, followed by another in 1958, *Hidden Fortress*. Neither film was the popular success that his subsequent sojourns into *chanbara* parody were. In 1961, Kurosawa directed and co-authored *Yojimbo* (*Bodyguard*) which played against *chanbara* conventions. Mifune was again the star, but this time as Sanjuro Kuwabatake—instead of the rough-hewn youth of *Samurai*, trying to improve himself through swordsmanship, earnestly seeking *satori*—he created the dirty, scratching *ronin* (masterless samurai) who hires out as a mercenary. In 1962, Kurosawa wrote and directed *Sanjuro* with Mifune as Sanjuro Tsubaki, essentially the same character as in the previous film, and poked more fun at the genre's clichés and the rules of *bushido* (the way of the warrior). Besides starring as the Yojimbo character with Katsu in the Zato Ichi picture, Mifune has also appeared as the same character in his own all-star production, called *Machibuse* (*Ambush*), with Katsu, Nakamura and Ishihara, directed by Hiroshi Inagaki. It is this Yojimbo characterization which has endeared Mifune to *chanbara* buffs and general audiences alike.

About ten years ago, some producers apparently thought that *chanbara* could not stand by itself, since its popularity in Japan was waning as the audience became more interested in *yakuza-eiga* (gambler films). Accordingly, they introduced the elements

Instead of playing his usual role as an honorable samurai, Toshiro Mifune here stars as Sanjuro Kuwabatake, a dirty and disreputable *ronin* (masterless samurai) in Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (*Bodyguard*).

Photo courtesy of Jerry Sisk.

Photo courtesy of Jerry Sisk.



In *Sanjuro*, Toshiro Mifune again parodies the *chanbara* genre and pokes fun at *bushido* (the way of the warrior) in a role similar to his Yojimbo character.

of the erotic or what is known in Japan as "Roman Porno" into the *chanbara* genre and came up with a hybrid called "Porno-Samurai." In Japan, the word "porno" does not have the connotation it has here. There it simply means "sexy." The "Roman" probably evokes images of orgies in the Japanese mind.

Shintaro Katsu, canny businessman that he is, began a new series, *The Sword of Justice*, incorporating both the erotic and martial arts aspects popular with the home audience. Portraying a constable of the Tokugawa era, he will, in one scene, use the *sai* as a defense against a sinister samurai sword and in the next, interrogate a female suspect by subjecting her to the exquisite torture of sexual excesses. All of this is held together by a satirical gloss which makes for—believe it or not—great fun.

In the *Shadow Hunters* series, *Part II*, the star, singer Yujiro Ishihara, plays a disreputable *ronin* who makes his living as a bounty hunter who kills *ninja* (spies). While bathing in a hot spring, he is approached by five women who, entering the bath nude, proceed to surround him and reveal themselves as *ninja* by attempting to kill him with various weapons hidden on their person (figure that one out). Needless to say, Ishihara deals with them with dispatch.

The *ninja* themselves display talents which relate them to the swordsmen of Chinese motion pictures. Their use of the straight sword and exotic weapons such as *shuriken*, flash powder, bombs, mystical

powers, sleeping gases, empty-hand fighting and, of course, their ability to leap tall temples in a single bound, all tend to support this. Of late, *ninja* have not been utilized as the heroes of Japanese martial arts films as in previous years, but rather as the heavies the anti-hero samurai have been hired to destroy—or vice versa. Such is the case in several of the segments of the *Baby Cart from Hell* series, starring Tomisaburo Wakayama as the former shogunate decapitator, Ito Ogami, who hires himself out as a mercenary. A threat to clan power, Ogami's life is jeopardized by the *ninja* group hired to assassinate him.

In Toei studio's *Bohachi Bushido*, *ronin* Tetsuro Tamba is tested by the depraved Bohachi clan to see if he is ruthless enough to join their ranks. He saves a disheveled young girl tied spread eagle to the floor from being sold to a group of dirty old lechers by outbidding them and then releases her untouched. When it is revealed that the whole incident was a charade for his benefit—that the lechers and the girl belong to the clan—another member, an old hag, calls Tamba "soft" for not ravishing the "prisoner." He promptly cuts off the hag's ear with one sweep of his *katana*.

Over the years, Tamba has appeared in many prestigious *jidai-geki*, including *Three Outlaw Samurai*, *Kwaidan*, *Hara-Kiri* and *Goyokin*, the last three of which also starred another unheralded period film actor, Tatsuya Nakadai. Brought to the attention of the general public as the pistol-carrying

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heavy of *Yojimbo*, Nakadai has the misfortune of losing most of his duels with Mifune, but never quite as spectacularly as the famous one-move duel in the finale of *Sanjuro* in which Mifune cut him down in the draw. An excellent actor, Nakadai has lent his talents to such quality historical films as Okamoto's *Sword of Doom* and *Tenchu* which starred Katsu and featured novelist Yukio Mishima, apparently rehearsing his own demise as he played a samurai who commits hara-ki.

The *chanbara* version of women's lib is amply represented by such actresses as Misora Hibari, Japan's Judy Garland, who recently celebrated her twenty-fifth year in motion pictures. After starting as a singer in teenage roles, Hibari starred in *chanbara* versions of old legends. In one of these, she plays the leading man who, during the course of the picture, disguises "himself" as a woman in order to trick the heavies. Such films are a tribute to the Japanese audience's ability to suspend their disbelief... as is the following:

Toei's *Ocho* series starring Reiko Ike, follows the adventures of a worldly gambler swordswoman who never seems to be able to complete a duel as fully dressed as she started. In one picture released recently, although surprised in her bath and attacked by a dozen sword-swinging samurai, Ocho manages to reach her *katana* and fight all her attackers in slow motion, killing them as they chase her, dripping wet, out of her tub, into her snowed-in garden. There, splattered with blood and snow, she kills the last of them.

Katsu production's *Lady Snow Blood* series stars Meiko Kaji in the role of Yuki, an early 20th century lady gambler who learned swordplay to avenge the imprisonment and death of her mother. Carrying her straight sword disguised as the handle of her parasol, Yuki manages to right the wrongs of evildoers quite efficiently until overwhelmed by the police, who seem to take a dim view of such things. Junko Miyazono plays another avenging offspring, the Lady Okatsu, an aristocrat of the Tokugawa era who mastered kendo just in time to avenge the politically-motivated death of her parents. (One fears the life expectancy of the average 19th century Japanese parent must have been quite short.) Okatsu's cover is that of an itinerant singer whose sword is disguised as part of the *shamisen* with which she accompanies herself.

In Shochiku studio's *Mekura No Oichi* (*Blind Swordswoman*) series, Oichi, played by Yoko Matsuyama, takes a leaf out of Zato Ichi's book by carrying a sword cane, relying on her supersensitive hearing and using the underhand style of fencing. In a recent Director Tai Kato's *Sword of Fury* presents one of the least romanticized versions of the life and legend of master swordsman Miyamoto Musashi. Here Hideki Takahashi (as Musashi) meets the head of the Hosokawa clan in a duel to the death.



Photo courtesy of Shochiku Films

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release, Oichi was almost beaten in a duel with a beautiful girl whose unique weapon was a horsewhip woven of women's hair.

Toho recently entered the competition with a heroine whose weapons were her empty hands. Karate Rica appeared in two films and then left the fray. The newest addition to the roster of Japanese fighting femmes is Etsuko Shiomi, a very young, attractive star of Toei studio who may well become the Angela Mao Ying of Japanese action films. After several supporting parts in her first two years, Shiomi emerges as a star in her own right in the film *Lady Karate* in which she plays a half Chinese, half Japanese girl—brought up in Hong Kong where she learned kung-fu—who travels to Japan to avenge the death of her father. Shiomi performs some dazzling fights and will, we are sure, give Mao Ying a run for her money.

The most successful and best-produced series with a woman star—to date—is Toei's *Hibotan Bakuto* (*The Big Peony Gambler*). Set in the early 1900's, the series begins with Junko Fuji, one of the most beautiful actresses on any screen, starring as Oryu, the Red Peony, accepting the life of an itinerant gambler in order to avenge the death of her *yakuza* father. When called upon by circumstances to right a wrong or follow the gambler's code, she protects herself like a man, using jiu-jitsu, *katana*, *tanto* (dagger, her favorite weapon), pistol or hairpin which she throws with the skill of a *ninja*. Fuji accomplishes all this without once losing her femininity or charm—an amazing feat. Despite the fact that the character of Oryu occasionally became a little preachy, the series was a tremendous success which ended, after just six films of high calibre, only because its star gave up her career in favor of marriage. The films still remain some of the best of the *yakuza* genre.

In the last ten years since the decline and fall of the popularity of the *chanbara* film in Japan, *yakuza-eiga* have all but replaced them. As a genre, the *yakuza* film fills a gap left by the samurai picture. Usually set between the early 1900's and the 1930's, the *yakuza* film's values are more modern than those of the *chanbara* picture. The samurai hero was concerned with the dual concept of *giri/ninjo* (inseparable duty/humanity), the *yakuza* anti-hero (we're not the only ones to come up with that lately) is haunted by the responsibilities of duty or humanity: either duty to his *oyabun* (boss) and gambler's clan, or humanity, consideration of the clan's responsibilities to the victims of the organization.

Yakuza films have spawned several actors whose immense popularity has taken them out of the narrow confines of the one genre and made them some of Japan's superstars. The first and archetypal *yakuza* anti-hero was Koji Tsuruta as he appeared in the 1964 Toei production, *Bakuto* (*Gambler*), directed by Shingehiro Ozawa.

Photo courtesy of Jerry Slat



Photo courtesy of Shoetoku Films



While Hidetaki Takahashi's Musashi radiated cold-blooded professionalism in *Sword of Fury* (top), Kinoshita Nakamura (above) portrayed a more traditionally heroic Musashi in director Tomo Uchida's *Musashi* series. The heroic—and romantic—actions of Sarutobi Sasuke (Ichiro Zaizu) in *Ninja Spy* (right) represented a departure from the usual film portrayal of villainous ninjas.

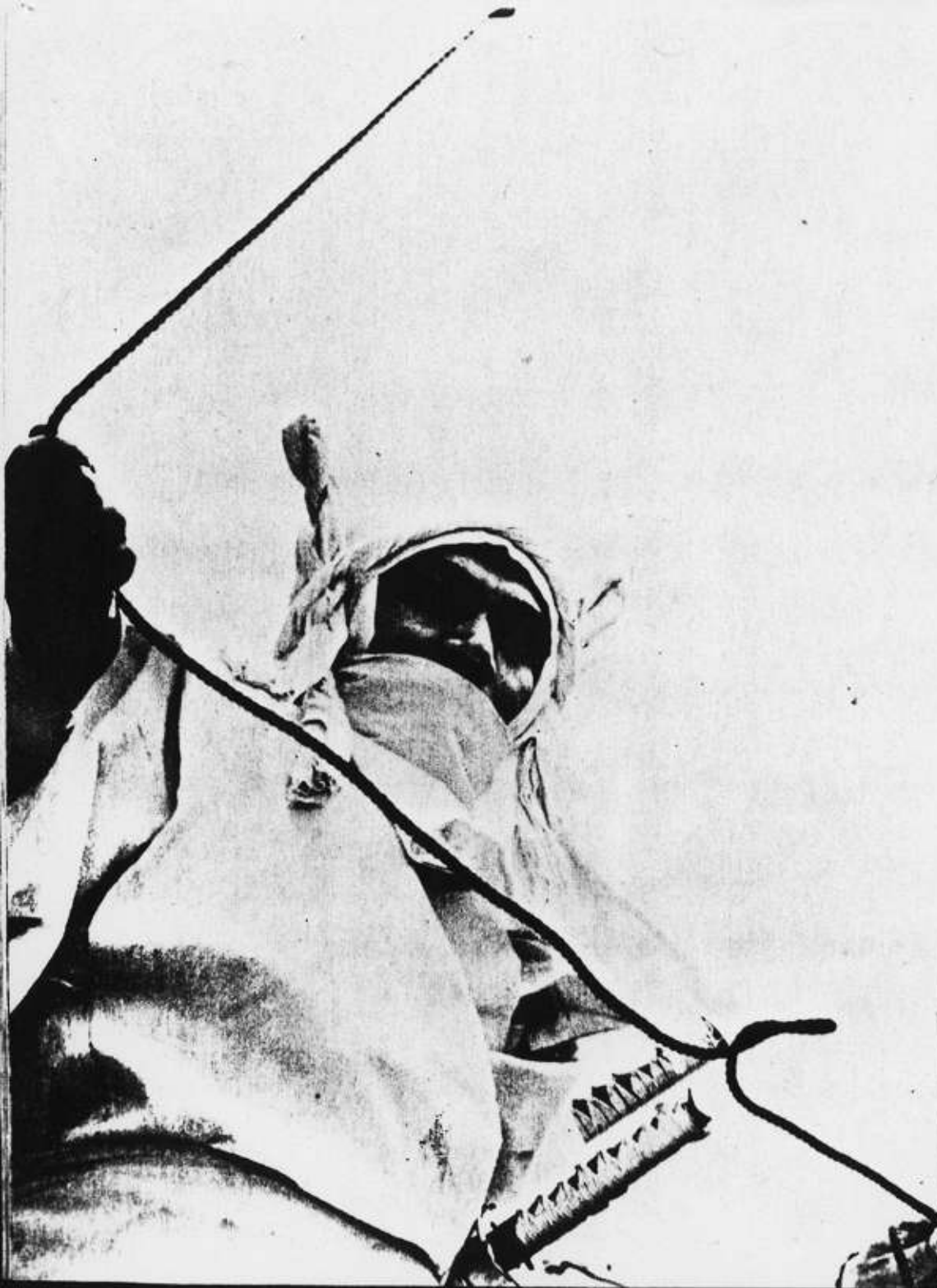
Tsuruta had gained recognition as Miyamoto Musashi's only real rival, Kojiro Sasaki, in the Inagaki-Mifune version of the *Samurai* trilogy. Tsuruta, in real life an ex-kamikaze pilot in World War II whose life had been saved by the cessation of hostilities, created the almost chivalrous

characters—haunted by inner conflict—who are the hallmark of *yakuza-eiga*.

Following in Tsuruta's mold, Ken Takakura, a slightly younger man, combining more physicality and a flair for underplaying with Tsuruta's stoicism, became Japan's number one box office star with his *Abashiri*

Photo courtesy of Shoetoku Films





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Prison series. Tsuruta and Takakura were two thirds of Toei's *yakuza* star triumvirate; the third was Junko Fuji. Supporting these stars in most of their films is another member of Toei's stock company, Tomisaburo Wakayama, whose *Gokudo* (*Outcast*) and *Capone* series are parodies of the genre.

The obligatory climax in the typical *yakuza-eiga* is when the hero, making his choice in favor of those oppressed by the *oyabun*, stages a one man raid on the gambler boss' headquarters. As he walks fatalistically to what he expects to be his final, expiating act of vengeance, we hear him sing his song of honor and revenge. Arriving at the boss' lair, the hero, entering unannounced (an unpardonable breach of etiquette), unwraps his *katana* or *tanto* hidden in his raincoat for his walk through the streets and swoops his arms forward out of the middle of his kimono, exposing his upper torso covered with his status symbol, his gambler's *irezumi* (tatoos). Through surprise, determination and belief in the righteousness of his cause, the hero decimates the clan in an extremely graphic, realistic sequence of extended carnage—complete with cut arteries spurting blood on *shoji* screens and severed hands falling to the tatami mats. The scenes are not for the squeamish. Slowly, methodically, the hero hacks his way to the detested *oyabun* who huddles, terrified, behind several bodyguards. Exacting just retribution, the hero

Photo courtesy of Jerry Stout

subjects the evil *oyabun* to an agonizing death which provides the audience with a tremendous catharsis and the knowledge that right can beat might. Something of a morality play, the *yakuza-eiga* also seem to make a statement reaffirming the validity of the individual in a group-oriented society. Japan is a country of joiners and here is a genre which lauds the courage and initiative of the individual who defies the group in order to do what is morally right. The general American audience was introduced to this genre through Warner Bros.' big budget film, *Yakuza*, written by Paul Schrader, directed by Sydney Pollack and starring Robert Mitchum and Ken Takakura.

In some respects, the American public has had more subliminal exposure to Japanese cinematic influence than is realized. Whether acknowledged or not, director Sam Peckinpah's *Wild Bunch* owes much to the Japanese. The use of slow motion and long lenses to depict violent action is right out of Kurosawa's bag of tricks. The entire last reel in which the four outlaws fatalistically march to the Mexican general's stronghold in order to *try* to rescue their comrade, only to see the general cut his throat—at which point they take on his entire army in a blood bath, winning and dying simultaneously—is quite like a *yakuza* finale. Other western directors and writers owe much to *yakuza* and *jidai-geki*. There is, of course, the obvious American remake of Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*

into *The Magnificent Seven* and its sequels. There was *Fist Full of Dollars*, based on *Yojimbo*, and *Rashomon* was remade as *The Outrage*. Tom Laughlin filmed *The Master Gunfighter*, based on *Goyokin*, and Clint Eastwood has negotiated with Katsu Productions in order to transpose the *Baby Cart From Hell* to the old West. The recently released *Boulevard Nights* was written by Japanese-American Desmond Nakano, a protege of Paul Schrader, writer of the film *Yakuza*. Although set in the barrio of East Los Angeles, *Boulevard Nights* is more uncompromisingly a *yakuza-eiga* than Schrader's picture and may well be America's first. This in itself may be an argument for the genre's universality.

The sport picture, another standard genre of the Japanese movie industry has, from time to time, produced films which have been considered milestones. One such picture is *Sanshiro Sugata*, Kurosawa's first directorial effort. Filmed in 1943, during World War II and used by the Imperial government as internal propaganda, the negative was apparently partly destroyed after its confiscation by the American occupation authorities. It was, however, subsequently reconstructed and prints rereleased in 1952. It was then remade in 1955 by Shigeo Tanaka and in 1965, as *Judo Saga*, it was produced by Kurosawa and directed by his former assistant, Seiichiro Uchikawa. The latter version starred the ubiquitous



The ninja of Japanese cinema are known for their exotic weapons, and a simple cord (left) in *Ninja Spy* could strike fear in enemy hearts. Priests could also be terrifying opponents. Above, Tomisaburo Wakayama portrays Shinkai, the renegade priest of the *Gokuaku Bozu* (*Wicked Priest*) series.

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Photo courtesy of Jerry Suss.



Photo courtesy of Shochiku Films



Photo courtesy of Jerry Suss.

The chanbara version of women's lib is demonstrated by Etsuko Shionoi (top), an attractive young star from the Toei Studios, who plays a kung-fu and karate expert in *Karate Woman*; and by Yoko Matsuyama (middle and above), the blind swordswoman Olchi, whose sixth sense makes her invincible in battle.

Toshiro Mifune as the Jigaro Kano character, Shogoro Yano, and pop singer-matinee idol, Yuzo Kayama as Sugata.

A perennial favorite, Sugata's story was filmed even more recently as *Dawn of Judo* by Shochiku studio. Based on Tsuneo Tomita's book set in the Meiji period, the films show the growth and development of interest in the spirit of judo through the training and accomplishment of Yano's star pupil, Sugata. Highlights of the story are Sugata's match with jiu-jitsu sensei Murai which decides which style is to be taught at the police academy and the *judoka's* final grudge duel with the Higaki brothers—both irrational karate experts—in the snows of Mount Yakushi.

For awhile, it seemed as if karate practitioners in Japanese films were doomed to being portrayed as fanatical and just a bit sinister—as opposed to the enlightened, rational *judoka*. Eventually, the influence of *shorinji kenpo*, apparently stressing the responsibility of the karateka, began to be acknowledged by one studio which created a hero who was a kenpo master. As Shinkai the gambler priest, picturesque hero (but hero, nonetheless) of the *Gokuaku Bozu* (*Wicked Priest*) series, Tomisaburo Wakayama was called upon to be a master of *bojitsu*, *iaido*, *judo* and *shorinji kenpo*. In each succeeding picture, several empty-hand fights were obligatory. The way was being paved for some contemporary characters who specialized in unarmed fighting to appear.

Over six years ago, Toei studio began producing a series called *Karate Kiba* in which the hero, Kiba, played by Shin'ichi Chiba, the master of an obscure karate style, foils an airplane hijacking singlehandedly. Interviewed on TV as an instant celebrity, he extolls the virtues of his style and offers himself for hire as a bodyguard. This set the premise of the series which featured many tight, well-choreographed fights.

It wasn't too long ago that Chiba acquired some notoriety in the States for the dubious distinction of being the first action star to have his picture rated "X." A film called *Streetfighter*, in which Chiba is billed as "Sonny," released here in a dubbed version, received the rating from the MPAA board by a seventeen-to-one vote because the film contains "excessive violence."

Shochiku recently released a tough cop picture called *Cobra*, starring Jiro Tamiya in the title role and featuring two Chinese martial artists, Wan Ping, playing a female bodyguard, and Kao Chaing as the karate heavy. The film was probably made to compete with Toei's *Yakuza Deka* or *Gangster Cop* series, starring Chiba and featuring many fights and stunts.

Where are the Japanese studios going now? The eldest, Nikkatsu, apparently is content to remain in the porno-samurai league with such releases as *Seven Naked Samurai* (a take-off on guess what), while producing *chanbara* TV series such as



Photo courtesy of Jerry Suss.

Tokyo Untouchables and an occasional big budget picture like *Senso To Ningen* (*Men and War*). Toho, according to one of its executives in a recent interview in Tokyo, is not producing anything itself now, but—instead—distributes the work of independents, such as Katsu's Zato Ichi series. Toho will release a certain amount of *chanbara*, but there will be no empty-hand productions. Over fifteen percent of its output will be science fiction (such as *Catastrophe, 1999*) and the balance will be comedies. Shochiku will continue with its domestic comedies and an occasional large scale *chanbara*, phasing out its empty-hand productions. Toei seems to be the only studio in Japan which evidences any interest in the empty-hand martial arts, having even produced a documentary on them and their elder practitioners who are beginning to die out. It is the

studio which produced the fictionalized versions of the lives of the late Doshin So and Mas Oyama, both of whom were played by Sonny Chiba.

The trend, however, seems to be away from empty-hand toward *chanbara*. Toei co-produced, with Sonny Chiba Enterprises, a sixteen hour version of *The Yagyu Family Conspiracy* which is currently running on UHF television in the Los Angeles area. The same studio also released a new two-part version of *Chushingura*. Tatsuya Nakadai starred in a new period picture, *Hunter in the Dark*, which arrived here recently and Kurosawa's new *jidai-geki*, *The Double*, split the Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival with *All That Jazz*.

All in all, the outlook for the martial arts movie fan looks good and for the *chanbara* fan, it looks excellent.

Pulling a straight sword out of her parasol, Meiko Kahi, as Yuki in *Lady Snow Blood*, prepares to avenge her mother's death.

CHANBARA



Photo courtesy of Shochiku Films.

Throughout the popular *Baby Cart From Hell* series, Tomisaburo Wakayama, as Ito Ogami, slaughtered all comers while keeping the baby cart itself unscathed.



Photo courtesy of Jerry Shaw.



Photo courtesy of Shochiku Films.

The not-so-innocent baby cart which accompanied Wakayama through the *Baby Cart* series could become an ally in battle by providing an arsenal of weaponry.



Photo courtesy of Shochiku Films.

CHANBARA

Ken Takakura (left) battles a yakuza of a rival gang to fulfill a debt of honor in *The Yakuza*, which introduced *yakuzaeiga* to American audiences. The chanbara takes on the problems of modern terrorism as Kiba (Sonny Chiba), a master of an obscure martial arts style, fells an airline hijacking singlehandedly in *Karate Kiba*.



Photo courtesy of Jerry Stout.

Below are this writer's ten favorite *chanbara* or, if you will, *jidaï geki*. In compiling this partial list of those I wouldn't mind seeing for the third or fourth time, I realize that the names Nakadai, Tanba and Gosha appear quite frequently and — if the list were extended — would probably appear many more times.

— J.S.

Title	Star	Director
TENCHU	Katsu, Nakadai	Gosha
GOYOKIN	Nakadai, Tanba	Gosha
SWORD OF DOOM	Nakadai	Okamoto
THREE OUTLAW SAMURAI	Tanba	Gosha
HARA-KIRI	Nakadai, Tanba	Kobayashi
SWORD OF THE BEAST	Hira	Gosha
YOJIMBO	Mifune, Toshiro	Kurosawa
ZATO ICHI MEETS HIS EQUAL	Katsu, Yu	Yasuda
MIYAMOTO MUSASHI	Mikuni	Kohata
LONE WOLF ON THE RIVER STYX	Wakayama	Misumi

SAMURAI FILMS

A NEGLECTED GENRE

FILM SURVEY BY CHRIS D.

It's possible that some of you are missing out on some of the best motion pictures ever produced on this planet — the Japanese Samurai films!

Just what exactly is a samurai or chanbara film? While it is true that you could take the protagonists in a number of samurai films, cut their topknot of hair, get rid of the sword and costuming, replace it all with a cowboy hat, jeans and a six-gun and have an American Western, it is also true that many samurai films could not be so easily transposed to our American counterpart genre. For all intents and purposes, as far as technological achievements, medicine, contact with the outside world, etc., Japan was still in the midst of the feudal middle ages until as late as 1870, and, in some outlying provinces as late as 1900. This, in and of itself, precludes many western film genre characteristics as does the fact that the Japanese people (comprised of a polyglot mix of Chinese, Russian, Eskimo Indian and indigenous natives) settled in Japan many centuries Before Christ. Although there were many similar hardships for rural inhabitants in regards to privation and starvation, the one big thing missing was America's frontier expansionist/settler mentality, the melting pot of people seeking freedom and a better, more prosperous life in America even as they stole from and killed the American Indian to achieve it. Japan's caste or class system before 1890 also created a different set of conflicts which the American western film could never have.

What one also finds in most samurai films that one will not find in the American western (except perhaps in a select few of the films of Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher and John Ford) is a ruggedly transcendent individual spirituality.

An interesting anomaly is that the Italian spaghetti western, though lacking the spiritual transcendence, was as much influenced by samurai films as they were influenced by their American western counterpart. In turn, especially in samurai films produced between 1968-1979, there is an unmistakable spaghetti western influence. Skeletal plots/storylines, music — and even actors in the case of Tatsuya Nakadai appearing as a psychotic Mexican villain in the spaghetti opus *Today It's Me, Tomorrow It's You* (co-written by Dario Argento) — became interchangeable. As world cinema became integrated into a global movie village, a cosmically circular array of influences and styles became progressively more obvious. Dare I use the word synchronicity?

In listing the following, some of my favorite samurai films, I have lumped all the films of one samurai film series or one samurai director into individual entries, so as to include more film titles.

1. Lone Wolf & Child Series:

Lone Wolf And Child - Sword Of Vengeance (Kozure Okami - Ko No Kashi Ube Kashi Tsukamatsuru) 1972, 84 Min. (Orig. release: 95 Min.) Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Tomisaburo Wakayama, Akihiro Tomikawa, Yunosuke Ito, VHS (Japan) TOHO

Lone Wolf And Child - Baby Cart At The River Styx (Kozure Okami - Sanzu No Kawa No Ubaguruma) 1972 85 Min. (Orig release: 85 Min.)



Lone Wolf & Child #3 — Flying On The Winds Of Death In A Baby Cart, aka Lightning Swords Of Death.

Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Tomisaburo Wakayama, Akihiro Tomikawa, Kashiro Matsuo, Minoru Oki VHS(Japan) TOHO

Lone Wolf And Child - Flying On The Winds Of Death In A Baby Cart (Kozure Okami - Shi Ni Kaze Ni Mukai Ubaguruma) aka *Lightning Swords Of Death* aka *Lupine Wolf* 1972, 81 Min. (orig. release: 89 Min.) Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Tomisaburo Wakayama, Akihiro Tomikawa, Go Kato, Ichiro Nakatani VHS (Japan) TOHO U. S. dubbed VHS: J. A. Video Productions

Lone Wolf And Child - Heart Of A Father, Heart Of A Child (Kozure Okami - Oyo No Ko Koro Ko No Ko Koro) aka *Baby Cart In Peril* 1972 81 Min. (Orig. release: 104 Min.) Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Tomisaburo Wakayama, Akihiro Tomikawa, Yoichi Hayashi VHS (Japan) TOHO

Lone Wolf And Child - Path Between Heaven And Hell (Kozure Okami - Meifumado) aka *Baby Cart In The Land Of Demons* 1973 82 Min. (Orig. release: 89 Min.) Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Tomisaburo Wakayama, Akihiro Tomikawa, Minoru Oki, Michiyo Yasuda, Bin Amatsu VHS (Japan) TOHO

Lone Wolf And Child - Daigoro! We're Going To Hell! (Kozure Okami - Jigoku E Daigoro Ikuzo) aka *White Heaven In Hell* 1974 82 min. (orig. release: 84 Min.) Dir. Yoshiyuki Kuroda w/Tomisaburo Wakayama, Akihiro Tomikawa, Isao Kimura, Minoru Oki.

The first three *Lone Wolf* films were produced by Shintaro Katsu (star of the *Zatoichi*, *Blind Swordsman* series), the second three by *Lone Wolf* star (and Katsu's real-life brother) the late Tomisaburo Wakayama. All were produced for Toho Film Company. All six were adapted by Kazuo Koike from the mega comic series (collected in 28 vol-

umes of 250 pages each) written by Koike and drawn by Goseki Kojima in the sixties. Production was originally started in 1969 on the first three pictures. Films #1 through 4 were released in 1972, #5 in 1973, and #6 in 1974. There was more than enough material for at least another half dozen films, but due to the plunging attendance across the board in all Japanese movie houses, it was decided to transfer the series to television. Kinnoyuke Nakamura (changing his name to Kinnoyuke Yorozuya, and star of numerous samurai films himself) took over the role of Itto Ogami played by Wakayama. In the films, Akihiro Tomikawa played the role of Ogami's infant son, Daigoro.

The film series is the apex of the samurai film genre. There've been other films as excellent, such as *Tenchu* or *Heaven's Punishment* (*Hitokiri*), *The Bodyguard* (*Yojimbo*), *Official Gold* (*Goyokin*), *Hunter In The Dark* (*Yami No Kariudo*), etc. But the *Lone Wolf* series has a balance of reality and fantasy, a detail of storytelling, a creation of an entire world that raises the series to the top. The films are incredibly exciting and entertaining; they have the visceral stimulation of the best of the Hong Kong period adventures currently in release as well as the refined pictorial beauty of an "art" film (but without the pretensions). There is also a lyricism and perspective on nature and man's place in the world that balances the brutally hellish carnage. In fact, my main criticism of *Shogun Assassin*, the butchering and cobbling-together of *Baby Cart At The River Styx* with ten minutes from *Sword Of Vengeance*, is that the lyricism, which makes the brutality all the more horrifying, is gone. It reduces these beautiful masterpieces to the same level of meaning as the most mediocre kung-fu films coming over in the mid-'70s. The Mark Lindsay score for *Shogun Assassin* also blows, especially when one stands it alongside the original excellent score by Eiken Sakurai.

Shintaro Katsu — already operating from a position of financial power as star of the very successful *Zatoichi*, *The Blind Swordsman* series at Daiei Pictures and at the helm of his own relatively new production company — secured the movie rights to the *Lone Wolf And Child* comics. The story goes that he very much wanted to establish his older brother (3 years Katsu's senior) as a major star, at least as big a star as Katsu himself. Wakayama and Katsu had both started out in their mid-twenties as film actors in the 1950s.

As the sixties progressed, Wakayama seemed to become typecast in comic roles unless he was playing a villain. Although top-billed in his own yakuza film series, the action/comedy *Scoundrel* (*Gokudo*) string of films, it was as a bumbling small-time yakuza boss. Wakayama, though, had as versatile a range as his brother. Katsu was also looked upon as a comic actor but because of his "Star" clout received an even share of dramatic roles. To give his brother the respect he was due, Katsu cast him as the stoic Ogami character. Wakayama's previous appearances in yakuza films, even his more serious samurai roles pre *Baby Cart/Lone Wolf* did not prepare one for the startling revelation of his Ogami characterization. Quiet, introspective, cool, calm and collected where he was before always loud-mouthed, hotheaded, boorish. And, although built like a bulldog, as Ogami he became strangely graceful in an astonishing display of martial arts from sword to judo to acrobatic leaps and somersaults.

In the first film of the series, *Sword Of Vengeance*, The Lone Wolf, Itto Ogami, now a wandering assassin for hire traveling with his son in a wooden baby cart, had lost his position as decapitator for the Shogun when betrayed by his arch-rival Lord Retsudo Yagyu (played by Yunnosuke Ito in the

film and Tatsuo Endo and Minoru Oki in the under of the series).

aving had to execute in infant heir/lord of an it clan earlier in the day, Ogami returns home id his wife disturbed by insomnia from night- concerning those the Shogun has had Ogami tite. Talk of burial mounds surrounded by its and pools of blood doesn't phase Ogami, he reassures his wife that "she's just tired." He s babe-in-arms, Daigoro, with him to the fam- emple. Later, approaching the wee hours, mi hears a scream and returns to the main se to find his wife murdered by Yagyu's ninjas. occupied with grief over his dead wife, Ogami sn't see another ninja plant an altar plaque laying the Shogun's crest in his temple (which be used as evidence to support the claim imi is a traitor and already praying for the if of the soon-to-be-killed Shogun). Put under se arrest, Ogami slays the men who've come him and defies Lord Yagyu who watches from arby bridge. Later, Ogami lays a sword and in front of Daigoro. If Daigoro chooses the he will join his mother in heaven; if he chooses sword Ogami will take him on the road be- en heaven and hell as fellow fugitive seeking geance. These events are told in flashback as ami pushes Daigoro along country backroads he wooden baby cart (the cart is furnished with nerous swords, knives, folding lances and in r episodes, gun barrels).

Ogami is hired by a clan to prevent the assassi- on of their tubercular leader. He travels to a note village lorded over by the sadistic, beastlike ers who've been enlisted to waylay the clan ainer. Through his stoic demeanor he manages void confrontation until the final massacre. The second film in the series, *Baby Cart At The ver Styx*, sees Yagyu hire female assassin Kashiro tsuo, and the women ninjas under her to avenge e death of his sons by Ogami. When Ogami nages to wipe out all of her female killers, tsuo engages three master slayers, each with ir trademark weapon: iron claws, a spiked club d spiked metal gloves. The odyssey of carnage nges from the high seas to desert dunes along a solate shore. In the desert sequence, the *Lone of* series enjoys possibly its most surreal imag- y with Ogami plucking killers out of the sand by ir heads.

Flying On The Winds Of Death In A Baby Cart is e third in the series. Ogami and Daigoro become volved with a poor teenage girl who's destined work as a whore in a yakuza brothel after her other's death. Coincidentally the yakuza adam/leader recognizes Ogami and desires ngeance - he'd accidentally amputated her ther's arm (a former shogunate retainer) when a ductant candidate for hara-kiri rambunctiously ied to escape decapitation. Lord Yagyu also elds his influence by manipulating a corrupt cal daimyo (magistrate or province leader) to ave his men attack Ogami. This entry was re- eased virtually intact - albeit atrociously dubbed y Columbia - as *Lightning Swords Of Death*.

In the fourth film, *Heart Of A Father, Heart Of A hild*, Yagyu once again throws everything he as t Ogami. Ogami, who is renting his sword out for illing if he believes the cause is just, seeks out a attooed swordswoman attempting to avenge onor lost to her evil, sex-driven sword teacher. agyu's disowned and sole-surviving (legitimate) on shows up - he'd shamed the Yagyu name in a fuel with Ogami, winning by disarming Ogami ut pointing his blade inadvertently at the watch- ing-from-the-sidelines Shogun, a definite no-no. because of this, Yagyu had secretly banished him, substituting a look-alike in hara-kiri to save face. This had been the seed of Lord Yagyu's bet royal

of Ogami (Yagyu had originally hoped for the job of chief decapitator for one of his other sons.). At the end, during a huge battle, Ogami wipes out everyone. Nearly dead himself he manages to blind Lord Yagyu in one eye. Buichi Saito, veteran director of countless yakuza and action films at Nikkatsu Studios in the sixties, helms this outing with as painterly, as color-conscious an eye as Kenji Misumi. Of particular visual note: the opening sequence where the topless tattooed swordswoman dispatches several shocked samurai in the forest; an attack on Ogami in-and-outside a temple in brightly colored autumnal woods; and the final battle where Ogami seems mortally wounded a number of times, but manages - bleeding profusely and barely able to stand - to stumble away with the baby cart after it's all over.

According to general Japanese film reference book, *Cinema Club 94*, all the *Lone Wolf* films appear in slightly shorter versions on video. However where other entries are shorn of only seven or eight minutes apiece, this particular episode seems to have been knocked down 23 minutes. I don't know the reason for this editing, or if it's Toho or



Zatoichi & The Fugitives, 18th in the series.

Katsu Productions who are responsible. I do know that these are the only versions now available. Knowing the Japanese film industry's proclivity for gore and excessive violence, and seeing the carnage that still survives intact in these films, it's difficult to understand the rationale for any trimming.

In the fifth film, *Path Between Heaven And Hell*, Ogami encounters numerous killers, each in the guise of potential employers. As they die under Ogami's blade, they each relate their short message - part of a story of a daimyo without a male heir, who's registered his daughter as a son and raised her as a boy. There's a document acknowledging all this that's been signed by the daimyo's allies, one of whom is a supposedly benevolent, but in reality evil Buddhist lama. The lama intends to hand the document over to Lord Yagyu, thus ending the daimyo's reign and destroying their clan. Ogami is hired to kill the Buddhist leader, retrieve the document and bring it to the clan's castle. Ogami achieves all this aided by a female assassin (Michiyo Yasuda) member of the clan. Once Ogami has the document in his possession, he insists on delivering it personally. Then in the presence of the daimyo and the dressed-up female heir, Ogami expresses his outrage "as a parent at

the sexual travesty being perpetrated" and explains to the daimyo that though he's fought on his side against Lord Yagyu, he cannot allow this subterfuge to continue. Ogami singlehandedly destroys the entire clan regiment then decapitates the daimyo, the wife and daughter.

One of the most chilling moments had Daigoro and the little girl/fake male heir making funny faces at each other, oblivious to the ridiculous insanity indulged in by their parents; however once Ogami has asserted his murderous intentions the little girl suddenly pipes up with the orders: "Kill them!!!" Director Misumi unfurls one of the most savage indictments of feudal mentality.

The sixth film in the series is *Daigoro! We're Going To Hell!* After his only daughter is dispatched by Ogami, Yagyu desperately implores his other disowned son for help. The son is a crazy bastard progeny who excels as sorcerer in the black magic arts of ninja. Director Kuroda draws on his special-effects background on such in period films as the *Giant Majin* trilogy and *Big Ghost War* to create a haunting atmosphere of occult menace. Ogami and Daigoro face Yagyu and his minions in a climactic battle on snow-covered slopes. This was the sixth and final installment of the film series.

Although the TV series featuring Kinnoyuzo Yorozuya wasn't bad, the dubbed adaptation-into-movie, *Fugitive Samurai* was decidedly inferior. At least 27 episodes in approx. 9 volumes are available on Japanese video.

A 1992 film version from Shichiku Films, *Lone Wolf And Child - A Handful Of Sand* (Kozure Okami - Sono Chitazaki Tenio), starred Masakazu Tamura as Ogami and Tatsuya Nakadai as Lord Yagyu. Directed by Akira Inoue (veteran of numerous samurai epics for Daiei Films), it's quite good except for two glaring faults that nearly ruin it: (1) a music score that takes a nice melody and runs it into the ground, repeating it so often a degree of sentimentality is introduced that's nausea-inducing. (2) The decision to do away with the baby cart - the most famous aspect of the *Lone Wolf* story! Daigoro tramps around on foot or is held in daddy Itto's arms. Oh well.

2. THE ZATOICHI SERIES

Although there are numerous assorted injustices and near-tragedies in the pathetic history of Japanese genre films distribution in America, one of the most astounding is the near-anonymity of Japanese superstar, Shintaro Katsu. Katsu is one of those actors in company as disparate as Charlie Chaplin, James Dean, Robert Mitchum, Marilyn Monroe, Orson Welles, and others. In the character of Zatoichi - the wandering, blind masseur/gambler/master swordsman - Katsu, in collaboration with writer Kan Shimoza, gave birth to a cinematic character as original as Chaplin's "Little Tramp" or Eastwood's "Man With No Name". (Eastwood's character itself coincidentally based on a samurai film persona, the *Yojimbo* (or *Bodyguard*) named Sanjuro, created by actor Toshiro Mifune and director Akira Kurosawa).

Mischievous rascal, Ichi, first appeared in 1962 in the black-and-white Daiei films production *The Life And Opinion Of Masseur Ichi* (*Zatoichi Monogatari*) directed by Kenji Misumi. Numerous Japanese films from 1950-1975 period were turned into movie series if ticket sales warranted, and *Zatoichi* proved to be no exception. Astonishingly enough, when you consider that *Katsu* as well as the *Zatoichi* character are virtually unknown in the U. S. (except Hawaii where television still airs the subtitled films and reruns of the TV shows), the

(continued)

Zatoichi films were the most popular moneymakers in domestic Japan during the sixties. They, in fact, surpassed the much-more-familiar-to-Americans *Godzilla* movies. Shochiku Films' bittersweet *Tora-San* comedy series (aka *It's Hard To Be A Man*) about a wandering tokiya (traveling salesman) finally usurped the honor of most lucrative, longest running film series in the eighties.

Zatoichi proved popular not only because of the spectacular swordsmanship coming from an unexpected quarter but also the philosophical wisecracks popping out of the mouth of our smart-aleck hero. This tightrope act of humor, drama and exhilaratingly choreographed violence kept the series in favor for over a decade.

Ichi roamed the backroads of Japan in the 1860s, a decade which saw the 400 year feudal rule of the Tokugawa shogunate finally start to crumble. This was an era of dramatic change where the idea of a caste system was being challenged, where starving farmers were finally revolting against centuries of brutally unfair taxes and oppression.

Ichi is a mass of contradictions - a yakuza gambler, he is scrupulously on the up-and-up with honest, common people but proves a ruthless conman trickster with anyone attempting to deceive or cheat him. An expert masseur and acupuncturist, he's also the most skilled swordsman in Japan. Despite being at the bottom of the ladder as a blind masseur in a still-in-place caste system, Ichi has opportunities to make good, settle down and even marry. But, either because of his own choice or the stormy weather of circumstance, his fate is to wander.

Following are descriptions of my favorite Zatoichi films. After the descriptions is a list of the remaining films with a four-star rating system to show my level of enjoyment:

1. *Life And Opinion Of Masseur Ichi (Zatoichi Monogatari)* 1962 96 Min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/ Shintaro Katsu, Shigeru Amachi, Masayo Banri. In this initial outing, Ichi cons his way into staying at a rural yakuza clan's HQ. The two-faced boss who knows Ichi's reputation, lays it on thick with hospitality, hoping Ichi will fight on their side in an upcoming battle against a clan from a nearby village. While fishing, Ichi meets a lonely, honorable and slowly dying tubercular samurai (Amachi) who turns out to be the rival clan's hired killer. The two become friends, and it's only through a series of accidents and gang manipulations that the two do, indeed, end up crossing swords. Ichi initially believes he'll be taking unfair advantage because of Amachi's health and refuses. Amachi, dreading a quiet death in bed, convinces Ichi he'd rather die on his feet with his sword in his hand. Ichi reluctantly acquiesces to the man's dying request. XXXX VHS/LASER(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer U. S. subtitled VHS, Chambara Entertainment (Formerly known as Video Action).

2. *Return Of Masseur Ichi (Zoku Zatoichi Monogatari)* 1962 72 Min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Shintaro Katsu, Tomisaburo Wakayama (under pka Kenzaburo Joh), Yoshie Mizutani, Masayo Banri. Ichi runs into his estranged one-armed brother (played by real-life bro, Wakayama) the person responsible for stealing Ochiyo, the love of his life. They become reconciled before the end, Wakayama dies in Ichi's arms and Ichi leaves his hiding place to avenge his brother's death. XXXX VHS/Laser (Japan) Daiei/Pioneer. American subtitled VHS from Chambara Entertainment.

4. *Zatoichi, Fugitive (Zatoichi Kyojotabio)* 1963 86 min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/Shintaro Katsu, Miwa Takada, Masayo Banri, Junichiro Narita. Ichi's platonic friendship with two sisters brings down the wrath of another rural yakuza clan. Beautiful opening with Ichi walking down the dirt road on

a hellish summer day with my favorite Akira Ifukube score playing underneath. Also has a very funny scene where Ichi tries his hand at sumo wrestling. XXXX VHS/LASER(JAPAN) Daiei/Pioneer.

12. *Zatoichi And The Chess Expert (Zatoichi Jigoku Tabi aka Zatoichi's Trip To Hell)* 1965 87 Min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/ Shintaro Katsu Mikio Narita, Chizu Hayashi. Ichi becomes friends and chess-playing partner with lone wolf samurai (Narita) who turns out to be a psycho. XXX VHS/LASER(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer American subtitled VHS from Chambara Entertainment.

14. *Zatoichi's Pilgrimage (Zatoichi Umio Wataru)* 1966 82 Min. Dir. Kazuo Ikehiro w/ Shintaro Katsu, Michiyo Yasuda. Ichi attempts to make a pilgrimage to a temple for each man he's killed (87 or so), but is waylaid by an attacker on the road. After slaying the man, Ichi becomes involved with the deceased's sister and the mountain bandit clan to which the fellow belonged. Atmospheric and evocative of the intoxicating beauty of rural Japan. XXXX VHS/Laser(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer

16. *Zatoichi's Rescue (Zatoichi Ro Yaburi aka The Breakout)* 1967 95 min. Dir. Satsuo Yamamoto w/ Shintaro Katsu, Rentaro Mikuni, Yuko Hamada, Ko Nishimura. Ichi ends up misjudging a yakuza boss, believing him upstanding. As soon as Ichi's left town, the boss takes over as village constable and persecutes the farmers mercilessly. Ichi returns after hearing of the village's misery from a girl who's been sold into prostitution. He ends up rescuing the idealistic swordless samurai who'd been organizing the farmers and sentenced to death by the boss and corrupt local lord. First film by Katsu's own production company. XXX VHS(Japan) Toho

20. *Zatoichi Meets Yojimbo (Zatoichi To Yojimbo)* 1970 116 Min. Dir. Kihachi Okamoto w/ Shintaro Katsu, Toshiro Mifune, Ayako Wakao, Kanjuro Arashi. Title says it all with Ichi and Sanjuro (Mifune) alternately teaming up, fighting, teaming up again in midst of internecine warfare among merchant father and his errant, greedy sons; one, a yakuza boss, the other an employee of the Edo gold mint who's been embezzling the yellow stuff. XXXX VHS(Japan) Toho. American subtitled VHS from Video Action (out-of-print but still available in some of the more complete foreign sections of indie video shops.)

21. *Zatoichi's Fire Festival (Zatoichi Abare Himatsuri)* 1970 95 Min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/ Shintaro Katsu, Tatsuya Nakadai, Masayuki Mori, Reiko Ohara, Ko Nishimura. One of my top three favorite Zatoichi pix with much action, humor pathos, and Misumi's visual poetry. Plus Mori plays a contemptible blind yakuza boss who devises one of the most sadian death traps Ichi's ever had to wrangle out of. A Katsu production originally released by Daiei, but Toho/Katsu owns the rights. XXXX VHS(Japan) Toho

22. *Zatoichi Meets His Equal (Shin Zatoichi Yaburi! Tojin Ken! aka Zatoichi Break! Chinese Sword!)* 1971 95 Min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/Shintaro Katsu, (Jimmy)Wang Yu. The actor Jimmy Wang Yu, aka simply Wang Yu, had his own much shorter-lived series in Hong Kong about a peculiar swordsman; his handicap? One arm. He also starred in a one-armed Kung Fu fighter series. I've heard slightly differing stories about this, but most agree, despite being executive-produced by Katsu and released by Daiei, that it was a Japanese/Hong Kong co-production. It seems to be the only one of the series, for whatever reason, to have never been released on video. Which is unfortunate - despite only seeing a chopped-up Japanese TV print, this is unquestionably one of the most spectacular, entertaining entries. But Katsu, or somebody, is sitting on the rights.

26. *Zatoichi 1989* 124 Min./ (produced and di-

rected by Shintaro Latsi w/Shintaro Katsu, Ken Ogata, Yomiko Higuchi. The most spectacular, most poignant and poetic of the whole blind swordsman series. Katsu's masterpiece. Much better, in my humble opinion, than the last couple of Kurosawa period/samurai films and deserves to have been released in theatres here. All this with Katsu an extremely spry 57 years old XXX VHS(Japan) Shochiku.

OTHER ZATOICHI FILMS:

3. *Masseur Ichi Enters Again (Shin Zatoichi Monogatari)* 1963 91 Min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/ Shintaro Katsu, Seizaburo Kawazu (First entry in color). XXX VHS/Laser(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer

5. *Zatoichi On The Road (Zatoichi Kenka Tabi aka Zatoichi's Violent Journey aka Zatoichi And The Scoundrels)* 1963 87 Min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Shintaro Katsu, Shio Fujimura XXX VHS/Laser(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer American subtitled VHS from Chambara Ent.

6. *Zatoichi And The Chest Of Gold (Zatoichi Senryo Kubi)* 1964 82 Min. Dir. Kazuo Ikehiro w/ Shintaro Katsu, Tomisaburo Wakayama (pka Kenzaburo Joh), Mikiko Tsubichi, Michiko Hasegawa XXX VHS/Laser(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer American subtitled VHS from Chambara Entertainment.

7. *Zatoichi's Flashing Sword (Zatoichi Abaredako)* 1964 82 min. Dir. Kazuo Ikehiro w/Shintaro Katsu, Naoko Kubo, Ryutaro Gomi, Mayumi Nagisa XXX VHS/Laser(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer American subtitled VHS from Chambara Ent.

8. *Fight, Zatoichi, Fight (Zatoichi Kesho Tabi aka Zatoichi's Bloody Journey)* 1964 87 Min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Shintaro Katsu, Nobuo Kaneko XXX VHS Laser(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer

9. *Adventures Of A Blind Man (Zatoichi Sekisho Yaburi)* 1964 86 Min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Shintaro Katsu, Miwa Takada, Mikijiro Hira, Eiko Taki XX VHS/Laser(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer

10. *Zatoichi's Revenge (Zatoichi Nidan Giri aka Zatoichi's Double-Cut Style)* 1965 83 Min. Dir. Akira Inoue w/Shintaro Katsu XX VHS/Laser(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer

11. *Zatoichi And The Doomed Man (Zatoichi Sakate Giri)* 1965 77 Min.. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/Shintaro Katsu, Eiko Taki Kenjiro Ishiyama, Mijoko Masaka XX VHS/Laser(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer

13. *Blind Swordsman's Vengeance (Zatoichi No Uta Ga Kikoeru aka Zatoichi's Song Of Vengeance)* 1966 83 Min..Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/Shintaro Katsu, Shigeru Amachi, Kei Sato, Mayumi Ogawa XXX VHS/Laser (Japan) Daiei/Pioneer. American subtitled VHS, CHAMBARA ENTERTAINMENT.

15. *Zatoichi's Cane Sword (Zatoichi Tekka Tabio)* 1967 93 Min.. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/Shintaro Katsu, Eijiro Tono, Shio Fujimura, Makoto Fujita, Tatsuo Endo XX VHS/Laser (Japan) Daiei/Pioneer

17. *Zatoichi Challenged (Zatoichi Chi Kemuri Kaido aka Zatoichi's Bloody Path)* 1967 86 Min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Shintaro Katsu, Asao Koike, Junshiro Konoe, Miwa Takada, Mikiko Tsubichi XXX VHS/Laser(Japan) Daiei/Pioneer

18. *Zatoichi And The Fugitives (Zatoichi Hatashijo)* 1968 82 Min.. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/Shintaro Katsu, Kyosuke Machida, Takashi Shimura, Kayo Mikimoto, Yumiko Nogawa XXX VHS/Laser (Japan) American subtitled VHS, Chambara Entertainment.

19. *Blind Swordsman Samaritan (Zatoichi Kenka Daiko, aka Zatoichi & The Battle Drum)* 1968, 82 min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Shintaro Katsu, Makoto Sato, Yoshiko Mita, Ko Nishimura, Takoya Fujioka VHS/Laser (Japan) Daiei/Pioneer, U. S. subtitled VHS from Chambara Entertainment

23. *Zatoichi At Large (Zatoichi Goyotabi aka Zatoichi's Journey Of Obligation aka Zatoichi's Official Journey)* 1972, 90 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/

Shintaro Katsu, Rentaro Mikuni, Hisaya Morishige, Etsushi Takahashi VHS (Japan) Toho

24. *Zatoichi In Desperation (Shin Zatoichi Monogatari - Oreta Tsue aka New Zatoichi Story - Broken Case)* 1972 92 min. Dir. Shintaro Katsu w/ Shintaro Katsu, Kiwako Taichi, Kyoko Yoshizawa, Katsuo Nakamura VHS(Japan) Toho

25. *Zatoichi's Conspiracy (Shin Zatoichi Monogatari - Kasama No Chimatsumi aka New Zatoichi Story - Bloodbath At Kasama)* 1973, 88 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/Shintaro Katsu, Kei Sato VHS (Japan) Toho.

After #25, Katsu took the series to television for a very successful run. Although the TV episodes were shot on shoestring budgets, the writing, acting and directing quality remained high due to Katsu's control. In some respects, the series actually improved since stories were produced that would've proved too small in scope, too introspective in tone for the big screen. Ichi, though, still managed to draw his sword for at least one major fight even in the more human-interest tales. The subtitled TV episodes, of which there are over 100, are still occasionally syndicated on Hawaiian TV.

FILMS BY HIDEO GOSHA

It's difficult to find an exact way of describing Gosha's style and his individual films without straying into a region of cliché. I hate to, when stumped, be reduced to comparisons with American counterparts. But since we're limited by matters of space, and, since the comparisons are not meant in a demeaning way but rather a complimentary one, probably the best way of getting a handle on his bravura visual style and excellence of narrative, is to imagine the foremost qualities of Anthony Mann (who directed the best of James Stewart's 1950s westerns and later *El Cid* and *Fall Of The Roman Empire*), Ken Russell, Sam Peckinpah and Robert Aldrich all rolled into one ball of Japanese cinematic self-expression.

In some respects the Mann comparison may be the most apt. Mann's and Gosha's no-nonsense style of violent, un-flinching confrontation, rugged adventure with often perversely sadistic and/or sexual emotional underpinnings, their willingness to instill their "heroes" with undesirable traits are actually very similar (though Gosha, due to the time he was working, was able to go much further with the sex and violence).

Before 1980, Gosha operated almost exclusively in the samurai genre. Two exceptions were *The Wolves (Shussho Iwai* which actually translates as *Prison Release Celebration*) in 1971, a stunningly personal but still epic saga of the 1920s yakuza (Japanese mafia) and arguably his finest film; and *Violent Street (Boryoku Gai)* in 1974, an excellent low-budget, extremely violent and perverse yakuza picture.

Tenchu and *Goyokin* (both 1969) and *Hunter In The Dark* (1979) are his best Samurai pictures.

Tenchu (Heaven's Punishment aka Hitokiri) 1969 140 Min. Dir. Hideo Gosha w/Shintaro Katsu, Tatsuya Nakadai, Yujiro Ishihara, Yukio Mishima. *Tenchu* tells the story of Izo (Katsu), a ruffian of unnerving proficiency with a sword and a ruthless killer, who, because of his average intelligence, naive trust and desperate financial situation, is exploited by one clan's cold-blooded petty official, Takechi (Nakadai), in his climb up the political ladder. Through *Tenchu's* spectacular catalogue of swordfights, assassinations and executions, Izo struggles within himself to achieve a peace of mind that is impossible as long as he unquestioningly kills for a master who regards him as nothing more than a dog. It leads him to frame one of his best friends (played by famous writer, Yukio Mishima) for a killing he, Izo, com-

mitted. Which in turn causes Mishima to commit hara-kiri (in an eerie, realistic scene that pre-echoes Mishima's own real-life hara-kiri a year later in 1970!!!) When Izo is finally thrown aside by Takechi, he falls into the depths of a heart-rending personality crisis that climaxes with his dear death from drinking poisoned wine. Knowing he's free at last, he adopts another name, Torazo - meaning "Tiger" - and turns Takechi in to clan officials even though it will mean his own crucifixion. Originally produced by Katsu Productions and Fuji Television, released by Daiei XXXX VHS/Laser (Japan) Pony Canyon.

Goyokin (Official Gold) 1969 124 Min. Dir. Hideo Gosha w/Tatsuya Nakadai, Tetsuro Tamba, Kinnoyuke Nakamura, Ruriko Asaoka, Ko Nishimura, Isao Natsuyagi.

Goyokin tells the story of Magobei (Nakadai), a swordsman reduced to performing in village fairs and carnivals after leaving his clan. He'd witnessed the slaughter of an entire village of peasants by his clan led by his brother-in-law (Tetsuro Tamba). The villagers had taken gold from a shipwreck and the clan, on the verge of breaking-up due to bankruptcy, had seized the gold (originally destined for the Shogunate) for themselves. Magobei had been shocked and saddened, suddenly confronted with the true nature of his samurai fellows, and had left to wander. Magobei ends up returning to expose the clan, who are now purposely wrecking ships on a desolate winter shore to steal the gold. Along the way he saves the life of a woman (Ruriko Asaoka) who'd witnessed the initial massacre and is befriended by a government spy (Kinnoyuke Nakamura). Before the film ends, he's survived numerous attempts on his life, and, with Nakamura's help, sabotages the clan's last attempt at shipwrecking. Finally, as the dawn comes, Nakadai and Tamba fight an amazingly choreographed duel-to-the-death in a snow-covered forest. XXXX Not out on tape either in Japan or the U. S. But I have seen a dub of a letterboxed VHS release with French subtitles, so apparently the French are up on us all.

Hunter In The Dark (Yami No Kariudo) 1979 137 Min. Dir. Hideo Gosha w/Tatsuya Nakadai, Yoshio Harada, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Keiko Kishi, Kashihiro Matsuo, Tatsuo Umemiya, Tetsuro Tamba, Ayumi Ishida.

Hunter In The Dark is a period yakuza story set in 1784 Edo (Tokyo). A chivalrous, ethical - though by no means saintly - yakuza boss (Nakadai) tries to help save the life of his loyal, amnesiac, one-eyed bodyguard (Harada). Harada, a high-born samurai is being victimized by Edo's head of secret police (Chiba) and prime minister (Tamba) who are trying to steal Ezo, a huge tract of unspoiled land, that represents Harada's title and inheritance. In flashback, we learn that Harada had been blinded in one eye when he'd tried to kill Chiba, but instead ended up accidentally assassinating his own father. Subsequently burned out of his rural hiding-place and tossed over a cliff by Chiba's men, he loses his memory. It turns out his traumatized wife (Ishida) believing him dead, had allowed herself to be taken under Nakadai's wing as his lover. Although a criminal, Nakadai loves the woman so much and values Harada's loyalty (Harada having saved his life) to the point he ends up sacrificing himself and his clan to try to reunite them - all in vain. XXXX VHS (Japan) Shochiku. American subtitled VHS via World Artists

Other Gosha samurai films

Three Outlaw Samurai (Sanbiki No Samurai) 1964 95 Min. Dir. Hideo Gosha w/Tetsuro Tamba, Mikijiro Hira, Isamu Nagato XXX VHS (Japan) Shochiku

Sword Of The Beast (Kemono No Ken aka Samurai Gold-Seekers) 1965 90 Min Dir. Hideo Gosha w/ Mikijiro Hira, Go Kato, Shima Iwashita, Kunie

Tanaka, Bin Amatsu XXX VHS (Japan) Shochiku
Secret Of The Urn (Tange Sazen Hien Iai-Giri) 1966 91 Min. Dir. Hideo Gosha w/Kinnoyuke Nakamura, Tetsuro Tamba, Keiko Awaji XXX VHS (Japan) Toei

Samurai Wolf (Kiba Okaminosuke) 1966 75 Min. Dir. Hideo Gosha w/Isao Natsuyagi, Ryohei Uchida, Junko Miyazono Released by Toei Pictures (No tape)

Samurai Wolf - Hell Cut (Kiba Okaminosuke Jigoku Giri) 1967, 72 Min. Dir. Hideo Gosha w/Isao Natsuyagi, Ko Nishimura, Released by Toei Pictures (No tape).

Bandit vs. Samurai Squad (Kumokiri Nazaemon) 1967, 66 Min. Dir. Hideo Gosha w/Isao Natsuyagi, Ko Nishimura, Released by Toei Pictures (No tape)

Death Shadows (Jitemai) 1985 116 Min. Dir. Hideo Gosha w/Mariko Ishihara, Takuzo Kawatani, Mari Natsuki, Tsunehiko Watase XXX VHS (Japan) Shochiku, American dubbed version (the dubbing is atrocious) via J. A Video Productions.

Some other non-samurai Gosha films:
The Wolves (Shusso Iwai) 1971, 131 Min. w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Noboru Ando, Kyoko Enami, Isao Natsuyagi, Tetsuro Tamba, Toshio Kurosawa XXXX VHS (Japan), Toho. American subtitled VHS/Laser via World Artists.

Violent Street (Boryoku Gai) 1974, 96 Min. w/ Noboru Ando, Isao Natsuyagi, Akira Kobayashi, Bunta Sugawara, Tetsuro Tamba, XXXX VHS (Japan) Toei

Kiryuin Hana Ko No Shogai 1982, 146 Min. w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Shima Iwashita, Tetsuro Tamba, Ryohei Uchida XXX VHS (Japan) Toei

Fireflies Of The North (Kita No Hotaru) 1984, 125 Min. w/Tatsuya Nakadai, Shima Iwashita, Isao Natsuyagi, Mari Natsuki, Mikio Narita, Tetsuro Tamba XXX VHS Toei

Kagero (Spider Web) 1991 106 Min w/Tatsuya Nakadai, Yomiko Higuchi with cameos by Tetsuro Tamba and Shima Iwashita XXX Released by Shochiku, and on VHS (Japan) by Bandai.

There are several more films directed by Gosha between 1980 and now, but space prohibits any further digressions. Gosha died in 1992.

FILMS BY KENJI MISUMI

I feel that Kenji Misumi is, visually, one of the most impressive directors of the last forty years - not just from Japan but on an international scale. Since he died abruptly in 1975 from a heart attack - he was only 54 years old - he hasn't received the critical attention I feel he deserves. Although not of the poisonously satirical persuasion of Seijun Suzuki (a director infamous for his bizarre, surreally violent action and yakuza films - he never directed any samurai films or he would be included here) or the over-the-top dramaturgy of Hideo Gosha, he still rates a place beside these other two masters in the pantheon of unrecognized geniuses of world cinema. The lion's share of his films are incredibly beautiful, with an intoxicating sense of color and a sparsely economic style of shot composition strikingly unique to Misumi. Most of his films are instantly recognizable from Misumi's uncluttered presentation of images and pared-to-the-quick-mise-en-scene. Undoubtedly some part of this style was born out of the factory-like, assembly-line production methods of Daiei, the studio where he directed roughly 80% of his output.

At this point I should probably digress and explain that all six studios (Toho, Daiei, Nikkatsu, Shochiku, Toei, Shinto) all churned out a staggering quantity of films at an exhaustive pace, all the time managing to achieve a high degree of quality in production values. Unlike the U.S. where the studios' chains of theatres were legally sev-

(continued)

ered from any affiliation with the parent studios in the 1940s in a devastating (to the studios) anti-trust lawsuit, Japanese studios maintained and still operate their own theatres. Thus they had a guaranteed venue for their product – generally double features which changed twice a week. However, even this cozy arrangement couldn't forestall the moviegoing public's retreat to the living room as Japanese television became firmly entrenched during the 1960s. Audience attendance went from a mind-blowing 1,127,000,000 a year in 1958 to 511,000,000 in 1963 to 253,000,000 in 1970 and finally bottomed out, stabilizing at 170,000,000 in 1975 (These figures are from David Desser's study on Japanese avant garde films, *Eros Plus Massacre*, published in 1988). Shintoho went bankrupt in the early sixties, Daiei was the next to follow in 1971, though they resurfaced in the eighties releasing prodigious amounts of their past classics on video. Nikkatsu also underwent major financial hardship in the early seventies. 1971 for them, too, was the last year that saw production of a varying array of films (mostly yakuza, action and "pink", or softcore sex, films). Nikkatsu survived by virtually devoting themselves to the "pink" film in the seventies. Toho, Toei, and Shochiku still produce films today but, as is the case in the rest of the world, at a fraction of their past output. All three, especially Toho, are somewhat stingy in their attention to releasing past classics (of whatever genre) on video. Toho also seems the most oblivious to the huge number of classics – particularly samurai movies – in their possession.

Misumi, much akin to Seijun Suzuki at Nikkatsu and Terence Fisher at Hammer Studios in the U. K. squeezed the maximum from the dollar (or yen) to achieve a singularity of vision. Limitation of budget and time restrictions are rarely evident. One of Misumi's most personal characteristics is his use of space, how he fills it up, or rather doesn't fill it up, to create atmosphere and attention to detail within the frame. The whole first five minutes of *Sword Devil (Ken Ki)*, Shio Fujimura's execution in *Destiny's Son*, or the shallow waterfall scene where Wakayama dispatches Fumio Watanabe in *Lone Wolf And Child – Sword Of Vengeance* are perfect examples. In the latter scene, Misumi also uses the sound of flesh-ripped-by-swords, then Wakayami's harangue of Lord Yagyu on the bridge with the noise of rushing water – which would in real life be the loudest sound – conspicuously absent, to manipulate reality and audience perception. He achieves this all throughout *Sword Of Vengeance* and to an only slightly lesser extent in the other three Lone Wolf films he directs, much the same effect as the original comic strip. In other words reality is sculpted by letting us see and hear only certain specific things.

Misumi's best samurai films:

Destiny's Son (Kiru) 1962, 71 Min. w/Raizo Ichikawa, Masayo Banri, Shio Fujimura, Shigeru Amachi, Junichiro Narity. Screenplay by Kaneto Shindo (*Oni-Baba, Kuroneko*) Fujimura, a lady-in-waiting, kills her mistress and escapes. She goes to live in a forest cabin with her lover, a samurai (Amachi) from the same household and gives birth to their son. Finally caught, Amachi is given the task of beheading his own wife. The son is adopted by another of the clan's retainers and grows up to be Ichikawa. However, Ichikawa doesn't know his illegitimate status until it's revealed to him by another jealous clan retainer. Circumstances lead the envious retainer to kill his foster father and fiancée. Ichikawa leaves the castle to find the retainer and retainer's son who've fled. In one of the most evocative scenes, Ichikawa catches up to them in a burnt out, surreally skeletal forest and slays them. He then goes to find his mother's grave. The grave is on the grounds of a



Destiny's Son, directed by Kenji Misumi.

temple which is tended by a Buddhist priest who ends up being his father. Amachi had given up the sword after having to execute the love-of-his-life, then had turned his own existence over to spiritual matters. Ichikawa briefly wanders, and eventually settles in to serve as samurai to a peaceful lord. At the end of the film he uses a cherry branch as symbolic sword when his lord's household is attacked. Managing to survive he commits harakiri over the corpse of his slain master. XXXX VHS/Laser Daiei/Pioneer

Sword Devil (Ken Ki) 1965, 83 Min. Dir. Kenji Misumi from a story by Renzaburo Shibata. w/Raizo Ichikawa, Kei Sato, Ryuji Shimada, Rokko Toura. One of the most original samurai films I've seen. The opening sequence where a noblewoman dies in childbirth, watched over by a howling dog while her ladies-in-waiting gossip about her death and the child, is one of the most haunting sequences in Japanese cinema. The child is given to a commoner to raise, and the baby once again grows up to be Ichikawa. As a young fellow we're led to wonder if perhaps he, indeed, is cursed. He has several unnatural/supernatural animal-like abilities that make him an outcast. He's an incredibly talented horticulturist given the job of head gardener at the local castle. His green thumb producing rows and rows of flowers is uncanny. He can also run as fast as a horse and gets to exercise this talent when his lord (Rokko Toura), a paranoid schizophrenic swiftly descending into incoherent madness, takes his horse on frantic, crazy rides that endanger his person. Gradually Ichikawa's strange abilities, as well as his inherent outcast/bastard status, raise the ire of the venal young samurais in the lord's employ. One of the lord's retainers played by Kei Sato, seeing that Ichikawa has secretly learned swordsmanship and brought his "savant" proficiency to bear in this area too, takes advantage of Ichikawa's naivete and desire to serve, by using him as an assassin. A brilliant, beautiful film. XXXX VHS/Laser, Daiei/Pioneer.

Daibosatsu Pass (Daibosatsu Toge or The Great Bodhisatva Pass aka Satan's Sword) Part One (1960, 105 Min.) and Two (1960 90 Min.) Dir. Kenji Misumi, Part Three (1961, 98 Min.) Dir. Kazuo Mori w/Raizo Ichikawa, Kojiro Hongo, Tamao Nakamura. This story has been filmed numerous times: in 1935 by Hiroshi Inagaki; in a 3-part version in 1953 by Kunio Watanabe; a 3-part ver-

sion in 1957-1959 by Tomu Uchida (Director of Toei's five part series on Musashi Miyamoto w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura); this 3-part version by Misumi and Mori for Daiei Studios; and part one only in 1966 by Kihachi Okamoto w/Tatsuya Nakadai called (in America) *Sword Of Doom* (see next issue's Part Two of this article). The story concerns Ryunosuke Tsukue (Ichikawa), a sociopathic samurai without conscience. The opening sequence has Ryunosuke test his blade on an aged pilgrim, killing him. He then wanders off. The old man's granddaughter returns from getting water at a spring to find his still form. A passing traveler takes the girl under his wing. In Part Two Ryunosuke, now a wandering outcast, is exploited by a political extremist group for his sword prowess. He's blinded in an explosion and is still pursued by the brother (Kojiro Hongo) of a man he'd killed in a wooden sword match (early in Part One). Hongo finally manages to catch up to Ichikawa at the conclusion of Part Three in the midst of a savage rainstorm which is causing massive floods. He sees Ichikawa literally battling the invisible ghosts of people he has killed while the house collapses around them. Realizing his revenge would be meaningless on such a pathetic figure, Hongo jumps to safety as the house is carried away by the overflowing river. The last shot is of Ichikawa standing on the roof of the floating house, still swinging his sword XXXX VHS/Laser, Daiei/Pioneer.

The Devil's Temple (Oni No Sumu Yakata) 1969, 76 Min. Dir. Kenji Misumi, Screenplay by Kaneto Shindo w/Shintaro Katsu, Michiyo Aratama, Kei Sato. Bizarre, extremely atmospheric tale about an itinerant swordsman (Katsu) and two women, one psychotic and evil, the other serene and good, who take up residence in a defiled Buddhist temple in the forest. The psycho woman (Aratama) eggs Katsu on to kill people as well as seduces traveling priest, Sato. Katsu finally has the spell of this "witch" broken when the priest dies. Katsu slays Aratama. His conscience and spirituality awakened, he takes the dead priest's place. XXXX VHS from Daiei

Other Misumi Samurai films:

Yotsuya Ghost Story (Yotsuya Kaidan) 1959, 84 Min. w/Kazuo Hasegawa. VHS, Daiei

Lone Wolf And Child (Kozure Okami) see above section on Lone Wolf film series

Sword (Ken) 1964, 94 Min. from a story by Yukio Mishima w/Raizo Ichikawa. Modern story of overly perfectionist kendo instructor and his death from shame. XXX VHS/Laser Daiei/Pioneer

Lone Wanderer (Mushoku Mono) 1966, 88 Min.. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Raizo Ichikawa. Daiei Films (no tape).

Hanzo The Blade aka Sword Of Justice (Goyo Kiba) which literally translates as *Fangs Of Public Office* 1972, 90 Min. (Orig. Release, 108 Min.) w/Shintaro Katsu (#1 in series) XXX VHS, Toho (See section on Hanzo in Part Two of article in next issue).

The Last Samurai (Okami Yoraku Jitsuo Kire) 1974, 159 Min. w/Hideki Takahashi, Ken Ogata, Misumi's last film. Shochiku Films (No tape).

Kyoshiro Nemuri Series

Kyoshiro Nemuri is one of the most nihilistic heroes (anti heroes?) to ever emerge from world literature, let alone Japanese literature. Originally appearing in short stories and novels by Renzaburo Shibata in the fifties, Nemuri was the Eurasian half-breed offspring of a Japanese lady-in-waiting raped by a defrocked Portuguese missionary while performing a Black Mass. This traumatic conception caused his mother's suicide. It also provides fodder for many surreal flashbacks in various excellent installments of this violent and frequently

macabre samurai film series that started in 1963. The series would've undoubtedly lasted several more films were it not for the death of extremely popular star, Raizo Ichikawa, from colon cancer in July 1969. Twelve Nemuri films were produced with Ichikawa. Daiei Films, the production company, immediately tried to revive the series with two more films starring the rising, talented but somewhat miscast Hiroki Matsukata. Ichikawa's posthumous popularity as well as Daiei's bankruptcy kept Matsukata from doing any more pictures as Nemuri.

Following are descriptions of what I feel are the five best Nemuri films:

#4 *Kyoshiro Nemuri At Bay (Nemuri Kyoshiro Jōyō Ken aka Kyoshiro Nemuri - Seductive Sword)* 1964, 81 Min. Dir. Kazuo Ikehiro w/Raizo Ichikawa, Shio Fujimura, Naoko Kubo. Nemuri (Ichikawa) comes up against a disfigured, opium-addicted princess whose court retainers try to hush up the fact she not only gets her thrills from seeing Christian subjects crucified but also from murdering her own handmaidens. After many plot convolutions, Nemuri kills her before she can betray any more Christians. XXX VHS/Laser, Daiei/Pioneer

#5 *Flaming Sword Of Kyoshiro Nemuri (Nemuri Kyoshiro - Enjo Ken)* 1965, 83 Min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Raizo Ichikawa, Tamao Nakamura, Ko Nishimura, Toru Abe, Ryūji Shimada. Nemuri saves the life of a scheming woman (Nakamura) at the beginning of the story, and, in the last scene on the same road and at the same time of the day - after being betrayed and attacked repeatedly by her - kills her. In between, Ichikawa gets to engage in some of the most spectacularly choreographed swordplay in the series. XXXX VHS/Laser (Japan) Daiei/Pioneer

#9 *Kyoshiro Nemuri - Trail Of Traps (Nemuri Kyoshiro Burai Hikae - Masho No Hada or Kyoshiro Nemuri Refraining From Villainy - Devilish Flesh)* 1967, 88 Min. Dir. Kazuo Ikehiro w/Raizo Ichikawa, Mikio Narita, Nobuo Kaneko, Naoko Kubo. Nemuri ends up accepting the job of defending a young woman transporting a sacred relic/statue of the Virgin Mary. Two separate sets of villains are after the statue; one, an evil merchant who knows the statue is made of solid gold and two, a fanatical Christian cult called the Black Finger Group led by Narita. XXX VHS/Laser Daiei/Pioneer

#11 *Kyoshiro Nemuri - Human Tarantula (Nemuri Kyoshiro Hito Hada Gumo or Kyoshiro Nemuri - Spider With Human Flesh)* 1968 80 Min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/Raizo Ichikawa, Mako Midori, Mako Sarijo, Yusuke Kawazu, Fumio Watanabe. Nemuri, while visiting his mother's grave in Kofu, becomes involved with a sadistic, incestuous brother and sister duo who've been banished by the Shogun for their psychotic antics and are now holding an entire village hostage in their castle lair. The princess (another gal addicted to killing her handmaidens, this time to quell semi-epileptic fits) falls for Nemuri, and her insanely jealous brother devises all kinds of traps to destroy him. This is probably the most bizarre and perverse of the whole series, and a definite precursor that set the mood for series like *Lone Wolf and Hanzo The Blade*. With a riveting, memorable score composed by Chūmei Watanabe. XXXX VHS/Laser (Japan), Daiei/Pioneer

#12 *Kyoshiro Nemuri - Castle Menagerie (Nemuri Kyoshiro - Aku Jo Gari or Hunting Evil Women)* 1969, 81 Min. Dir. Kazuo Ikehiro w/Raizo Ichikawa, Naoko Kubo, Shio Fujimura, Kashiro Matsuo, Asao Koike. Nemuri becomes entangled with a group of evil women retainers in the shogun's court who are planning to usurp power. In the meantime they devote their spare time to trying to kill each other, lesbian lovemaking, engineering massacres of Christian subjects and attempting to assassi-



Enter Kyoshiro Nemuri, first in the series.

nate Nemuri. This is another film that is extremely violent and bizarre, blending a couple of Nemuri's daydreams/dream sequences with actual reality (attacks on him within the castle by assassins dressed up as demons and giant birds). Beautiful cinematography as usual with an incredible score. Ichikawa died of cancer the same year this and *Gamblers Life - Unstoppable Bloodbath*, a yakuza film, were released.

Other films in the Kyoshiro Nemuri film series:
#1 *Kyoshiro Nemuri - Book Of Death (Nemuri Kyoshiro - Sappo Cho aka Enter Kyoshiro Nemuri, Swordsman)* 1963, 82 Min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/Raizo Ichikawa, Tomisaburo Wakayama (pk Kenzaburo Joh), Tamao Nakamura XXX VHS/Laser (Japan) Daiei/Pioneer

#2 *Adventures Of Kyoshiro Nemuri (Nemuri Kyoshiro - Shobu aka Kyoshiro Nemuri - Showdown)* 1964, 83 Min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Raizo Ichikawa, Shio Fujimura, Naoko Kubo, Junichiro Narita XXX VHS/Laser Daiei/Pioneer

#3 *Exploits Of Kyoshiro Nemuri (Nemuri Kyoshiro - Engetsu Giri or Kyoshiro Nemuri - Full Circle Cut)* 1964, 85 Min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/Raizo Ichikawa, Ko Tokyo, Junichiro Narita XXX VHS/Laser, Daiei/Pioneer

#6 *Mysterious Sword Of Kyoshiro Nemuri (Nemuri Kyoshiro - Masho Ken or Kyoshiro Nemuri - Devilish Sword)* 1965, 81 Min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda W/Raizo Ichikawa, Machiko Hasegawa XXX VHS/Laser Daiei/Pioneer

#7 *Kyoshiro Nemuri - The Princess' Mask (Nemuri Kyoshiro - Tajo Ken)* 1966 85 Min. Dir. Akira Inoue

w/Raizo Ichikawa, Ichiro Nakatani, Yoshie Mizutani Follow-up to *Nemuri At Bay* (#4) XXX VHS/Laser Daiei/Pioneer

#8 *Kyoshiro Nemuri - Villain Sword (Nemuri Kyoshiro - Burai Ken)* 1966, 79 Min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/Raizo Ichikawa, Shigeru Amachi, Shio Fujimura XXX VHS? Laser Daiei/Pioneer

#10 *Kyoshiro Nemuri In Woman Hell (Nemuri Kyoshiro - Onna Jigoku aka A Ronin Called Nemuri)* 82 Min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/Raizo Ichikawa, Yunnosuke Ito, Miwa Takada, Yoshie Mizutani, Toru Abe XXX VHS/Laser, Daiei/Pioneer XXXX VHS/Laser (Japan) Daiei/pioneer

Nemuri Films with Hiroki Matsukata in title role:

#13 *Kyoshiro Nemuri - Full Moon Swordsman (Nemuri Kyoshiro - Engetsu Sappo or Kyoshiro Nemuri - Full Circle Killing)* 1969, 82 Min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/Hiroki Matsukata, Mikio Narita XXX VHS, Daiei

#14 *Kyoshiro Nemuri - Flycot Swordplay (Manji Giri or Kyoshiro Nemuri - Spinning Wheel Killing)* 1969, 88 Min. Dir. Kazuo Ikehiro w/Hiroki Matsukata, Masakazu Tamura XXX VHS, Daiei

There was also a series of three films in the late fifties with Koji Tsuruta as Nemuri

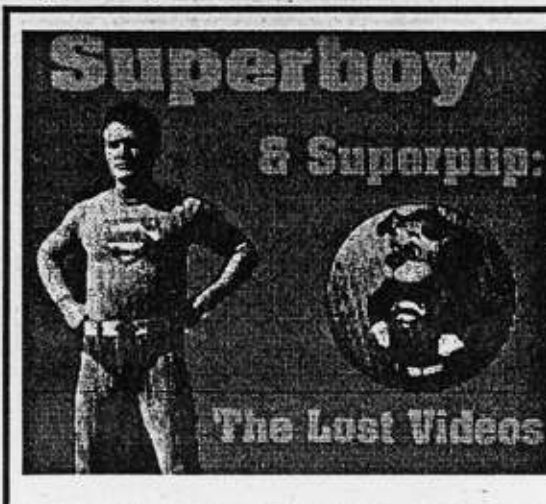
#1 *Kyoshiro Nemuri Refraining From Villainy (Nemuri Kyoshiro Burai Hikae)* 1957 VHS, Toho

#2 *Full Circle Killing (Engetsu Sappo)* 1957 VHS, Toho

#3 *Kyoshiro Nemuri Refraining From Villainy - Devil Sword From Hell (Nemuri Kyoshiro Burai Hikae - Ma Ken Jigoku)* 1958, 91 Min. Toho Films (No tape).

Kyoshiro Nemuri has also been portrayed in several TV movies in the late 1980s and early 1990s by Masakazu Tamura (star of the latest *Lone Wolf And Child* film). Unfortunately the only Nemuri film to be subtitled in English is the latest TV incarnation when it was broadcast on Hawaiian television. It's another travesty that none of the *Raizo Ichikawa Nemuri* pictures have been licensed for video release here in the United States.

This is the end of Part One of the article, "Samurai Films: A Neglected Genre." I wish to thank Satoko Nakajima and Merlin David for their help in preparing this article. Part Two will appear in the next issue of *Cult Movies* and will be more of an overview with information and comment on the films of directors Akira Kurosawa, Kihachi Okamoto, Masaki Kobayashi, Masahiro Shinoda, Daisuke Ito, Hiroshi Inagaki, as well as the *Ninja, Band Of Assassins* film series, the *Hanzo The Blade* film series, director Tomu Uchida's six films with Kinnosuke Nakamura as "Miyamoto Musashi," *Kaidan* (or period ghost story films usually featuring samurai characters), Teruo Ishii's sadistic *Tokugawa* film trilogy, Kaneto Shindo's supernatural samurai films, *Oni-Baba, Kuroneko*, and *Matatabi* Films (about roving samurai gamblers). ■



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THE SAMURAI FILM: A NEGLECTED GENRE, PART 2

by Chris D.

What were the reasons for the samurai film's popularity from the pre-World War 2 era till the early seventies when the amount of samurai films produced dwindled to only a handful each year? Of course, I'm speaking of the genre's popularity in Japan, since in Western nations it's always been, even at its height as a result of kung-fu-film-interest-spillover, an area of marginal interest.

One could as easily ask why any cycle of myths, from the stories of knight errants' chivalry in Britain and Europe during the Middle Ages to the western's emergent popularity in the dime novels of late 19th century America through its cinematic transformation in early 20th century silent films, attracted so much attention. Then talkies, sagebrush saga in film-after-film mutating again in the sixties through the spaghetti westerns—what does the passive viewer in a darkened movie theater vicariously obtain from identifying with these tall tale myths that have only a vague resemblance to reality? The key word here is "identify" as in "identity". What function do heroes perform in myths, be it in literature or film? A cathartic release for pent-up anger and frustrations of generation after generation caught up in boring, functional 9-to-5 existences?

In Japan especially, there had been cataclysmic changes going on from 1860 into the post-WW 2 era circa 1952. The middle class had come into being in mid-19th century in the form of a merchant class. Their emergence *en masse*, boosted by the opening of trade with the West, virtually insured the destruction of the samurai, or warrior, class. Until then, the caste system had been very rigid, with the bottom rung of the social ladder relegated to people considered "non-human" — butchers, undertakers, masseurs, etc., various ethnic groups from immigrant Koreans to the indigenous Ainu tribes. With multitudes of the population from merchant to farmer to tradesman escaping dire poverty, the caste system, while not collapsing altogether, became rickety, unable to support the massive oppression of a significant portion of the population.

One must remember that the samurai, being a privileged warrior class, protectors of the shogunate, had excessive advantage over other members of the populace. One of their most brutal, barbaric rights was the practice of testing one's sword blade on any commoner within reach — if the samurai so desired. If the samurai felt a commoner had slighted or cheated him in any fashion, the samurai had the right to slay the offender on the spot. The victim's family had little recourse to justice being served.

With the disappearance of the samurai as a class — carrying swords became illegal shortly after the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate in the mid-1860s — so, too, went their excessive privilege. Of course, not all samurai were given to excess. Amongst the warrior lineage there were many who believed not only in *bushido* — the warrior's code of duty and fealty to one's master or clan at any price, but a warrior's code tempered in "giri/ninjo", acknowledging obligation/duty and humanity.

The popular heroes in the samurai film mythos were, with but few exceptions — such as the Loyal 47 Ronin (*CHUSHINGURA*), impoverished ronin, masterless samurai who had, either by choice or fate, been reduced to living amongst the common people. These were the warriors whom most Japanese felt embodied the true samurai spirit — noble men (and sometimes women) who chose to die for what they believed was right and just, whether out of principle or practical application when some villager(s) were being persecuted by merciless authority.

Rejection of the idea of duty to one's master or the Emperor above all else, including the warrior's own family; rejection of the idea of "chari" or outcasts and human "non-men", people not legally regarded as human; the evolution of *giri/ninjo* — obligation and humanity — which also became the linchpin of he-

roes and anti-heroes in the period yakuza film. These were the key changes in thinking, and were, for decades, considered radically subversive ideas.

The values of *giri/ninjo* had already started replacing *bushido/giri* in the mid-19th century or the Tokugawa regime would never have toppled, the rights and excess privilege of the samurai as a special class would've never dissolved.

However, *bushido* was by no means dead. The right wing, nationalistic fanaticism that had distilled every wrongheaded feudal samurai belief in the first part of this century, giving rise to the militaristic Japan of WW2 was actually the last gasp of the hypocritical standards of *bushido*.

So, in the midst of all this cultural and class upheaval, there'd been no dissolution of these ideas in popular art or culture. In other words, in a nutshell, *giri/ninjo* needed to replace *bushido* in a public catharsis in domestic Japan. The emergence of cinema as a national art/entertainment form and point of dissemination of ideas was the best place for this to happen. Pre-WW2, many directors had already been showing masterless samurai taking the part of the



Sanjuro, directed by Akira Kurosawa.

common people against the ruthless oppression of government authority. With the advent of the military government and censorship, film directors were forced to once again portray the beauty of *bushido* — loyalty to one's nation at any cost, whether one believed it right or wrong, whether one had to sacrifice one's livelihood, family or very life.

At the close of WW2, with the entry of the U.S. Occupation forces, swordplay was banned from all *jidai-geki* or period/historical films from 1946-1951. *Chanbara*, or swordplay films, were considered by the U.S. Occupation to be non-democratic, nationalistic, fascist. They were unaware that the majority of directors were also critical of the very same characteristics that they, the Occupation, were trying to stamp out.

It's amusing because many filmmakers such as Daisuke Ito, Akira Kurosawa, Satsuo Yamamoto were unabashedly leftist and totally in favor of a real democracy for the common people. By 1950, the Occupation's toleration, even friendliness towards the Japanese, anti-fascist left had become disguised hostility. Instead of crushing labor unions and strikes themselves, it was common knowledge the U.S. Occupation hired black marketeers and yakuza gangsters — some led by former war criminals — to do their dirty work. The very freedom and democracy the U.S. Occupation had fostered was kept from going too far lest the "red" or communist threat come

to power

Many Japanese intellectuals, labor leaders and artists, particularly filmmakers, were openly incredulous and confused at the strange double standard. After all, the U.S. Occupation had also accomplished in a few short years what centuries of struggling peasants and exploited farmers had failed to do — revolutionary changes in government, especially land reform: cutting-up and distribution of huge land tracts to masses of people whom had previously been little more than indentured slaves.

I'm digressing too much. In any case, the samurai, or *chanbara*/swordplay film, once allowed again, was able to do the same thing it had done pre-war. That is to tell entertaining adventure stories without too much interference. And, beyond entertainment, to deal with subject matter that one could not always deal with openly in "gendai" films or films with contemporary, present-day subject matter. Exploitation of the poor, stamping on human rights could be transposed, quite effectively, to the feudal past and be dealt with just as powerfully since the depiction of righting wrongs to achieve mankind's equality knows no temporal boundaries. And the one samurai attribute worthy of the name, the one attribute more characteristic of the true samurai than any other — a tenet that both *bushido* and *giri/ninjo* could have in common — was proudly set forth: "To Live Prepared To Die".

AKIRA KUROSAWA

Kurosawa is the director probably a lot of folks think I should've been concentrating the lion's share of attention on in last issue's Part One. Well, despite my enjoyment of the majority of Kurosawa's films, especially *YOJIMBO*, *SANJURO* and the non-samurai *HIGH AND LOW* (*Tengoku to jigoku*, literally translated *Heaven and Hell* and based on an Ed McBain crime novel), I've found quite a few other directors' work in the samurai genre more rewarding. These other directors may not have the overall consistent body of work behind them as does Kurosawa, but certain individual films — particularly by directors Gosha, Misumi and Okamoto — I've found much more effective in wringing the emotions, memorable as exciting movies. Why? Kurosawa, for all his wealth of perfectionist detail, the excellence he elicits from his performers, the fact he never played the studio game of assigned projects, I find a bit cold and distant. That's always the feeling I retain after seeing even his earlier pictures. There's always, even when dealing with a character's inner, emotional life, an intellectual approach I find removed, almost sterile. Visually there's a reliance on long and medium shots, virtually no close-ups in his later films — witness the bulk of *DODES KA DEN* or the whole first seven or eight minutes of *KAGEMUSHA*, and we never get to really know the characters. *KAGEMUSHA* actually had the potential for being the film to break this pattern, to return to the black, but nevertheless warm humor of *YOJIMBO* and *SANJURO*. Kurosawa originally wrote it for actor Shintaro (*Zatoichi*) Katsu. There was originally a comic spin to the story of a ne'er-do-well thief/nobody about to be executed suddenly picked, because of his uncanny resemblance, to be the double of a warlord general attempting to seize control of the feudal nation. The character actually ends up taking the warlord's place permanently when the original dies from an infected bullet wound. But, on the first day of shooting, due to Katsu insisting on his own private video crew recording his performance, Kurosawa fired him. Replacement, Tatsuya Nakadai, an excellent actor capable of profound nuances, is nevertheless a somewhat cold personage and is not known for a warm, comic persona (as is Katsu). So the film became much more tragic than Kurosawa had originally intended. The balance was upset. And what could've been a masterpiece-collaboration, instead emerged as merely another good, but emotionally-distant film.

(continued)

Some of the Kurosawa films listed below are not samurai films per se, but I've categorized them as such due to their being "jidai-geki" or "in-period".

SAMURAI FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA:

MEN WHO TREAD ON THE TIGER'S TAIL (*Tora No O O Fumu Otoko Tachi*) (1945) 58 min. w/ Denjiro Okochi, Susumu Fujita, Masayuki Mori, Takashi Shimura *** Amer. subtitled VHS has been available, but I don't know the company or if it's still in print. VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

RASHOMON (1950) 88 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Machiko Kyo, Masayuki Mori, Takashi Shimura, Minoru Chiaki

**** Amer. subt. VHS = HOME VISION LASER = CRITERION VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = DAIJI SEVEN SAMURAI (*Shichinin No Samurai*) (1954) 200 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura, Daisuke Kato, Isao Kimura, Yoshio Inaba, Minoru Chiaki **** Amer. subt. VHS = HOME VISION LASER = CRITERION VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO

THRONE OF BLOOD (*Kumo No Soju or Castle Of The Spider's Web*) (1957) 110 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Isuzu Yamada, Akira Kubo, Minoru Chiaki, Takashi Shimura *** 1/2 Amer. subt. VHS = HOME VISION LASER = CRITERION VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = TOHO

HIDDEN FORTRESS (*Kakushi Toride No San Aki Nin or Three Bad Men and A Hidden Fortress*) (1958) 139 min.

w/ Toshiro Mifune, Misa Uehara, Minoru Chiaki, Kamatari Fujiwara *** 1/2 Amer. subt. VHS = HOME VISION or CINEMATEQUE COLLECTION LASER = CRITERION VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO

YOJIMBO (*The Bodyguard*) (1961) 110 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Eijiro Tono, Seizaburo Kawazu, Isuzu Yamada, Daisuke Kato, Tatsuya Nakadai, Takashi Shimura ****

Amer. subt. VHS = HOME VISION LASER = CRITERION VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO

SANJURO (*Tsubaki Sanjuro*) (1962) 96 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Yuzo Kayama, Tatsuya Nakadai, Akihiko Hirata, Kunie Tanaka: Sequel to YOJIMBO. *** 1/2 Amer. subt. VHS = HOME VISION LASER = CRITERION (should be released soon), previously IMAGE VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO

RED BEARD (*Aka Hige*) (1965) 185 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Yuzo Kayama Story of 19th century doctor (Kayama) and his assignment to poor clinic run by doctor known as Red Beard (Mifune). Red Beard becomes his mentor. *** Amer. subt. VHS = CINEMATEQUE COLLECTION (may be re-released soon by HOME VISION since they seem to have most Kurosawa films now) LASER = CRITERION VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO

KAGEMUSHA (*Shadow Warrior*) (1980) U.S./ International version: 160 min., Japanese version: 180 min. Prod. Coordinator: Ishiro Honda w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Tsutomu Yamazaki, Jinpachi Nezu, Kenichi Hagiwara *** Amer. subt. VHS / LASER = CBS/FOX VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = TOHO

RAN (*Chaos*) (1985) 161 min. Prod. Coord. Ishiro Honda w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Satoshi Terao, Jinpachi Nezu, Daisuke Ryu, Peter, Mieko Harada *** Amer. subt. VHS/LASER = CBS/FOX VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = PONY CANYON

SOME NON-SAMURAI KUROSAWA FILMS:

SANSHIRO SUGATA (*Judo Saga*) (1943) w/ Susumu Fujita, Denjiro Okochi Kurosawa's first film. *** Amer. subt. VHS = SONY JAPAN FILM COLLECTION VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO

DRUNKEN ANGEL (*Yoidore Tenshi*) (1948) w/ Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura *** 1/2 Amer. subt. VHS = has been available, not sure what co.; probably out-of-print

VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO
STRAY DOG (*Nora Inu*) (1949) w/ Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura, Isao Kimura *** 1/2 Amer. subt. VHS = SONY JAPAN FILM COLLECTION VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO

THE BAD SLEEP WELL (*Warui Yatsu Hodo Yoku Nemuru*) w/ Toshiro Mifune, Masayuki Mori, Tatsuya Mihashi, Takashi Shimura, Ko Nishimura *** 1/2 Amer. subt. VHS = SONY JAPAN FILM COLLECTION LASER = CRITERION VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO

HIGH AND LOW (*Tengoku To Jigoku or Heaven And Hell*) w/ Toshiro Mifune, Tatsuya Nakadai, Kyoko Kagawa, Tatsuya Mihashi, Kenjiro Ishiyama **** Amer. subt. VHS = PACIFIC ARTS VIDEO / EAST-WEST CLASSICS LASER = IMAGE VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO

DREAMS (*Yume*) (1990) 120 min. Creative Consultant: Ishiro Honda w/ Mitsuko Baisho, Martin Scorsese Amer. subt. VHS/LASER = WARNER BROS. HOME VIDEO VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = WARNER BROS.

DAISUKE ITO

Daisuke Ito was born into a samurai family in 1898. He grew up Christian and leaning to the left. He was originally a pupil of Kaoru Osanai at the Shochiku Cinema Institute. The Institute trained people and developed new cinema methods in the early twenties. Osanai had been a progenitor of the "shingeki" theater movement or modern theater of realism. Ito directed his first film in 1924. Forming a friendship with actor, Denjiro Okochi, they both migrated to NIKKATSU Studios. There Ito became one of the originators of the "nihilistic samurai" archetype, the frustrated hero who no longer believes in the values he's been taught but revolts anyway. Ito utilized period dramas because his social satire, attacks on injustice, had he chosen to tell contempo stories, would never have gotten past the tough strictures of increasingly fascist censors.

NOTE: Most of the following director filmographies (even narrowed down to samurai films) are incomplete. It's very difficult to find complete filmographies, even in Japanese, on the majority of Japanese directors. A case in point: I know from casual asides in two different articles, that Ito directed at least one entry, perhaps more, of one of the several film series (circa 1945-1960) featuring the one-eyed, one-armed swordsman, Tange Sazen. But I could find no documentation re: title, date, actor, studio, etc. Not that we have room to mention every samurai film by each and every director. ALSO: Many Japanese film studios did not acquire sound technology till several years after America and Europe, thus most Japanese films made pre-1935 - '36 were still silent. Also "benshis", or in-theater narrators of silent films, had a very strong union. They fought sound technology — which would effectively render them obsolete — for several years before finally caving-in to the inevitable.

SOME SAMURAI FILMS BY DAISUKE ITO

DIARY OF CHUJI'S TRAVELS (*Chuji Tabi Ni Hikki*) in three parts. Pt.1: **STORY OF KOSHU'S KILLER** (*Koshu Satsujin Hen aka Swashbuckling in Koshu*); Pt.2: **BLOODY LAUGH IN SHINSHU** (*Shinshu-Kessho Hen*); Pt.3: **OFFICIAL STORY** (*Goyo Hen aka Chuji's Arrest*) (1927) w/ ? NO TAPE

THE SERVANT (*Gero*) (1927)
OOKA'S TRAIL (1928)

KILL-ONE-MAN-LET-MANY-LIVE SWORD (*Issaysu-Tassho Ken*) (1929)

MAN-SLASHING, HORSE-PIERCING SWORD (*Zanjin Zamba Ken*) (1930)

ARONIN, NIGHT AND DAY (*Ronin Chuya*) (1930)
KURAMA TENGU APPEARS IN YOKOHAMA (*Kurama Tengu Yokohama Ni Arawaru*) (1942) 91 min. w/ Kanjuro Arashi #26 in Kurama Tengu series (Daiei) VHS(JAPAN) = KINEMA

THE PALTRY RONIN FORCES HIS WAY THROUGH (*Suronin Makaritoru*) (1947) 80 min. w/ Tsumasaburo Bando, Ryutaro Otomo. Famous for delivering an exciting story/ *mise en scene* without any of the forbidden swordplay (banned by U.S. Occupation), instead relying on a climactic chase of the hero (Bando). The character, Iganosuke, turns to face his pursuers from atop a roof, jumps into their

midst, sealing his fate and insuring his own death. VHS (JAPAN) = KINEMA

FIVE MEN FROM EDO (*Oo Edo Gonin Otoko*) (1951) 132 min. w/ Tsumasaburo Bando, Utaemon Ichikawa, Isuzu Yamada, Kokichi Takada VHS(JAPAN) = SHOCHIKU

THE SERVANT'S HEAD (*Gero No Kubi*) (1955) 98 min. w/ Tetsuro Tamba (Shintosh Studios) NO TAPE

GAY MASQUERADE (*Benten Kozo or Benten, The Thief*) (1958) 86 min. w/ Raizo Ichikawa, Shintaro Katsu Story adapted from a kabuki play of gallant thief (Ichikawa) trying to help young woman and her father victimized by cruel officials. He commits impromptu hara-kiri in front of his pursuers at the end. Also filmed by TOEI in 1960 by director Ko Sasaki with female star, Hibari Misora in Benten role and Tomisaburo Wakayama supporting. *** VHS (JAPAN) = DAIJI/KINEMA LASER(JAPAN) = DAIJI/PIONEER

JAN ARIMA NO SHUGEKI (1959) w/ Raizo Ichikawa, Junko Kano Story of Christian samurai and his fellows, their persecution and involvement with 17th century westerners. (Daiei) NO TAPE

WOMAN AND THE PIRATE (*Onna To Kaizoku*) (1959) 90 min. w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Machiko Kyo (Daiei) NO TAPE

SCARLED YOSABURO (*Kirare Yosaburo*) (1960) 94 min. w/ Raizo Ichikawa, Tamao Nakamura Another tale from kabuki origins of a handsome, though terribly-scarred thief and his tragic love affair. VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = DAIJI/PIONEER

CONSPIRATOR (*Hangyakuji aka Rebel of Rebels*) (1961) 110 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Kaneko Iwasaki, Chiyonosuke Azuma I haven't seen it, but supposedly one of Ito's finest films. VHS (JAPAN) = TOEI

GENJI KURO SASSOKI - HIKEN AGE HANO. CHO (1962) 98 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Tetsuro Tamba, Mitsuko Sakuramachi Entry in series based on characters created by writer, Renzaburo Shibata (creator of halfbreed samurai, *Kyoshiro Nemuri - Son Of The Black Mass*)

VHS (JAPAN) = TOEI

THIS HEAD IS WANTED FOR 10,000 GOKU (*Kono Kubi Ichiman Goku*) (1963) 93 min. w/ Hashizo Okawa, Mikihiro Hira Story of naive spearman (Okawa) and his victimization by clan of villains. Climax where he's gotten drunk, unawares of the danger around him, then attacked, is unbearably suspenseful. He holds his own against scores of swordsmen. Although nearly mortally wounded, he seems on the brink of triumph until a squad of rifle-armed samurai police appear. His geisha girlfriend attempts to shield him. When they're both cut down, along with some of their commoner friends, the effect is incredibly moving.

*** 1/2 (Toei) unfortunately NO TAPE (I saw chopped-up, pan-and-scan Japanese TV print)

IEYASU TOKUGAWA (*Tokugawa Ieyasu*) (1965) 143 min. Music: Akira Ifukube w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Kinya Kitoji, Takahiro Tamura. Story of the famous shogun. VHS (JAPAN) = TOEI

THE AMBITIOUS (*Bakumatsu or Overthrown Regime*) (1970) 121 min. Produced by Kinnosuke Nakamura w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Tatsuya Nakadai, Toshiro Mifune, Katsuo Nakamura Story of the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate and one band of reformers in particular led by Ryoma Sakamoto (Kinnosuke Nakamura). Although a samurai himself, Ryoma saw the inevitable destruction of the samurai as a privileged warrior class and, influenced by Western political thought, wrote manifestoes declaring the equality of all men. Ryoma felt schizophrenic about this since he, himself, had a vested interest in the survival of the samurai class. However, he'd also formed a trading company to do business with the West. In the end, he was assassinated (as depicted in the film) by his friends who believe he'd betrayed them. It's a real pity that this film is not only unavailable in the U.S., but also unavailable in Japan. (Toho) NO TAPE

THE AMBITIOUS was Ito's last film. He undoubtedly would've directed more films after this and before his death in 1981, but an ever-worsening deafness proved an insurmountable obstacle. Ito was also

a prolific writer of screenplays for other directors. Most notable amongst them is his interpretation of the famous story of Tenzen and Yasubei - two of the 47 retainers of CHUSHINGURA fame - called SAMURAI VENDETTA (*Haku Oki* or *Chronicle of Pale Cherry Blossoms*) directed for DAI EI studios in 1959 by Kazuo Mori with Raizo Ichikawa and Shintaro Katsu (available on VHS/LASER from DAI EI/PIONEER). It was remade by director, Kazuo Ikehiro in 1969 as BROKEN SWORDS (*Hiken Yaburi*) with Hiroki Matsukata and Kojiro Hongo (also available on VHS from DAI EI). Other screenplays include ZATOICHI AND THE CHESSEXPERT (*Zatoichi Jigoku Tabi* or *Zatoichi's Trip To Hell*) #12 in the film series ('65) directed by Kenji Misumi VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = DAI EI/PIONEER and Amer.subt.VHS = CHANBARA ENTERTAINMENT (see last issue on *Zatoichi*). And SWORDS OF DEATH (*Shinken Shobu* or *Death Swords Match* aka *Musashi Miyamoto #6*) (1970) Dir. Tomu Uchida w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura and Rentaro Mikuni (Only one of the Uchida/Musashi series produced and released by TOHO; all other entries were done in early '60s at TOEI) An out-of-print Amer. subt. VHS was released by VIDEO ACTION.

HIROSHI INAGAKI

Hiroshi Inagaki (1905-1980) made his first film, TENKA TAIEI KI (*Record of the Pacific Land?*) in 1928. I don't think it's a samurai or *jidai-geki* piece. Inagaki's films, at least since the mid-1950s, are known for their larger-than-life characterizations and stunningly beautiful color compositions. If one was to look for his American counterparts, there would be large helpings of John Ford, Vincent Minnelli and Cecil B. DeMille with only slightly smaller bits of Raoul Walsh and Brit, Michael Powell. He's renowned for his somewhat old-fashioned approach to action which nevertheless gave birth to many genuinely exciting, though often one-dimensional, adventures. Possibly the most valid criticism of Inagaki is in his depiction of female characters, creatures who usually prevail but only by fighting against their own weak- and-weepy natures. The remake of his earlier MUSASHI MIYAMOTO film ('42), known in the U.S. as SAMURAI (*Miyamoto Musashi*) ('54) starring Toshiro Mifune won the foreign film Academy Award for that year. It was followed by Parts Two and Three in 1955. Two other Inagaki films that were very successful on an international scale were the non-samurai RIKISHA MAN (*Muhamatsu No Issho*) in 1958 (another remake of one of his '40s films) with Mifune and winner of Venice Film Festival Gran Prix for 1958; and the epic-length CHUSHINGURA (*The Loyal 47 Ronin*) in 1962.

SOME OF INAGAKI'S SAMURAI FILMS:

DEVOTION TO WANDER (*Horo Zan Mai*) (1928) 60 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka, Kanjuro Nakamura VHS(JAPAN) = APORO
 WANDERERS ON THE ROAD (*Matatabi Waraji*) (1929) NO TAPE
 CHUTARO'S VIGIL PLACE - LONG-SOUGHT MOTHER or THE MOTHER HE NEVER KNEW (*Banbo No Chutaro - Mabuta No Haha*) (1931) 72 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka VHS(JAPAN) = APORO
 YATARO'S TRAVEL HAT (*Yataro Gasa*) (1932) In Two Parts.
 THE GREAT BODDHISATVA PASS or DAIBOSATSU PASS (*Daibosatsu Toge*) (1935) w/ Denjiro Okochi First of many versions, most famous of which is SWORD OF DOOM ('66).
 NO TAPE (believed lost)
 JOURNEY OF 1001 NIGHTS (*Matatabi Senichiya*) (1936) w/ Kanemon Nakamura
 FESTIVAL ACROSS THE SEA (*Umi O Wataru Sairei*) (1941)
 DAYS OF GREAT EDO (*Edo Saigo No Hi*) (1941) 72 min. w/ Tsumasaburo Bando, Takashi Shimura VHS (JAPAN) = NIKKATSU/KINEMA
 HAWK OF THE NORTH (*Doku Ganryu Masumune*) (1942) 83 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka, Michitaro Mizushima (Daiei) VHS (JAPAN) = KINEMA
 MUSASHI MIYAMOTO - DUEL AT ICHIJIOJI TEMPLE (*Miyamoto Musashi - Ichijioji No Ketto*) (1942)

88 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka, Takashi Shimura Believed to be one of the films burned by U.S. Occupation for excessive swordplay. (Nikkatsu) NO TAPE

KOJIRO SASAKI (*Sasaki Kojiro*) (1950) 116 min. w/ Uemon Oyatomo Story of the fabled swordsman (whom some believe never existed) supposedly killed in duel with Musashi on Ganryu Island. Inagaki remade it in 1967. (Toho) #1 of 3 VHS (JAPAN) = KINEMA

KOJIRO SASAKI RETURNS (*Zoku Sasaki Kojiro*) (1951) 116 min. w/ Uemon Oyatomo (Toho) #2 of 3 NO TAPE

CONCLUSION - KOJIRO SASAKI'S DUEL ON GANRYU ISLAND (*Kankestu Hen - Sasaki Kojiro Ganryujima No Ketto*) (1951) 98 min. w/ Uemon Oyatomo, Toshiro Mifune (Toho) #3 of 3 NO TAPE

SWORD FOR HIRE (*Sengoku Burai*) (1952) 106 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Rentaro Mikuni, Eijiro Tono, Yoshiko Yamaguchi, Takashi Shimura (Toho) VHS(JAPAN) = KINEMA

OMATSURI HANJIRO (1953) 89 min. w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Rentaro Mikuni (Toho) VHS(JAPAN) = KINEMA

MUSASHI MIYAMOTO (*Miyamoto Musashi aka Samurai 1*) (1954) 103 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Kaoru Yachigusa, Rentaro Mikuni, Mariko Okada Adapted from the 1930's multi-volume novel, MIYAMOTO MUSASHI by Eiji Yoshikawa. This five part novel has been the basis for virtually all films on Musashi, except Yasuo Furuhashi's 1954 film, MUSASHI MIYAMOTO from TOEI. For description of Inagaki's three Musashi films see section on Tomu Uchida (his six film Musashi series - elsewhere in this article). #1 *** Amer. subt. VHS = HOME VISION LASER = CRITERION

VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO
 DUEL AT ICHIJIOJI TEMPLE (*Miyamoto Musashi - Ichijioji No Ketto aka Samurai 2*) (1955) 104 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Koji Tsuruta, Akihiko Hirata, Sachio Sakai, Kaoru Yachigusa
 *** 1/2 Amer. subt. VHS = HOME VISION LASER = CRITERION VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

DUEL ON GANRYU ISLAND (*Miyamoto Musashi - Ganryujima No Ketto aka Samurai 3*) (1955) 105 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Koji Tsuruta, Kaoru Yachigusa *** Amer. subt. VHS = HOME VISION LASER = CRITERION VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

NINJITSU - YAGYU SECRET SCROLL (*Yagyū Bugeicho*) (1957) 109 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Koji Tsuruta, Eijiro Tono #1 *** VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO
 YAGYU SECRET SCROLL - TWIN DRAGONS, SECRET SWORDS (*Yagyū Bugeicho - Soryu Hiken*) (1958) 106 min. w/ Koji Tsuruta, Toshiro Mifune, Nobuko Otowa #2 *** VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

SAMURAI SAGA (*Aru Kengo No Shogai*) (1959) 111 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Seizaburo Kawazu Samurai version of the Cyrano de Bergerac story. ** 1/2 Amer. subt. VHS = VIDEO ACTION (out-of-print)

THREE TREASURES (*Nippon Tanjo aka Birth of Japan*) (1959) 182 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Koji Tsuruta, Nobuko Otowa Amalgam of ancient Japanese legends telling of Prince Yamato, a magic sword and the birth of Japan. Many fantasy elements including multi-headed sea serpent. Remade by TOHO in 1994. *** VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = TOHO

DAREDEVIL IN THE CASTLE (*Osakajo Monogatari or Story of the Osaka Women*) (1961) 95 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Kyoko Kagawa, Isuzu Yamada, Yuriko Hoshi VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

BANDITS ON THE WIND (*Yato Kaze No Taka O Hashiru*) (1961) 111 min. w/ Makoto Sato, Yosuke Natsuki, Somegoro Ichikawa (Toho) VHS(JAPAN) = HOSHIMA

CHUSHINGURA (*Loyal 47 Ronin*) (1962) 204 min. w/ Koshiro Matsumoto, Yuzo Kayama, Yoko Tsukasa, Toshiro Mifune, Tatsuya Mihashi Running time was cut by at least 40-50 minutes when originally released in the U.S. This is probably the most famous version of what is, without question, the most-filmed saga in Japanese film history. The young lord of a clan is goaded into losing his temper by older, vicious member of the shogun's court. When the young lord attacks the older man inside the shogun's castle, he's arrested and forced to commit hara-kiri. His clan is

dissolved, family sent into exile. His loyal 47 samurai, now ronin (or masterless samurai), vow to avenge his death. Many labyrinthine plot threads are woven into this elaborate melodramatic tapestry. Upon completion of their vengeance on all concerned, the 47 also commit hara-kiri.

*** VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = TOHO
 YOUNG SWORDSMAN (*Hiken or Secret Sword*) (1963) 106 min. w/ Somegoro Ichikawa, Hiroyuki Nagato (Toho) NO TAPE

WHIRLWIND (*Dai Tatumaki*) (1964) 106 min. w/ Somegoro Ichikawa, Makoto Sato, Toshiro Mifune LASER(JAPAN) = TOHO, NO TAPE

RISE AGAINST THE SWORD (*Abare Goemon*) (1966) 101 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Makoto Sato, Yuriko Hoshi, Nobuko Otowa (Toho) NO TAPE

KOJIRO (*Sasaki Kojiro*) (1967) 152 min. w/ Kikunosuke Onoe, Yuriko Hoshi, Yoko Tsukasa, Tatsuya Nakadai, Isamu Nagato, Tatsuya Mihashi, Tadao Nakamaru Remake of Inagaki's own three part film from 1950-51. *** 1/2 Amer. subt. VHS = VIDEO ACTION (out-of-print) VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

UNDER BANNER OF THE SAMURAI (*Furin Kazan*) (1969) 166 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Kinnosuke Nakamura, Yoshiko Sakuma, Masakazu Tamura *** VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

THE AMBUSH (*Machibuse aka Incident At Blood Pass*) (1970) 120 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Shintaro Katsu, Kinnosuke Nakamura, Ruriko Asaoka, Yujiro Ishihara ***

(I've seen a tape of subtitled Hawaiian TV broadcast) (Toho) NO TAPE

OTHER NON-SAMURAI INAGAKI FILMS:

LIFE OF MATSU, THE UNTAMED (*Muhamatsu No Issho*) (1943) 80 min. w/ Tsumasaburo Bando Story of a ricksha man and his unrequited love for a highborn woman and her son, how he basically looks after them from behind the scenes even though the attraction and care, because of class barriers, can never be returned. Thought of by many Japanese critics to be Inagaki's best film. Many of them also consider the 1958 remake w/ Mifune to pale in comparison. (Daiei) VHS(JAPAN) = KINEMA

RIKISHA MAN (*Muhamatsu No Issho aka Life of Matsu The Untamed*) (1958) 104 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune This won the Venice Film Festival Gran Prix in 1958 (even though supposedly not as good as original). This is the version best known internationally. Amer. subt. VHS = VIDEO ACTION (out-of-print)

KIHACHI OKAMOTO

Kihachi Okamoto was born in 1924. He directed his first film, MARRIAGE IN GENERAL (*Kekkon No Subete*) in 1958. He soon plunged into directing many of TOHO's gangster films (more influenced by American gangster pictures than Japan's homeborn yakuza variety). Most of these featured duo-pairings of such TOHO stars as Toshiro Mifune, Koji Tsuruta (soon to migrate to TOEI and yakuza superstardom), Makoto Sato, Yuzo Kayama and Tatsuya Mihashi. This is where Okamoto cut his action teeth, later to be seen to much greater effect in his samurai films. Okamoto also wrote and directed several of the popular (in Japan) satirical war film series DESPERADO OUT-POST (*Dokuritsu Gurentai*) ('59), the avant-garde satire/war film THE HUMAN BULLET (*Nikudan*) ('68) (so disorienting of narrative it was released through ATG) and the excellent, Strangelovian action/satire, AGE OF ASSASSINS (*Satsujin Kyojidai*) ('67).

SAMURAI FILMS OF KIHACHI OKAMOTO:

WARRING CLANS (*Sengoku Yaro*) (1963) 97 min. w/ Yuzo Kayama, Makoto Sato, Ichiro Nakatani, Tadao Nakamaru Has one of the most atmospherically evocative, just-plain-exciting opening sequences of any 60's action film - let alone samurai/ninja film - I've seen. Kayama is challenged by ninja, Nakamaru, on misty mountainside; they fight, Kayama flips him over the cliff (supposedly). Ruffian, Nakatani, appears, they bandy about, establish they're on the same side and settle down to eat rice balls when they're attacked by another ninja. Incredible cinema-

(continued)

topography and great score by Masaru Sato. Only problem with this is it gets bogged-down with too much humor during its middle third. Still a great ninja/samurai picture. *** VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

SAMURAI ASSASSIN (*Samurai*) (1965) 124 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Yunosuke Ito, Michiyo Aratama, Kojiro Matsumoto Mifune is drunken, overreaching swordsman with plenty of prowess. We learn through flashbacks that he was once tonsured and a respected member of a clan. However, upon discovering his illegitimate status, he loses all self-esteem and suffers from an identity crisis. He falls in with anti-shogunate collaborators planning to kill the local lord. The traitors, led by Ito, decide that Mifune is too unstable to be involved in the assassination and plot to kill him. Mifune not only survives, but joins the attack on the lord at the film's snowy climax. Ironically, every one of the anti-shogunate faction, along with most of the lord's men, are mortally wounded — leaving Mifune to complete the killing. Unbeknownst to both Mifune and the lord he decapitates, the lord is his long-lost father. It's surprising this hasn't ever been licensed/released here in U.S. on subtitled video. *** VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

SWORD OF DOOM (*Daibosatsu Toge or The Great Bodhi Satva Pass*) (1966) 122 min. w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Toshiro Mifune, Yuzo Kayama, Michiyo Aratama, Ko Nishimura, Kei Sato The most famous (in the West, anyway) version of *THE GREAT BODDHISATVA PASS* novel (the three part series directed by Kenji Misumi/Kazuo Mori for DAI EI w/ R. Ichikawa was covered in Part One of this article last issue). Incredibly stark black-and-white cinematography, an ominous, sparse score by Masaru Sato and Nakadai's psychotic performance as Tsukue make this version perhaps the most haunting and nihilistic in tone. Too bad it wasn't successful at the Japanese box-office, and then we could've seen Parts Two and Three as interpreted by Okamoto and Nakadai. Hey, come on, CRITERION, get hip and release a letterboxed disc of this (as well as next three masterpieces below!). *** 1/2. Amer. subt. VHS = AVCO EMBASSY (probably out-of-print) VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

KILL! (Kiru) (1968) 115 min. w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Etsushi Takahashi, Tadao Nakamaru, Eijiro Tono, Yuriko Hoshi My favorite of Okamoto's samurai films, with Nakadai and Takahashi impoverished ronin stranded in a windswept, dustblown ghost town that will be the stage for numerous bloody battles between two rival clans. This film, with its nihilistic story leavened with just the right amount of humor, its ghost town ambience, its atmosphere of continuous brutal violence and torture and especially its electric-guitar-heavy score by Masaru Sato, is the samurai film most similar to the spaghetti westerns being directed by Sergio Corbucci (*THE GREAT SILENCE*, *PROFESSIONAL GUN*, *COMPANEROS*) in Europe around the same time. Except it's even better! Incredibly exciting. Why this film hasn't been licensed for U.S. video release, whatever the reason, is a crime. **** VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

RED LION (*Akage*) (1969) 116 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Shima Iwashita, Etsushi Takahashi, Yunosuke Ito, Takahiro Tamura, Minoru Terada Another excellent film. Mifune plays a farmer's son who's left home to join the troops fighting against Tokugawa's forces in the 1860s. The Red Lion refers to the mane of artificial red hair worn by various troop officers. The generals wear white manes. The officer in charge of Mifune's regiment (Tamura) regards him as something of a simpleton and not suited for the job of advance scout to the next village they plan to liberate from a corrupt daimyo and money-grubbing landlords. However, it's Mifune's hometown. Graced with a gift-for-gab, despite a stammer, Mifune talks his way into not only being the advance rider, but also borrowing the captain's red mane until the captain can arrive with the entire regiment. Singlehandedly, Mifune liberates the village, and the townspeople are bewildered that the former village buffoon has supposedly made something of himself. Ito plays the daimyo squeezing taxes from farmers who are just too broke to pay, holding hostages until he gets his money. Once Mifune appears with his proclamation

of "Ejainaika" (exclamation/motto of common people shouted in unison which roughly translates "Isn't it great?" or "What-the-hell!" because they're soon to be free at last), Ito is toppled. But it's not surprising the tables eventually turn back. It seems the white-maned generals have just been using the red-maned officers and their former regiments as cannon fodder. Once the Tokugawa regime has definitely fallen, they go back on their promises to cut taxes in half and distribute land parcels to farmers. In the process, red-maned officers are executed. Mifune and his girl, Iwashita, try to keep the village liberated to no avail. I'm going into too much detail. Extremely entertaining. *** 1/2. Amer. subt. VHS = VIDEO ACTION (out-of-print, though may be released again eventually by CHANBARA ENTERTAINMENT)

ZATOICHI MEETS YOJIMBO (*Zatoichi To Yojimbo*) (1970) 116 min. w/ Shintaro Katsu, Toshiro Mifune, Ayako Wakao #20 in ZATOICHI, BLIND SWORDSMAN series (see last issue's part one of this article for story description). *** 1/2. Amer. subt. VHS = VIDEO ACTION (out-of-print) VHS (JAPAN) = TOHO

OTHER NON-SAMURAI OKAMOTO FILMS
DESPERADO OUTPOST (*Dokuritsu Gurentai*) (1959) 109 min. w/ Makoto Sato, Ichiro Nakatani, Koji Tsuruta, Tadao Nakamaru. #1 in series *** VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO

DESPERADO OUTPOST 2 (*Dokuritsu Gurentai Nishi He*) (1960) 107 min. w/ Yuzo Kayama, Makoto Sato, Ichiro Nakatani #2 in series VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO

BLOOD AND SAND - DESPERADO OUTPOST (*Chi To Suna - Dokuritsu Gurentai*) (1965) 131 min. Produced by Mifune w/ Toshiro Mifune, Yunosuke Ito, Makoto Sato, Tatsuya Mifune. #7 and last in series VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

UNDERWORLD BOSS (*Ankoku Gai No Kaoyaku*) (1959) 102 min. w/ Koji Tsuruta, Toshiro Mifune, Tadao Nakamaru VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

UNDERWORLD DUEL (*Ankoku Gai No Taiketsu or Underworld Confrontation aka The Last Gunfight*) (1960) 95 min. w/ Toshiro Mifune, Koji Tsuruta, Seizaburo Kawazu, Makoto Sato ** 1/2 VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

BULLETHOLES IN THE UNDERWORLD (*Ankoku Gai No Dankon*) (1961) 73 min. w/ Yuzo Kayama, Makoto Sato, Tatsuya Mifune (Toho) NO TAPE

BOSS FIGHTING TO THE DEATH AT DAWN (*Kaoyaku Akatsuki Ni Shisu*) (1961) 97 min. w/ Yuzo Kayama, Ichiro Nakatani (Toho) NO TAPE

ALAS, VIOLENT GANG (*AA Boryokudan*) (1964) 95 min. w/ Yunosuke Ito, Ichiro Nakatani VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

AGE OF ASSASSINS (*Satsujin Kyojidai*) (1967) 99 min. (69? min) w/ Tatsuya Nakadai *** 1/2 VHS (JAPAN) = TOHO

THE HUMAN BULLET (*Nikudan*) (1968) 109 min. w/ Minoru Terada. *** (Released by ATG) VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

SANSHIRO SUGATA (*Judo Saga*) (1977) 143 min. w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Tomisaburo Wakayama. Yet another remake of Kurosawa's first film (Toho) NO TAPE

NOISY DYNAMITE (*Dainomaito Dondon*) (1978) 142 min. w/ Bunta Sugawara, Kinya Kitoji, Kanjuro Arashi. Seems to be tongue-in-cheek yakuza film. (Toei/Daiei Co-production) VHS(JAPAN) = DAI EI

BLOOD TYPE: BLUE (*Burukkuri Sumasu*) (1978) 134 min. w/ Tatsuya Nakadai Sci-fi thriller with serious overtones about people whom were exposed to UFOs discriminated against when their blood turns blue. Nakadai plays an investigative reporter. (Toho) NO TAPE

TOMU UCHIDA

Tomu Uchida was born in 1898. He directed his first film in 1927. During the late twenties and through-out the thirties he was associated with "leftist tendency" films such as *A LIVING DOLL* (*Ikeru Ningyo*) ('29) and *THE REVENGE CHAMPION* (*Adauchi Senshu*) ('31) and films of "critical realism" such as *UNENDING ADVANCE* (*Kagirinaki Zenshin*)

('37) and *EARTH* (*Tsuchi*) ('39). He released a period film in 1940 called *HISTORY* (*Rokishi*). Uchida's film career was interrupted by the war, but not merely for the five-year duration. He was held prisoner in China for nine more years after war's end. According to Japanese film critic, Tadao Saito, Uchida's previous leftist bent and his wartime P.O.W. experiences led many to believe he'd make a leftist film upon his return. However, the film *BLOODY SPEAR ON MOUNT FUJI* proved to be devoid of any political content. Instead it shows the unchecked rage of an aging lancebearer when his young and weak samurai master is murdered by professional swordsmen. The tragicomic sketches and seemingly nostalgic mood in the first half of the picture gives way to a shocking display of bloody carnage as the old retainer, a man without martial arts training, tracks down the men responsible and slays them all. Saito asserts that in *BLOODY SPEAR...*, *SOULS IN THE MOONLIGHT* (Uchida's 3-part version of *GREAT BODDHISATVA PASS*) and *BEAUTIFUL YOSHIWARA AND THE MURDER OF HUNDREDS*, "...Uchida transforms the main theme of 1950s' leftist movies — the resentment of the underdog erupting against society — into a chain reaction initiated by resentment..." Saito believes that the "true period drama precursors of the climactic fights in modern yakuza movies" can be found in these films by Uchida. Uchida is probably best known in the West for his six films featuring Kinnosuke Nakamura as famous swordsman, Musashi Miyamoto (see below).

SOME SAMURAI FILMS BY TOMU UCHIDA:
THE REVENGE CHAMPION (*Adauchi Senshu*) (1931) w/ Denjiro Okochi

A BLOODY SPEAR ON MOUNT FUJI (*Chiyari Fuji*) (1955) 95 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka, Chiyonosuke Azuma, Daisuke Kato VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

DISORDER BY THE KURODA CLAN (*Kuroda Sodo*) (1956) 109 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka, Ryutarō Otomo (Toei) NO TAPE

THUNDER HIGHWAY (*Abarenbo Kaido*) (1957) 95 min. w/ Shuji Sano, Isuzu Yamada (Toei) NO TAPE

SOULS IN THE MOONLIGHT (*Daibosatsu Toge - Daichi Bu or Great Bodhisatva Pass - Part One*) (1957) 119 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka, Kinnosuke Nakamura, Satomi Oka. Extremely evocative and atmospheric version of the story of psychotic, sociopathic swordsman, Ryunosuke Tsukue. Only problem with this is that Kataoka is at least twenty years too old for the part. It's a tribute to Uchida that he overcomes such an obvious liability. (For story description see coverage of the Misumi/Mori-directed trilogy for DAI EI with Raizo Ichikawa in last issue's Part One) *** VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

SOULS IN THE MOONLIGHT, PART 2 (*Daibosatsu Toge - Daini Bu or Great Bodhisatva Pass - Part Two*) (1958) 105 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka, Kinnosuke Nakamura VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

SOULS IN THE MOONLIGHT - SAGA CONCLUSION (*Daibosatsu Toge - Kanketsu Hen*) (1959) 107 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka, Kinnosuke Nakamura, Satomi Oka *** VHS (JAPAN) = TOEI

THE THIEF ISHOGUN'S KINSMAN (1959) (Toei) NO TAPE

MAN'S AMBITION (*Sake To Onna To Yari or Sake, Women and Spears*) (1960) 99 min. w/ Ryutarō Otomo, Hiromi Hanazono (Toei) NO TAPE

BEAUTIFUL YOSHIWARA AND THE MURDER OF HUNDREDS

(*Yoto Monogatari - Hana No Yoshiwara Hyakumin Giri or Story of a Witch and a Saber - Flower of Yoshiwara and the Cutting-Down of Hundreds*) (1960) 109 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka, Akiko Yamato. Prostitute plying her trade in forbidden neighborhood of Edo is arrested and, as punishment, is banished to Edo's red-light district, sentenced to work as a whore without remuneration. A naive bumpkin (Kataoka) falls in love with her, and she bilks him out of his money. When he realizes her thievery, she laughs at him: He draws his sword and chases her throughout the district until he finally cuts her down. VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

ZEN AND SWORD (*Miyamoto Musashi or Musashi Miyamoto 1 aka Untamed Fury*) (1961) 110 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Wakaba Irie, Isao Kimura,

Rentaro Mikuni, Satomi Oka First installment of Uchida's *Musashi* series. We follow Musashi (still known as *Takezo*) back from the Battle of Sekigahara to his native village where he's finally caught by the priest, Takuan (Mikuni), after "terrorizing" the countryside as an outlaw. The girl, Otsu, takes pity on him, frees him, and they escape together. This entry ends when lone Musashi - since separated from Otsu for her own good - again runs into priest, Takuan. Takuan brings him to the attic of an ancient castle where Musashi's ancestors perished in battle centuries before. He locks him in with numerous manuscripts on philosophy and the art of war. It's shameful that this is the only one of the series out-on-video in Japan. The films have also never been licensed on U.S. video. Though done on a lower budget with less sumptuous color, they're somewhat better than the Inagaki/Mifune trio of Musashi films. Luckily I've seen tapes of all the series' films from subtitled Hawaiian TV broadcasts. #1 **** 1/2 VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

MUSASHI MIYAMOTO - DUEL WITHOUT END (*Miyamoto Musashi - Han Nyazaka no Ketto or Duel at Devil's Mask Pass*) (1962) 107 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Wakaba Irie, Isao Kimura, Rentaro Mikuni, Satomi Oka, Rinichi Yamamoto My favorite episode of this series as Musashi emerges from castle attic several years later a much wiser young man intent on wandering the countryside and developing his spirit through swordsmanship. His climactic battle with first a Hozoin priest, then a band of outlaws is feverishly exciting. #2 **** (Toei Studios) NOTAPE

MUSASHI MIYAMOTO - WORTHLESS DUEL (*Miyamoto Musashi - Nito Ryu Kaigan or Development of Two-Sword Style*) (1963) 104 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Isao Kimura, Wakaba Irie, Ken Takakura Musashi continues his journeys, sometimes with the boy, Jotaro. He makes enemies of the Yoshioka School of Fencing by defeating many of their best swordsmen. They vow revenge. Ken Takakura portrays Kojiro Sasaki. Numbers 3, 4, 5 in the series mark the extremely rare appearance of Takakura in period (samurai) films. He's one of the rare Japanese superstars who became famous by playing virtually no samurai roles, instead rising to fame in countless TOEI yakuza films. *** #3 (Toei Studios) NO TAPE

MUSASHI MIYAMOTO - DUEL AT ICHIJIOJI TEMPLE (*Miyamoto Musashi - Ichijoji No Ketto*) (1964) 128 Min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Ken Takakura, Wakaba Irie, Isao Kimura Musashi faces the whole Yoshioka school after having defeated the school's head. And, using his two-sword style, he fights them all off. This despite having had his best friend's mother, Granny Honiden, spit a needle in one of his eyes. She despises him because she wrongly believes he's the cause of her son's downfall. He also ends up killing the heir/leader of the Yoshioka's, a young boy. He's roundly criticized for this, despite having been set upon by scores of the school's swordsmen. * * 1/2 #4 (Toei Studios) NO TAPE

MUSASHI MIYAMOTO - DUEL ON GANRYU ISLAND (*Miyamoto Musashi - Ganryujima no Ketto*) (1965) 121 Min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Ken Takakura, Wakaba Irie, Chiezo Kataoka, Rentaro Mikuni, Satomi Oka Musashi faces and defeats Kojiro (Takakura) in a duel on Ganryu Island *** 1/2 #5 (Toei Studios) NO TAPE.

MUSASHI MIYAMOTO - SWORDS OF DEATH (*Miyamoto Musashi - Shinken Shobu or Death Swords Match*) (1970) 79 Min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Rentaro Mikuni, Hideko Okiyama Musashi visits chain-and-sickle master, Baiken, for instruction, not realizing that Baiken and wife are plotting his death. He'd killed the wife's brother in the Battle of Sekigahara many years before when he was still called *Takezo*. Baiken, a mercenary/revolutionary, rounds up his small band of followers to help him. Musashi kills them all within a few minutes as day breaks. Baiken and his wife, their son on her back, are left to face Musashi in the wild fields around their ramshackle cottage. Excellent film of an intense story told almost in real time. Also Uchida's last film before his death; he died the same year, 1970. **** #6 (Toho Studios) Amer. subt. VHS = VIDEO ACTION (out-of-print)

SOME OTHER NON-SAMURAI UCHIDA FILMS;

HUNGER STRAITS (*Kiga Kaikyo*) (1965) 183 Min. w/ Rentaro Mikuni, Ken Takakura, Yoshi Kato, Rinichi Yamamoto Supposedly excellent gangster/yakuza film. VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

THEATRE OF LIFE - HISHAKAKU AND KIRATSUNE (*Jinsei Gekisho - Hishakaku to Kiratsune*) (1968) 109 min. w. Koji Tsuruta, Ken Takakura, Junko Fuji, Hiroki Matsukata, Minoru Oki, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Masagoro Shimada Reportedly excellent period yakuza film (1920's) and final installment of the THEATRE OF LIFE - HISHAKAKU series (the first three directed by Tadashi Sawashima) #4 and last in series (Toei Studios) NO TAPE.



Swords Of Death, directed by Tomu Uchida.

MASAKI KOBAYASHI

Masaki Kobayashi was born in 1916. He directed MY SON'S YOUTH (*Musuko no Seishun*), his first picture in 1952. Known primarily for his nine hour-long epic, THE HUMAN CONDITION (*Ningen no Joken*) consisting of three parts (each three hours): NO GREATER LOVE, ROAD TO ETERNITY, and A SOLDIER'S PRAYER; the atmospheric horror film KWAIDAN and HARA-KIRI (*Seppuku*). He made only four films which could be considered samurai/period films, but they are of such stature that he's inevitably compared in equal terms to such fellow Japanese directors as Akira Kurosawa, Kenji Mizoguchi and Kon Ichikawa.

SAMURAI FILMS OF MASAKI KOBAYASHI

HARA-KIRI (*Seppuku*) (1962) 134 min. w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Rentaro Mikuni, Tetsuro Tamba, Akira Ishihama, Shima Iwashita Nakadai's son-in-law, driven to desperation because of his infant son's illness, goes to a local clan's mansion with the hope of engendering pity, thus charity. He swallows his pride, pretending to intend ritual suicide - hara-kiri (or seppuku). At the time a story was circulating about an impoverished samurai who'd asked at another clan's household to be allowed to commit hara-kiri on their grounds. Moved to pity, the clan asked him to join their clan, and the masterless samurai thus became once more gainfully employed. And had not had to kill himself out of shame. Unfortunately, the clan whom Nakadai's son-in-law has chosen has also heard the story and, wishing to make an example of the young man so other impoverished ronin won't attempt the same thing, force him to go-through with the hara-kiri. As it turns out, the young man had sold his swords to buy medicine for his son. The sadistic clan retainers, refusing to let him leave on his word to return with real swords or to lend him the use of their

weapons, had coerced him into performing the already painful disembowelment with his blunt bamboo blades! We learn all this in flashback as Nakadai relates the story to the clan chamberlain. Nakadai's also requested to commit hara-kiri on the grounds, and asks for three specific clan samurai as his seconds. As Nakadai relates the details, how his grandson and daughter have also died, we realize the seconds are unavailable. We see flashbacks of Nakadai finding the three prime instigators of his son-in-law's death, challenging each of them to duels. He ends each fight not by killing them, but by cutting off their topknot - something which will shame them before their clan and probably result in their own seppuku. At the close of the narrative, Nakadai challenges the whole clan, facing certain death. He dispatches numerous swordsmen and wounds many more before the clan, in desperation, bring in riflemen and cut him down with bullets. The chamberlain, frightened that news of this debacle might reach the shogun's court, bids the man in charge of making entries in the clan's day-to-day journal to record the deaths as death-from-illness and mention only that an impoverished ronin had committed seppuku on their grounds. Devastating, with a scarily dissonant, abstract score by Toru Takemitsu. (Although the three duels and Nakadai's final battle with the clan are full of action, this is not an action film and if that's what you're expecting, you may be disappointed for the first hour-or-so. However, I can't recommend this highly enough.) Amer. Subt. VHS = HOME VISION VHS(JAPAN) = SHOCHIKU ****

KWAIDAN (*Kaidan aka Ghost Stories aka A Study of Strange Things*) (1964) 183 Min. w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Keiko Kishi, Rentaro Mikuni, Michiyo Aratama, Katsuo Nakamura, Tetsuro Tamba, Takashi Shimura Four exquisitely beautiful ghost stories in atmospheric color: BLACK HAIR, WOMAN OF THE SNOW, HOICHI THE EARLESS, IN A CUP OF TEA. (For more detailed descriptions of the individual stories see Part Three of this article in next issue of Cult Movies) **** Amer. subt. VHS = HOME VISION LASER = CRITERION Not available on tape in Japan!

SAMURAI REBELLION (*Joi Uchi aka Rebellion*) (1967) Both Alain Silver's book, SAMURAI FILM, and the Japanese CINEMA CLUB '94 volume list this film as running 128 min. However, the TOHO laser disc, which is supposed to be uncut, definitely runs 121 min. Of course, this discrepancy may be a case of time compression. w/ Toshirō Mifune, Tatsuya Nakadai, Go Kato, Michiko Otsuka, Yoko Tsukasa The story of a vassal samurai (Mifune) ordered by his lord to marry the lord's concubine when she becomes pregnant. He accepts the woman. They're happily married for two years when the lord suddenly wants the woman back since the son she's given birth to has become his only heir. Much of the film is quite talky until the family refuses to be broken up and things climax with a spectacular, protracted swordfight. ** * VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO (out-of-print)

INN OF EVIL (*Inochi Bo Ni Furo*) (1971) 121 Min. w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Wakako Sakai, Kei Sato, Shintaro Katsu, Komaki Kurahara A gang of thieves and smugglers who hang out at a particular inn decide to help one of their youngest members when the fellow's girl is sold into prostitution. Performing a perilous job, they're all killed except for one (Nakadai) who escapes with cash to redeem the girl. According to some sources, laced with much black humor. (Released by Toho Studios) NO TAPE

HANZO THE BLADE or RAZOR HANZO (GOYO KIBA) SERIES

FANGS OF PUBLIC OFFICE (*Goyo Kiba aka Sword of Justice aka Hanzo The Blade*) (1972) Orig. time: 108 Min. video: 90 Min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/ Shintaro Katsu, Ko Nishimura Katsu Productions (who also brought us Koike's LONE WOLF AND CHILD - *Kozure Okami* in six excellent features - see Part One of article in last issue) takes a stab at another of Kazuo Koike's comicstrips, GOYO KIBA (literally translated: FANGS OF PUBLIC OFFICE) about a burly, scar-toughened, sadistic, saturnine, but honest and (if you're a decent

(continued)

citizen) ultimately compassionate samurai cop in 1860s Edo (Tokyo). There was a trend of blending samurai stories with S & M and softcore sex, and all three of this series' entries pull no punches in that regard. Hanzo (Katsu) submits his own body to the same tortures he perpetrates on suspects or uncooperative witnesses, all in order to achieve indestructibility through endurance. He also gives his prodigious sex organ (always just out-of-frame or obscured by some out-of-focus object) a thorough going-over with boiling hot water, a wooden club (literally beating his meat) and then fucking a contraption full of rock salt! Oooch! All this so he can better use it as an interrogating tool on female captives. He's also given to having his two comical henchmen lower not-too-talkative female witnesses/ suspects (in a net) up-and-down onto his erect member. The absolute agony they undergo quite often changes to ecstasy before the process (or Hanzo) is finished. Hanzo also has his home equipped with numerous secret panels/ recesses hiding all manner of swords, automatic bows-and-arrows, spears and *jittes* (traditional samurai cop weapon made up of a three-tined fork dagger with a long chain secreted in the hollow handle). Spears are also likely to be found beneath floor trapdoors to impale unwelcome guests. Ko Nishimura appears in all three films as Hanzo's colleague/liaison with the shogun, and he's constantly admonishing Hanzo to be more respectful and submissive to his superiors (to no avail). Surprisingly, the S & M and sexist behavior is presented in so matter-of-a-fact manner without excuses or glorification that it ends up being fairly inoffensive (I'm sure there's many of you out there unwilling to believe such a thing is possible - suffice to say I felt the same before seeing these extraordinary films), #1 *** 1/2 VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

FANGS OF PUBLIC OFFICE - RAZOR HANZO'S HELL TORTURE (*Goyo Kiba - Kamisori Hanzo jigoku Seme aka Sword of Justice 2 - The Snare*) (1973) 89 min. Dir. Yasuzo Masumura w/ Shintaro Katsu, Toshio Kurosawa, Kei Sato, Ko Nishimura Hanzo uncovers a combination abortion ring/S & M brothel run by a sorceress and bald Buddhist nuns in the local temple. He gets onto the grounds by taking the place of a woman's corpse - an anonymous whore found dead from abortion complications and how Hanzo had discovered the nefarious doings - in a cylindrical, barrel coffin (the type of burial casing used pre-20th century). That night, once Hanzo's two henchmen have buried him in a shallow grave, he waits to make sure that no one is about. He then erupts from the mound/coffin like a white-robed banshee. Inside the temple the sorceress is performing mistress-of-ceremony functions for several rich, middle-aged merchants enraptured in a frenzy of S & M sex with bald, nude nuns. Hanzo literally explodes through the wall and busts everyone. He hauls one particular nun back to his HQ for some erotic interrogation. Afterwards, as the two are about to enjoy some sake in Hanzo's hot tub, a crew of black-masked killers breaks in. It seems that a lord in the shogun's court is affiliated with not only the temple but also a band of murdering thieves (led by gleefully evil Kei Sato) that has been victimizing numerous rich households in Edo. A gory battle ensues with Hanzo emerging the victor. Before long, Hanzo has figured out who the lord is and manages to catch the thieves red-handed. More carnage results, with Sato grabbing a servant girl as hostage. Hanzo's fellow police/superiors as well as a couple of lords - among them the guilty party - gather in the alley beside Hanzo as he attempts to free the girl and capture Sato. It's interesting that despite Hanzo's brutal treatment of both sexes, when put into a situation where innocent lives are at stake, he's the only official willing to go out of his way to insure the victim's safety. Sure enough, he rescues the girl, but Sato is accidentally killed. As Nishimura and other higher-ups congratulate him, Hanzo rudely accuses the guilty lord, offering incontrovertible proof. The next day, after everything is seemingly resolved, Hanzo is challenged by the lord's master swordsman-bodyguard (Toshio Kurosawa). They'd tangled twice before but, since equally matched, things'd always ended in a draw. Now they fight a nerve-racking duel atop a large bridge, and Hanzo finally



Hara-Kiri, directed by Masaki Kobayashi.

is victorious. Late director, Masumura, was probably Japan's most talented, sixties-New-Wave director. He was responsible for many masterpieces, virtually none of which, strangely enough, have ever been licensed in English subtitled form: HOODLUM SOLDIER (*Heitai Yakuza*) ('65) - first in the extremely brutal, satirical nine picture war series with Shintaro Katsu as a misfit gangster drafted into WW2; WITHIN A MILITARY SPY SCHOOL ('66) (*Riku Gun Naka Nogakkoo*) - first in the noirish five picture WW2 spy series with Raizo Ichikawa; TOUGH GUY (*Karakkaze Yaro*) ('62) - Yukio Mishima starring in his own self-planned yakuza film, RED ANGEL (*Akai Tenshi*), BLIND BEAST (*Moju*), LOVE SUICIDES AT SONEZAKI (*Sonezaki Shinju*). #2 **** VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

FANGS OF PUBLIC OFFICE - HAUNTED GOLD (*Goyo Kiba - Oni No Hanzo Yawu Hada Koban or Gold Coins, Soft Flesh and Hanzo's Ghost aka Sword Of Justice 3*) (1974) 84 min. Dir. Yoshio Inoue Written: Yasuzo Masumura w/ Shintaro Katsu, Mako Midori, Ko Nishimura, Mikio Narita, Asao Koike Third, last, and, even though not bad, easily the least of the trio. When Hanzo's two goony helpers are joking with each other while enjoying a bit of nocturnal fishing, they're scared out-of-their-pants by a horribly-scarred female ghost emerging from the swamp. Breathlessly relating all this to Hanzo, he immediately realizes she's a phony. Going out to the lake himself, he frightens her when she realizes her appearance isn't having the desired effect. She jumps into the water, and Hanzo immediately dives in after her. Before long, she's tied-up in Hanzo's lair. Hanzo discovers she's been guarding a cache of sunken gold pieces (secreted in bamboo poles that've been driven spearlike into the pond's muddy bottom). The rest of the film is spent with Hanzo exposing the usual court corruption. Of course, until he brings the high-echelon thieves to justice, he must constantly fight off various killers after his hide. All three films have what



Fangs Of Public Office, the first Hanzo the Blade film.

seems, at first, out-of-place funky, SHAFT/SUPERFLY-style music scores. But surprisingly enough, the scores work #3 *** VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

The listing of directors and their films below is by no means complete. Even if I had access to complete filmographies, this would be a logistical/space impossibility. Most directors were astoundingly prolific. The average Japanese film director (both good and bad) churning out over eighty films in a twenty-to-thirty year career is not particularly unusual. Some, such as Masahiro Makino and Kazuo Mori, directed well over a hundred films. I've tried to list films and directors below that I feel were fairly consistent in overall quality. Believe me, as far as quantity of samurai films produced, especially between 1950 - 1975, this is a mere drop in the bucket. Reference books that proved invaluable were *THE SAMURAI FILM* by Alain Silver (still in-print from Overlook Press) - despite Silver's fairly expansive filmography at the end, there are still many omissions; his listings probably represent only 1/2 to 2/3 of the *chanbara* or sword pictures released; *CINEMA CLUB '94* (in Japanese, but all film titles are supplied with a *hiragana* alphabet pronunciation key - which I can luckily read) - this is an invaluable tool for the serious student of Japanese film (if you can decipher it) even though it probably only represents listings for a bit more than 1/2 to 2/3 of all Japanese films ever made; also *JAPANESE FILM DIRECTORS* by Audie Bock, Kodansha Press; *REFRAMING JAPANESE CINEMA* by many writers, Univ. of Indiana Press; *CURRENTS IN JAPANESE CINEMA* by Tadao Saito, Kodansha Press; and *JAPANESE FILM POSTERS, VOL. 2* (Paperbound collection of Japanese movie posters, all in full color - with some of the shoddiest glue binding ever!); I also found a few tidbits of info in various back issues of *MARTIAL ARTS MOVIES Magazine*.

MISCELLANEOUS SAMURAI FILMS

MASABONU DEME

LAST SWORDSMAN (*Okita Soji*) (1975) w/ Masao Kusakari, Koji Takahashi Story of tubercular swordsman, Soji, and his involvement with revolutionary faction in days of Tokugawa's overthrow. This is probably the only period film Deme has done - he also directed the excellent *STATION TO HEAVEN* (*Tengoku No Eki*) in 1984 for TOEI. For same subject matter/story as *LAST SWORDSMAN*, see Misumi's '63 *I WANT TO DIE A SAMURAI* (*Shinsengumi Shimatsuki or Account Of Assassins' Leadership*) and Sawashima's '70 *BAND OF ASSASSINS* (*Shinsengumi*) (no relation to the *NINJA, BAND OF ASSASSINS* series at DAIEI). *** 1/2 (I've seen a subtitled broadcast taped off of Hawaiian TV) VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO

KINJI FUKASAKU

LOYAL 47 RONIN - GHOST OF YOTSUYA (*Chushingura Gaidan - Yotsuya Kaidan*) (1994) w/ Eriko Watanabe, Takahiro Tamura Fukasaku blends the two most-filmed stories in Japan. Fukasaku has made many samurai films, including an earlier version of *47 RONIN* (*Akojo Danzetsu*) ('78) VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI as well as the supernatural *SAMURAI REINCARNATION* (*Makai Tensho*) Amer. subt. VHS = American TOEI (out-of-print) LASER(JAPAN) = TOEI, but his samurai films seem strangely mediocre. He's best known in Japan for his excellent modern yakuza films such as *BATTLES WITHOUT HONOR OR HUMANITY* (*Jinginaki Tatakai or Gang War Without The Gambling Code*) ('73-'75) (he directed 8 out of 9 of this violent, downbeat series w/ Bunta Sugawara) VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI and *GRAVEYARD OF HONOR AND HUMANITY* (*Jingi No Hakaba or Burial Of The Gambler's Code*) w/ Tetsuya Watari ('75) VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI (Shochiku) (to early for video release)

SADAO FUNADOKO

THE SEARCHING SWORDSMAN (*Onmitsu Kenshi*) (1964) 83 min. w/ Koichi Ose, Junko Fuji, Bin

Amatsu Movie version of the very popular TOEI TV series c.'62. According to *ORIENTAL CINEMA* magazine's Damon Foster, this TV show was also quite popular in Australia where it ran, in dubbed English, under the title *THE SAMURAI*. Supposedly there were even SAMURAI TV series trading cards for all the Aussie kids! #1 of 2 VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI
THE SEARCHING SWORDSMAN RETURNS (*Zoku Onmitsu Kenshi*) (1964) 83 min. w/ Koichi Ose, Bin Amatsu #2 of 2 VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

YASUO FURUHATA

(commonly mis-identified as Yasuo Kohata)
MUSASHI MIYAMOTO (*Miyamoto Musashi*) (1954) 84 min. w/ Rentaro Mikuni Infamous for its unorthodox and, some might say unflattering, portrayal of Musashi. Has reputation in West of being an excellent film. (Toei) NO TAPE

SUDDEN ATTACK! (*Geki Totsu - Shogun Iemitsu No Ranshin*) (1989) 110 min. w/ Ken Ogata, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Tetsuro Tamba, Hiroki Matsukata Very violent, bloody big-budget samurai thriller from TOEI. *** VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI (may be out-of-print, but most Japanese video stores have it for rent)

Furuhata (1934 -) directed more yakuza films in the late '60s/all through the '70s than anything else, and he's very good. Of particular note is *JAPAN'S VIOLENT GANGS - LOYALTY OFFERING MURDER* (*Nihon Boryokudan - Koroshi No Sakazuki*) ('72) VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI He still directs films for TOEI.

BUNTARO FUTAGAWA

OROCHI (1925) 75 min VHS(JAPAN) = APORO

KON ICHIKAWA

AN ACTOR'S REVENGE (*Yukinojo Henge*) (1963) 113 min. w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Fujiko Yamamoto, Ayako Wakao, Ganjiro Nakamura, Raizo Ichikawa, Shintaro Katsu Mindblowingly beautiful melodrama featuring Hasegawa in a dual role to commemorate his 300th film! - he plays Yuki, the female impersonator kabuki actor seeking revenge on the evil Nakamura who's responsible for his parents' bankruptcy and death; he also plays a good-hearted burglar who helps Yuki. Setbound, but, much like TOHO's *KWAIDAN* by Kobayashi, this is an attribute rather than a liability as Ichikawa uses all kinds of imaginative lighting set-ups and color compositions to achieve nearly avant-garde effects. Ichikawa and Katsu, DAIEI's two biggest stars, appear in small roles. ** 1/2 Amer. subt. VHS = NEW YORKER VIDEO VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER

THE WANDERERS (*Matatabi*) (1973) 96 min. w/ Ichiro Ogura, Isao Bito, Kenichi Hagiwara (see section on matatabi films in next issue's part three) *** VHS(JAPAN) = TOHO (probably out-of-print)

COLD WIND MONJIRO'S BAD TEMPER (*Kaettekita Kogarashi Monjiro*) (1993) TV movie featuring same actor who played Monjiro in the original 1970s TV series. He's been a woodcutter for many years but ends up having to pick up his sword again. *** VHS(JAPAN) = PONY CANYON

47 KILLERS (*Yoju Shichinin No Shikaku aka The Loyal 47 Ronin aka Chushingura*) (1994) w/ Ken Takakura One of the two most recent versions of this famous story. The other, also released in '94 and directed by Kinji Fukasaku, combines the 47 Ronin tale with the Yotsuya ghost story (see above on Fukasaku). (too early for video release)

Ichikawa (1915 -) also directed numerous episodes of the excellent matatabi samurai TV series, *COLD WIND MONJIRO* (*Kogarashi Monjiro aka Monjiro, The Whistling Wind*) in the early '70's. At least six episodes are available in Japan on PONY CANYON video. (see next issue on matatabi films).

KAZUO IKEHIRO

CUT THE SHADOW (*Kage O Kiru*) (1960) w/ Raizo Ichikawa (Daiei) NO TAPE
GAMBLER'S CODE (*Kutsukake Tokijiro*) (1961) 86 min. w/ Raizo Ichikawa The KUTSUKAKE TOKIJIRO

CULT MOVIES

story has been made several times. (see section on matatabi in next issue)

*** VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER
WITHIN A MOUNTAINOUS AREA (*Naka Yama Shichi Ri*) (1962) w/ Raizo Ichikawa, Tamao Nakamura (see section on matatabi in next issue) *** VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER
RABBLE TACTICS (*Zoyo Monogatari*) (1963) 91 min. w/ Shintaro Katsu, Eiji Funakoshi, Shio Fujimura (Daiei) NO TAPE
THIEF'S WHO'S WHO (*Dorobo Banzuke*) (1966) w/ Shintaro Katsu (Daiei) NO TAPE
THE LONE STALKER (*Hitori Okami or Human Wolf*) (1966) 83 min. w/ Raizo Ichikawa, Isamu Nagato, Asao Koike (see section on matatabi films in



Shingo's Challenge - Conclusion (#6 of 7)

next issue). **** VHS/LASER(JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER

PRIEST AND THE GOLD MINT (*Zoku Yakuza Bozu*) (1968) 80 min. w/ Shintaro Katsu Second of two films featuring Katsu as a wandering gambler priest proficient in judo and swordplay. Katsu's bro, Tomisaburo Wakayama, did a very similar series at TOEI called *SCOUNDREL PRIEST* (*Gokuaku Bozu or Evil Priest or Wicked Priest*) which started in '68 and ran for five films (see paragraph on director KIYOSHI SAEKI below and next issue's matatabi piece). #2 VHS(JAPAN) = DAIEI

BROKEN SWORDS (*Hiken Yaburi*) (1969) w/ Hiroki Matsukata, Kojiro Hongo, Shio Fujimura Remake of the Daisuke Ito screenplay *SAMURAI VENDETTA* (*Haku Oki or Chronicle of Pale Cherry Blossoms*) directed in 1959 by Kazuo Mori. VHS(JAPAN) = DAIEI

Ikehiro (1929 -) also directed several films in the ZATOICHI, BLIND SWORDSMAN and KYOSHIRO NEMURI, SON OF BLACK MASS film series as well as one of the eight ninja films in the NINJA, BAND OF ASSASSINS (*Shinobi No Mono*) series (see next issue on ninja films). He also directed several of the eight picture turn-of-the-century yakuza film series, **YOUNG BOSS** (*Waka Oyabun*) w/ Raizo Ichikawa (NO TAPE, except for #1, VHS(JAPAN) = DAIEI). He also directed the samurai/period yakuza trio of films, **TRAIL OF BLOOD** (*Mushukunin Mikogami No Jokichi*), w/ Yoshio Harada for TOHO in '72-'73 (NO TAPE) (see next issue on matatabi).

MANSUKU ITAMI

GREATEST MAN IN THE WORLD (*Kokushi Muso aka The Peerless Patriot*) A silent film. NO TAPE

TADASHI IMAI

NIGHT DRUM (*Yoru No Tsuzumi aka The Adulteress*) (1958) 95 min. w/ Rentaro Mikuni, Ineko Arima, Masayuki Mori Wife of samurai who's stationed in

the capital is so lonely she has an illicit affair. It's discovered. Despite her husband wishing to forgive her and forget it, *bushido* and politics asserts that she must be executed. So she is by her own husband (I think he's the one who kills her - I haven't seen it). In any case, has reputation in the West of being excellent film. (Shochiku) NO TAPE

BUSHIDO SAMURAI SAGA (*Bushido Zankoku Monogatari or Story of Bushido Cruelty*) (1963) 123 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Yoshiko Mita, Masayuki Mori VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

VENDETTA (*Adauchi*) (1966) 103 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Yoshiko Mita, Tetsuro Tamba VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

TAIKATO

THE WIND, THE WOMAN AND THE TRIP (*Kaze To Onna To Tabi Garasu*) (1958) w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Rentaro Mikuni (Toei) NO TAPE

MISSION TO HELL (*Kogan No Mieshi*) (1959) 100 min. w/ Hashizo Okawa, Jun Tazaki (Toei) NO TAPE

GHOST OF OIWA (*Kaidan Oiwa No Borei*) (1961) w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama Yet another version of the Yotsuya Ghost Story (see article in next issue on kaidan - period ghost stories) (Toei) NO TAPE

LONG SOUGHT MOTHER (*Mabuta No Haha*) (1962) 97 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Hitomi Nakahara, Hiroki Matsukata Classic of the matatabi sub-genre (see next issue) VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

SASUKE AND HIS COMEDIANS (*Sanada Fuuroku*) (1963) 91 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura Ninja film, believe it or not (see next issue). (Toei) NO TAPE

STORY OF CRUELTY OF OVERTHROWN REGIME (*Bakumatsu Zankoku Monogatari*) (1964) 99 min. w/ Hashizo Okawa, Ryohei Uchida, Junko Fuji (Toei) NO TAPE

MOUNT FUJI WIND (*Kaze No Fuji*) (1964) w/ Hashizo Okawa (Toei) NO TAPE

KUTSUKAKE TOKIJIRO - LONELY YAKUZA (*Kutsukake Tokijiro - Yukyo Ippiki*) (1966) 91 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Chiyonosuke Azuma This is supposed to be one of the best matatabi/period yakuza films ever made (see next issue) (Toei) NO TAPE

MUSASHI MIYAMOTO (*Miyamoto Musashi aka Sword of Fury*) (1973) 147 min. w/ Hideki Takahashi, Jiro Tamiya Released in U.S. as a two-parter under title, *SWORD OF FURY 1 and 2*. *** Amer. subt. VHS = VIDEO ACTION (out-of-print; not only that, but this version, besides being chopped into two parts as *SWORD OF FURY*, is scratched throughout, squeezed slightly and the pan-and-scan really makes this scope-ratio film suffer. Seek out the full-length - in other words, one-part - letterboxed Japanese tape) VHS(JAPAN) = SHOCHIKU

FLAMES OF BLOOD (*Honoo No Gotoku*) (1981) 147 min. w/ Bunta Sugawara, Mitsuko Baisho, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Tetsuro Tamba (see next issue on matatabi) ** 1/2 (Toho) NO TAPE

Kato (1916-1985) also did many excellent yakuza films, particularly 3 out of the 8 entries of the *RED PEONY GAMBLER* (*Hibotan Bakuto aka Woman Gambler*) series set in 1920s with the incredibly beautiful and charismatic Junko Fuji ('68-'72). VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

Also *STORY OF MEIJI ERA CHIVALRY - THIRD GENERATION'S RISE TO FAME* (*Meiji Kyokakuden - Sandaime Shumei*) ('65) with Koji Tsuruta VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI; *HISTORY OF A MAN'S FACE* (*Otoko No Kao Wa Rirekisho*) ('66) w/ Noboru Ando VHS(JAPAN) = SHOCHIKU; *SONG OF MASSACRE* (*Minagoroshi No Reika*) ('68) w/ Makoto Sato VHS(JAPAN) = SHOCHIKU.

BANSHO KANAMORI

THE WOODCUT ARTIST (*Uki Yoeshi - Murasaki Zukin*) (1923) NO TAPE

TEINOSUKE KINOGASA

THE LOYAL 47 RONIN (*Chushingura*) (1932) NO TAPE

(continued)

SUMMER BATTLE OF OSAKA (1937) NO TAPE
 BATTLE AT KAWANAKA ISLAND
 (*Kawanakajima Kessen*) (1941) NO TAPE
 MOON WANDERER (*Tsuki No Wataridori*) (1951)
 83 min. w/ Kazuo Hasegawa (Daiei) VHS(JAPAN)
 = KINEMA

GATE OF HELL (*Jigoku Mon*) (1953) 90 min. w/
 Kazuo Hasegawa, Machiko Kyo, Isao Yamagata Very
 famous samurai film with reputation of classic in the
 West. *** Amer.subt.VHS = HOME VISION VHS/
 LASER(JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER

NEW TALES OF THE TAIRA CLAN - THREE
 WOMEN (*Shin Heike Monogatari - Yoshi O Meguro
 Sannin No Onna*) (1956) w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Machiko
 Kyo, Fujiko Yamamoto Supposedly loosely-linked
 to Mizoguchi's NEW TALES...from the year before
 with Raizo Ichikawa and second in trilogy. based on
 the novel *SHIN HEIKE MONOGATARI* by Eiji
 Yoshikawa (more familiar in the West as author of the
 five-volume *MUSASHI MIYAMOTO* novel) NEW
 TALES...#3 ('56) was directed by Koji Shima. #2 of 3
 (Daiei) NO TAPE

NARUTO HICHO (1957) 101 min. w/ Kazuo
 Hasegawa, Raizo Ichikawa, Fukijo Yamamoto (Daiei)
 NO TAPE

KAGEROEZU (1959) 117 min. w/ Raizo Ichikawa,
 Fujiko Yamamoto (Daiei) VHS(JAPAN) = KINEMA

ICHIKAWA

THE THUNDER KID (*Asama No Abarenbo*) (1958)
 82 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Satomi Oka (Toei)
 NO TAPE

REVENGER IN RED (*Beni Dasuki Kenka Jo or Dasuki
 Beni's Ambush*) (1959) 74 min. w/ Chiyonosuke
 Azuma, Hibari Misora (Toei) NO TAPE

HAWK OF THE NORTH (*Doku Ganryu Masumune*)
 (1959) w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Yoshiko Sakuma *
 ** VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

ODA NOBUNAGA (*Fuunji Oda Nobunaga*) (1959)
 95 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura This, and the
 above HAWK OF THE NORTH, are extraordinary
 evidence why Nakamura had already been one of
 TOEI's biggest stars starting in the mid-50s. Nakamura
 is the same Nakamura who later changed his name to
 Kinnosuke Yorozyua and played Ito Ogami in the
 LONE WOLF AND CHILD TV series. The name
 change is in keeping with kabuki acting families'
 traditions when one of their rank reaches a "higher
 form or plateau" in their craft. Nakamura/Yorozyua
 was capable of subtle scenes requiring complex emo-
 tional nuances as well as explosive infernos of cathar-
 sis. ODA NOBUNAGA is a prime example. ***1/2
 VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

YAKUZA'S YOUNG MASTER (*Waka Sama Yakuza*)
 (1961) 90 min. w/ Hashizo Okawa, Chiyonosuke
 Azuma (Toei) NO TAPE

KAGEMARU OF THE IGA CLAN (*Iga No
 Kagemaru*) (1963) 69 min. w/ Hiroki Matsukata Ninja
 film (see next issue's part three) VHS/LASER(JAPAN)
 = TOEI

IKKI KUDO

LADY YAKUZA, FLOWER OF EDO (*Hana No Edo
 Yakuza Hime*) (1961) w/ Hibari Misora (Toei) NO
 TAPE

CASTLE OF OWLS (*Ninja Hicho - Fukuro No Shiro*)
 (1963) 91 min. w/ Ryutaro Otomo, Minoru Oki Ninja
 film (see next issue) VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

THIRTEEN ASSASSINS (*Juusannin No Shikaku*)
 (1963) 125 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka, Kanjuro Arashi,
 Ryohei Uchida, Ko Nishimura This and the next two
 films, THE GREAT MELEE and ELEVEN SAMURAI,
 are regarded as excellent by most Japanese critics,
 writers who are notoriously hard-to-please when it
 comes to samurai films. VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

THE GREAT MELEE (*Dai Satsujin aka The Great
 Duel*) (1964) 118 min. w/ Mikijiro Hira, Ryutaro
 Otomo, Minoru Oki VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

ELEVEN SAMURAI (*Juuchinin No Samurai*) (1967)
 99 min. w/ Isao Natsuyagi (Natsuki?), Ryutaro
 Otomo, Junko Miyazono, Ko Nishimura
 VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

PORT OF DEATH (*Gonin Shokin Kasegi*) (1970) 97



Samurai Vendetta, directed by Kazuo Mori,
 written by Daisuke Ito.

min. w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama, Ichiro Nakatani,
 Minoru Oki Sequel to KILLER'S MISSION (*Shokin
 Kasegi*) directed by Shigehiro Ozawa also w/
 Wakayama. (Toei) NO TAPE

Kudo (1929 -) also directed quite a few yakuza
 films, including the four film period-yakuza series
 JIROCHO KESSHO KI ('60) (see next issue) and many
 contemporary yakuza pictures such as BLOOD FEUD -
 JAPAN'S DARK HISTORY (*Chi No Koso - Nihon
 Ankokushi*) ('67) w/ Noboru Ando VHS(JAPAN) =
 TOEI and AFTERMATH OF BATTLES WITHOUT
 HONOR OR HUMANITY (*Sonogono Jinginaki Tatakai
 or Aftermath of the Gambling Code War*) ('79)
 VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI, the only one of that nine pic-
 ture series not directed by Kinji Fukasaku.

KAZUO KUROKI

STREET OF MASTERLESS SAMURAI (*Roningai*)
 (1990) 118 min. w/ Yoshio Harada, Shintaro Katsu,
 Kunie Tanaka, Kei Sato, Michitaro Mizushima,
 Hiroyuki Nagato Latest remake of this famous
 samurai tale. ***1/2 VHS(JAPAN) = SHOCHIKU

MASAKIYO MAKINO

STREET OF MASTERLESS SAMURAI (*Roningai*)
 (1928) 30 min. Another story that has been remade
 many times, most recently by Kazuo Kuroki (see
 above) but also by Makino, himself, in '51 and '57. NO
 TAPE

THE BEHEADING PLACE (1929) NO TAPE
 JIROCHO OF THREE PROVINCES (*Jirocho San
 Gokushi*) Extremely popular period yakuza series for
 TOHO (9 films between '52-'54) (see next issue on
 matatabi films) VHS(JAPAN) (entire series) =
 KINEMA

HORDE OF DRUNKEN KNIGHTS (*Yoidore Hachi
 Manki*) (1951) 101 min. w/ Seizaburo Kawazu Re-
 make of Makino's silent STREET OF MASTERLESS
 SAMURAI (see above) (Toei) NO TAPE

STREET OF MASTERLESS SAMURAI (*Roningai*)
 (1957) 110 min. w/ Junshiro Konoe, Seizaburo Kawazu
 Another remake of Makino's popular tale (Shochiku)
 NO TAPE

RUFFIAN IN LOVE (*Suteuri Kanbei*) (1958) w/
 Ryutaro Otomo (Toei) NO TAPE

BULL'S EYE FOR LOVE (*Oshidoru Kago*) (1959)
 Love that title! (Toei) NO TAPE

YATARO'S TRAVEL HAT (*Yataro Gasa*) (1960) w/
 Kinnosuke Nakamura Another remake of the fa-
 mous matatabi tale (see next issue). (Toei) NO TAPE

DAYS OF YOUNG JIROCHO (*Waka Ki Hi No*

Jirocho) series made up of three pictures with
 Kinnosuke Nakamura as Jirocho: BOSS OF TOKAI
 (*Tokai No Kaoyaku*) ('60) #1 VHS = TOEI, YOUNG
 BOSS ALONE IN TOKAI (*Tokai Ichi No Waka Oyabun*)
 ('61) #2 NO TAPE and WILD WIND ON THE
 TOKAIDO HIGHWAY (*Tokaido No Tsumuji Kaze*)
 ('62) #3 VHS = TOEI. There may be one more picture
 in this series. (see next issue on matatabi/samurai
 yakuza pictures)

SEN HIME TO HIDORU RAI (1962) w/ Ken
 Takakura, Hibari Misora, Kinnosuke Nakamura
 Historical samurai epic set in middle ages during the
 great clan wars (or so it seems from the movie poster).
 Besides the Nakamura/Uchida MUSASHI series,
 Takakura's only appearance in a samurai film (until
 Kon Ichikawa's 1994 *CHUSHINGURA*). (Toei) NO
 TAPE

JIROCHO OF THREE PROVINCES (*Jirocho San
 Gokushi*) series. Remake of Makino's earlier series,
 this time for TOEI with four films between '63-'65
 with Koji Tsuruta as Jirocho. This is rumored to be the
 best Jirocho series but none of the four films is avail-
 able on video. (Toei) NO TAPE

Makino was born in 1908 and died just recently in
 1993. He was probably one of the most prolific Japa-
 nese directors ever. His father was silent film pioneer,
 Shozo Makino. Makino directed many excellent
 yakuza films in the late sixties/early seventies, in-
 cluding 9 out of 11 films in the TALES OF JAPANESE
 CHIVALRY (*Nihon Kyokakuden or Account of Japan's
 Chivalrous Men*) series, all starring Ken Takakura and
 quite often co-starring Koji Tsuruta; 3 out of 9 films of
 TALES OF SHOWA ERA CRUELTY (*Showa Zan
 Kyoden*) series, all starring Ken Takakura ('65-'72) and
 Junko Fuji's last film before her retirement to get
 married: KANTO ACTRESS' CLAN (*Kanto Hizakura
 Ikka or Cherry Blossom Fire Gang*) ('72). All of these are
 set in the 1920s and most feature alot of swordplay,
 especially at the bloody climaxes. At least five of the
 TALES OF JAPANESE CHIVALRY, all nine of TALES
 OF SHOWA ERA CRUELTY and KANTO ACTRESS'
 CLAN are available from TOEI (JAPAN) video.

TEIJI MATSUDA

THE LOYAL 47 RONIN (*Chushingura*) (1959) 183
 min. w/ Chiezo Kataoka, Ryutaro Otomo,
 Chiyonosuke Azuma, Kinya Kitoji Yet another ver-
 sion of the oft-filmed saga. VHS (JAPAN) = TOEI

TANGE SAZEN (1958) 100 min. w/ Ryutaro
 Otomo, Hashizo Okawa, Hibari Misora Matsuda is a
 strange director with a wildly uneven output: He
 directed 4 out of 5 of this film series that's a wildly
 cornball samurai potpourri about the one-eyed, one-
 armed swordsman (much of the corn can be laid at
 Otomo's door, although TOEI policy is to blame for
 the idiotic musical interludes that tended to ruin
 many samurai films - not only at TOEI but also DAIEI,
 TOHO and SHOCHIKU during the late fifties). How-
 ever, Matsuda directed all entries in the near-excel-
 lent TEN DUELS OF YOUNG SHINGO/SHINGO'S
 CHALLENGE series and 2 out of 4 of the CRIMSON
 BAT series (see next issue on female samurai). The
 TANGE SAZEN series ran through 1962.

TEN DUELS OF YOUNG SHINGO (*Shingo Juuban
 Shobu - Dai Ichi Bu/Dai Ni Bu or Parts One and Two*)
 (1959) 103 min. w/ Hashizo Okawa, Ryutaro Otomo,
 So Yamamura Pretty uniformly excellent sword se-
 ries with former kabuki female impersonator, Okawa,
 becoming proficient samurai film superstar. Okawa
 portrays swordsman of illegitimate but royal birth
 trying to get to his noble father by way of becoming
 best swordsman in the nation. The late Okawa (he
 was only 55 when he died in 1984) also appeared in
 the later 1960s in 520 episodes of the Japanese TV
 series, HEIJI THE SHOGUN'S DETECTIVE (*Zenigata
 Heiji*) Okawa also appeared in a movie version,
 ZENIGATA HEIJI ('67) VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI (Kazuo
 Hasegawa appeared as Heiji in a series of films for
 DAIEI in the 1950s). ***1/2 #1 VHS (JAPAN) =
 TOEI

TEN DUELS OF YOUNG SHINGO (*Shingo Juuban
 Shobu - Dai San Bu or Part Three*) (1960) 83 min. w/
 Hashizo Okawa *** #2 VHS(JAPAN) = TOEI

TEN DUELS OF YOUNG SHINGO - SAGA CON-

CLUSION (*Shingo Juuban Shobu - Kanketsu Hen*) (1960) 87 min. w/ Hashizo Okawa *** #3 VHS (JAPAN) = TOEI

SHINGO'S CHALLENGE (*Shingo Ni Juuban Shobu or Shingo's Twenty Duels, Part One*) (1961) 88 min. w/ Hashizo Okawa, Satomi Oka, Mikijiro Hira, Mitsuko Sakuramachi #4 VHS (JAPAN) = TOEI

SHINGO'S CHALLENGE PART 2 (*Shingo Ni Juuban Shobu - Dai Ni Bu*) (1961) 90 min. w/ Hashizo Okawa, Satomi Oka #5 VHS (JAPAN) = TOEI

SHINGO'S CHALLENGE - SAGA CONCLUSION (*Shingo Ni Juuban Shobu - Kanketsu Hen*) (1963) 93 min. w/ Hashizo Okawa, Mikijiro Hira, Satomi Oka #6 VHS (JAPAN) = TOEI

SHINGO'S GREATEST DUEL (*Shingo Bangai Shobu*) (1964) 87 min. w/ Hashizo Okawa, Mitsuko Sakuramachi, Ryohei Uchida, Hiroki Matsukata, Junko Fuji #7 and last in the series VHS (JAPAN) = TOEI

CRIMSON BAT, THE BLIND SWORDSWOMAN (*Makkana Nagare Dori*) (1969) 88 min. w/ Yoko Matsuyama, Isamu Nagato First in this film series (which was also a TV series) (see next issue on female samurais) #1 (Shochiku) NO TAPE

TRAPPED, THE CRIMSON BAT (*Mekurana Oichi Jigoku Hada or Crimson Bat - Hell Flesh*) (1969) 87 min. w/ Yoko Matsuyama, Kikko Matsuoka, Toru Abe, Junshiro Konoe #2 (Shochiku) NO TAPE

KENJI MISUMI

(additional samurai films by this great director that I absent-mindedly left out of his filmography in last issue's Part One)

TANGE SAZEN AND THE NOBLE FAMILY'S VASE (*Tange Sazen - Koke Zaru No Tsubo*) (1954) 87 min. Misumi's first film and the last in DAIEI's three film TANGESAZEN series. VHS (JAPAN) = KINEMA

AMIGASA GONPACHI (1956) w/ Raizo Ichikawa (Daiei) NO TAPE

FREE-LANCE SAMURAI (*Momotaro Samurai*) (1957) w/ Raizo Ichikawa (Daiei) NO TAPE

SENBAZURU HICHO (1959) w/ Raizo Ichikawa Not sure, but from movie poster I'd say it was another tale of chivalrous thief. (Daiei) NO TAPE

I WANT TO DIE A SAMURAI (*Shinsengumi Shimatsuki or Account Of Assassins' Leadership*) (1963) 93 min. w/ Raizo Ichikawa, Tomisaburo Wakayama (*aka Kenzaburo Jo*), Shigeru Amachi, Shio Fujimura Subject matter of school of master swordsmen/assassins becoming power-mad as the Tokugawa regime crumbles. Many different factions emerge, and bloody chaos reigns. Same story also told in the excellent LAST SWORDSMAN (*Okita Soji*) ('75) directed by Masanobu Deme and Tadashi Sawashima's BAND OF ASSASSINS (*Shinsengumi*) ('70) (no relation to the DAIEI ninja series). *** VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER

RETURN OF GIANT MAJIN (*Dai Majin Ikaru or The Great Man Demon's Anger*) (1966) Second in this supernatural trilogy. (see next issue on kaidan-period ghost stories) ***

#2 VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER

THE MAGOICHI SAGA (*Shiri Kurae Magoichi*) (1969) 95 min. w/ Kinnosuke Nakamura, Shintaro Katsu VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

Misumi, of course, directed several installments each of the ZATOICHI, BLIND SWORDSMAN and KYOSHIRO NEMURI, SON OF BLACK MASS film series and 4 out of 6 of the LONE WOLF AND CHILD (*Kozure Okami*) film series (for more info on these see last issue's Part One)

KENJI MIZOGUCHI

THE LOYAL 47 RONIN (*Chushingura*) (1941) w/ Utaemon Ichikawa, Mieko Takamine Epic version of the story and probably the only version lensed in the turbulent forties. Originally released in two parts. (Shochiku) Amer. subt. VHS = SONY JAPAN FILM COLLECTION

MUSASHI MIYAMOTO (*Miyamoto Musashi*) (1944) w/ Chojiro Kawaharazaki, Kinuyo Tanaka This may be a lost film. (Shochiku) NO TAPE

FAMOUS SWORDSMITH BIJOMARU (*Mieto*

Bijomaru) (1945) w/ Eijiro Yanagi, Isuzu Yamada (Shochiku) NO TAPE

UTAMARO AND HIS FIVE WOMEN (*Utamaro O Meguro Gonin No Onna*) (1946) w/ Minosuke Bando, Kinuyo Tanaka Disguised story of government censorship dealing with early 19th century woodblock artist, Utamaro. Mizoguchi had to appeal to the U.S. Occupation to allow him to make a period film (which were largely banned '46-'51) *** 1/2

Amer. subt. VHS = NEW YORKER VIDEO

LIFE OF OHARU (*Saikaku Ichidai Onna*) (1952) w/ Kinuyo Tanaka, Toshiro Mifune Story of court lady who is banished to pleasure quarter as a prostitute because of her illicit affair with a young samurai. ** Amer. subt. VHS = VIDEO YESTERYEAR (probably out-of-print)

UGETSU OR TALES OF UGETSU (*Ugetsu Monogatari or Tales Of Moonlight And Rain*) (1953) 96 min. w/ Masayuki Mori, Kinuyo Tanaka, Machiko Kyo Probably Mizoguchi's most famous and greatest film. Two medieval families set out to a nearby city to sell pottery, are split up by chaos of war and tragic consequences occur. Supernatural elements subtly abound, and this is an incredibly beautiful, moving film. **** Amer. subt. VHS = HOME VISION LASER = CRITERION VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

SANSHO THE BAILIFF (*Sanjo Dayu*) (1954) 124 min. w/ Kinuyo Tanaka, Kisho Hanayagi, Kyoko Kagawa Compassionate daimyo (lord) is deposed and sent into exile. His wife, son and daughter go to live with her sister's family for several years (not shown in the film). Forced to once again leave, the mother, son and daughter are split up by slave traders and go through decades of degradation and horror. *** Amer. subt. VHS = SONY JAPAN FILM COLLECTION LASER = CRITERION VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

CRUCIFIED LOVERS (*Chikamatsu Monogatari or Story By Chikamatsu*) (1954) w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Kyoko Kagawa One of 17th century playwright, Chikamatsu's plays. A very successful, very selfish printmaker falsely accuses his wife of adultery with Hasegawa, his right-hand man who basically supervises all the quality work. Hasegawa and the wife flee together to avoid arrest - adultery was a crime punishable by death in those days! Unavoidably thrown together, they actually do fall in love. They're finally trapped and executed. A beautiful, transcendental romance. *** 1/2 Amer. subt. VHS = BALZAC VIDEO VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

NEW TALES OF THE TAIRA CLAN (*Shin Heike Monogatari*) (1955) w/ Raizo Ichikawa, Yoshiko Kuga The Heike clan (also known as the Taira clan), led by Ichikawa after his father's death, strike out against privileged, corrupt Buddhist warrior priests who wield enormous influence with the Emperor. *** Amer. subt. VHS = BALZAC VIDEO VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER

Mizoguchi is regarded by many, along with Kurosawa and Ozu, to be one of the greatest directors to ever emerge from Japan. He died in 1956 of leukemia. Most of his period films weren't specifically samurai but samurais more often than not figured as story characters.

KAZUO MORI

(sometimes mis-identified as Issei Mori)

VENDETTA OF THE SAMURAI (*Ketto Kajyu No Tsuji*) (1951) 82 min. Written by Akira Kurosawa w/ Toshiro Mifune, Yuriko Hamada (Toho) NO TAPE

GOBLIN MANGORO (*Mangoro Tengu*) (1957) w/ Raizo Ichikawa (Daiei) NO TAPE

DAYS OF YOUNG NOBUNAGA (*Waka Ki Hi Nobunaga*) (1959) w/ Raizo Ichikawa VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

SAMURAI VENDETTA (*Haku Oki or Chronicle of Pale Cherry Blossoms*) (1959) w/ Raizo Ichikawa, Shintaro Katsu From the screenplay by Daisuke Ito about the faithful friendship of Tenzen and Yasubei, two of the Loyal 47 Ronin. Remade by DAIEI in 1969 as BROKEN SWORDS (*Hiken Yaburi*). *** 1/2 VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER

JIROCHO ON MOUNT FUJI (*Jirocho Fuji*) (1959) 105 min. w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Raizo Ichikawa,

Machiko Kyo, Ayako Wakao, Shintaro Katsu Another tale of the popular yakuza Robin Hood from the 19th century. #1 of 2 VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

RETURN OF JIROCHO ON MOUNT FUJI (*Zoku Jirocho Fuji*) (1960) 108 min. w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Raizo Ichikawa, Shintaro Katsu #2 of 2 VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

TADANAOKYOGYO JOKI (1960) w/ Raizo Ichikawa Story of young daimyo (Ichikawa) and his troubles. VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

SHIRANUI KENGYO (1960) w/ Shintaro Katsu, Tamao Nakamura Pre-Zatoichi, Katsu plays a sword-wielding blind man (however this blind man is basically a villain). Has reputation of being one of Katsu's and Mori's best films. VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

SAMURAI GAMBLER (*Bakuto Zamurai*) (1964) w/ Raizo Ichikawa, Kojiro Hongo (see next issue on matatabi films) (Daiei) NO TAPE

Mori (1911-1989) was a good friend of Kurosawa's but worked predominantly at DAIEI from mid-fifties onwards. He directed three of the ZATOICHI film series as well as episodes of the TV series. He also directed the Matsukata-starring Nemuri film, FULL MOON SWORDSMAN (*Nemuri Kyoshiro Ugetsu Sappo*) (for Zatoichi and Nemuri info, see last issue). Mori also directed films in the yakuza film series, BAD REPUTATION (*Akumyo*) w/ Shintaro Katsu (series ran from 1961-1974) (all except the last film - at TOHO - are available VHS/LASER = DAIEI/PIONEER); one or two of the YOUNG BOSS (*Waka Oyabun*) yakuza film series with Raizo Ichikawa; also 2 out of 3 of the period yakuza series, SURUGA YUKYODEN w/ Shintaro Katsu (NO TAPE) 3 out of 8 of the NINJA, BAND OF ASSASSINS (*Shinobi No Mono*) film series, VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER as well as MISSION: IRON CASTLE (*Shinobi No Shu*) VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI (see next issue on ninja films).

NOBUO NAKAGAWA

GHOST OF YOTSUYA (*Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan or Yotsuya Ghost Story On The Tokaido Highway*) (1959) w/ Shigeru Amachi Classic samurai horror tale. (see next issue on kaidan - period ghost stories) *** 1/2 (Shinto Studios) VHS (JAPAN) = CLARION LASER (JAPAN) = NIKKATSU (may be out-of-print)

QUICK-DRAW OKATSU (*Yoen Dokufuden - Hitokiri Okatsu*) (1969) 89 min. w/ Junko Miyazono, Ko Nishimura (see next issue on female samurais) #2 of 3 (Toei) NO TAPE!

VENDETTA OF A SAMURAI GIRL (*Yoen Dokufuden - Okatsu Kyojotabi*) (1969) 84 min. w/ Junko Miyazono, Toru Abe, Tatsuo Umemiya (see next issue) #3 of 3 (Toei) NO TAPE

Nakagawa (1905-1984) was an excellent director specializing in horror films during the fifties (mostly at SHINTOHO who went bankrupt in the very early '60s), and period/samurai films. He also directed the first of a two-picture NIKKATSU yakuza film series with Hideki Takahashi in 1969, CHERRY TREE LOYALTY OFFERING (*Sakura Sakazuki - Gikei Dai*). Samurai film director, Seichiro Uchikawa (see below) directed the second film.

SHIGEKIYO OZAWA

SWORD OF THE ITINERANT ACTOR (*Abare Kaido*) (1959) 91 min. w/ Utaemon Ichikawa (Toei) NO TAPE

GOBLIN FESTIVAL (*Tengu Matsuri*) (1961) 88 min. w/ Ryutaro Otomo (Toei) NO TAPE

REVENGER IN THE SHADOW (*Akai Kage Boshi or Red Star's Shadow*) (1962) (Toei) NO TAPE

KILLER'S MISSION (*Shokin Kasegi*) (1969) w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama, Yumiko Nogawa, Chiezo Kataoka, Koji Tsuruta First of a two picture series with Wakayama as an assassin/trouble-shooter-for-hire. (sequel is FORT OF DEATH (*Gonin Shokin Kasegi*) directed by Eiichi Kudo). ***

(I've seen a chopped-up Japanese TV print) (Toei) NO TAPE

Ozawa was one of TOEI's biggest directorial guns in the sixties/early seventies, helming mostly yakuza

(continued)

films, among them about half of the ten film GAMBLER (*Bakuto*) series and about half of the eleven film GAMBLING DEN (*Bakuchiuchi*) series, both starring Koji Tsuruta and quite often co-starring Tomisaburo Wakayama. (only the Kinji Fukasaku-directed of the GAMBLER series are available on video and four of the GAMBLING DEN series, two directed by Kosaku Yamashita). He also directed the first two STREETFIGHTER films (*Geki Totsu Satsujinken and Satsujinken 2*) with Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba. Both are available from TOEI video. He also directed the fourth film, ONNA HISSATSU GODAI KEN ('76), in the SISTER STREETFIGHTER (*Onna Hissatsu Ken*) series (only one of the series not available on TOEI VHS). He was born in 1922 and is actually still around, though he seems to've been retired since the mid-70s.

KIYOSHI SAEKI

KUTSUKAKE TOKIJIRO (1954) w/ Masagoro Shimada Another version of this famous matatabi story (see next issue). VHS (JAPAN) = NIKKATSU/KINEMA

SCOUNDREL PRIEST (*Gokuaku Bozu aka The Wicked Priest aka The Evil Priest*) (1968) w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama First in this series for TOEI about a wandering gambler priest. Much violence ala judo and swordplay. It ran five films with #s 2, 3, 4 directed by Takashi Harada and the last, #5, by Buichi Saito (#3, 4, 5 are all available on TOEI VHS; #1, 2 I'm not sure about) (see next issue on matatabi films)

Saeki (1914 -) directed predominantly yakuza films for TOEI and is probably best known in Japan for directing #s 1, 2, 3, 8, 9 of the excellent TALES OF SHOWA CRUELTY (*Showa Zan Kyoden*) series with Ken Takakura (all available from TOEI VHS).

KO SASAKI

FORBIDDEN CASTLE (*Binan Jo*) (1959) 92 min. w/ Kinnoyuke Nakamura (Toei) NO TAPE

MAN WHO CAME ON THE WIND (*Oshidori Dochu*) (1959) 88 min. w/ Hashizo Okawa (Toei) NO TAPE

RIVER OF FURY (*Doto No Taiketsu*) (1959) 119 min. w/ Utaemon Ichikawa, Chiezo Kataoka (Toei) NO TAPE

SWORD AGAINST INTRIGUE (*Naze No Naiban Daiko*) (1959) 87 min. w/ Utaemon Ichikawa (Toei) NO TAPE

BENTEN, THE THIEF (*Benten Koso*) (1960) w/ Hibari Misora, Tomisaburo Wakayama (Toei) NO TAPE

SWORD OF DESTINY (*Tsuki Kage Itto Ryu*) (1960) w/ Koji Tsuruta, Hibari Misora (Toei) NO TAPE

GOBLIN PRIEST (*O Bozu Tengu*) (1961) w/ Hibari Misora, Chiezo Kataoka, Hashizo Okawa (Toei) NO TAPE

TADASHI SAWASHIMA

LORD AND THE PIRATES (1959) 84 min. w/ Kinnoyuke Nakamura, Katsuo Nakamura (Toei) NO TAPE

ONE-EYED WOLF (*Katame No Okami*) (1959) 87 min. w/ Ryutaro Otomo (Toei) NO TAPE

THE PIRATES (*Kaizoku Bohansen*) (1960) w/ Hashizo Okawa, Satomi Oka (Toei) NO TAPE

THE WANDERERS - THREE YAKUZA (*Matatabi - Sannin Yakuza*) (1965) 120 min. w/ Kinnoyuke Nakamura, Tatsuya Nakadai, Hiroki Matsukata, Junko Fuji Has reputation of being excellent. (see next issue on matatabi films) (Toei) NO TAPE

THE GOLDEN COUPLE (*Ogon No Tazoku*) (1967) 90 min. w/ Hiroki Matsukata, Koichi Ose, Masumi Harukawa (Toei) NO TAPE

BAND OF ASSASSINS (*Shinsengumi*) (1970) Produced by T. Mifune w/ Toshiro Mifune, Kinya Kitoji, Rentaro Mikuni, Katsuo Nakamura, Yumiko Nogawa Same subject as THE LAST SWORDSMAN (*Okita Soji*) ('75) and I WANT TO DIE A SAMURAI (*Shinsengumi Shimatsuki or Account Of Assassins' Leadership*) ('63). No relation to the DAIEI ninja series, NINJA, BAND OF ASSASSINS. (Toho) NO TAPE

Sawashima also directed several period (set in

1920s) yakuza films, among them the first three of the four excellent THEATER OF LIFE - HISHAKAKU (*Jinsei Gekisho - Hishakaku*) series with Koji Tsuruta.

MASAHIRO SHINODA

ASSASSINATION (*Ansatsu*) (1964) 104 min. w/ Tetsuro Tamba, Shima Iwashita, Isao Kimura, Eiji Okada VHS (JAPAN) = SHOCHIKU

SAMURAI SPY (*Ibun Sarutobi Sasuke*) (1965) 102 min. w/ Koji Takahashi, Misako Watanabe, Eiji Okada, Tetsuro Tamba (Shochiku) NO TAPE

DOUBLE SUICIDE (*Shinju Ten No Amijima*) (1969) 142 min. w/ Kichieon Nakamura, Shima Iwashita From yet another Chikamatsu play, this the story of a merchant desperately in-love with a prostitute (Iwashita in a double-role - she plays his wife, too) who is also enamored of him. However, she's indentured; in other words, a slave until she brings in enough money to pay off her debt. The merchant's parents and brother, a samurai, are disgusted with him. He and the girl end up running away to die together in a love suicide. *** Amer. subt. VHS = SONY JAPAN FILM COLLECTION

SCANDALOUS ADVENTURES OF BURAIKAN (*Buraikan*) (1970) 104 min. w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Tetsuro Tamba, Shima Iwashita (Toho) NO TAPE

UNDER THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS (*Sakura No Mori No Mankai No Shita*) (1975) w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama, Shima Iwashita A mountain bandit kidnaps a beautiful woman traveling through the forest who turns out to be a murdering demon. (see next issue on period ghost films)

**** VHS (JAPAN) = TOHO

BANISHED ORIN (*Hanare Goze Orin aka Melody In Grey*) (1977) w/ Shima Iwashita, Yoshio Harada, Toru Abe Excellent, poignant tale of turn-of-the-century wandering blind shamisen player and her tragic end. **** VHS (JAPAN) = TOHO

GONZA THE SPEARMAN (1986) 126 min. w/ Shima Iwashita, Hiromi Go Tale of illicit love amongst samurais based on another Chikamatsu play. *** Amer. subt. VHS = KINO VIDEO

Shinoda (1931 -) was and is very influenced by the aesthetics of traditional Japanese theater, especially kabuki. One can see this in his dazzlingly beautiful shot compositions and the way he updates these aesthetics with daring uses of color and the mixing-up of ancient conventions with avant-garde visual language. He also directed three yakuza films at the beginning of his career: MY FACE RED IN THE SUNSET ('61), TEARS ON THE LION'S MANE ('62) and the very beautiful and transcendently nihilistic PALE FLOWER (*Kawaita Hana*) w/ Ryo Ikebe and Mariko Kaga (only one of the three on tape, VHS (JAPAN) = SHOCHIKU). He's married to actress, Iwashita.

TOKUZOU TANAKA

KOINA NO ZANPEI (1961) 72 min. w/ Raizo Ichikawa Action-packed matatabi take (see next issue) VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

THE GREAT KILLING (*Dai Satsujin - O Ro Chi*) (1966) 87 min. w/ Raizo Ichikawa May have same subject as TOEI's Eiichi Kudo-directed GREAT MELEE (*Dai Satsujin*). (Daiei) NO TAPE

WOMAN OF THE SNOW (*Kaidan Yukigoro*) (1968) 80 min. w/ Shio Fujimura, Akira Ishiyama. Same tale as in Kobayashi's four-story KWAIDAN, here expanded to feature-length. (see next issue on period-ghost story films) VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

THE HAUNTED CASTLE (*Hiroko Kaibyoden or Story Of The Ghost-Cat's Secret*) (1969) w/ Kojiro Hongo (see next issue) VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

Tanaka (1925 -) also directed many entries in the ZATOICHI film series as well as the TV series; two of the KYOSHIRO NEMURI, SON OF BLACK MASS film series (see last issue) and 6 out of the 9 yakuza/war film series, HOODLUM SOLDIER (*Heitai Yakuza*) with Shintaro Katsu and Takahiro Tamura, all VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI. He also directed the 130 min. LONE WOLF AND CHILD (*Kozure Okami*) TV movie with Hideki Takahashi as Ogami, Tomisaburo Wakayama as Yagyū and Mieko Kaji as a female

yakuza boss (made in late '70s or early '80s) He also directed at least one of the most recent KYOSHIRO NEMURI TV movies with Masakazu Tamura.

SENKICHI TANIGUCHI

THE GAMBLING SAMURAI (*Kunisada Chuji or Chuji's Travels*) (1961) w/ Toshiro Mifune, Michiyo Aratama, Eijiro Tono One of the most famous versions of the story of Robin Hood-type gambler, Chuji. *** Amer. subt. VHS = VIDEO ACTION (out-of-print)

SAMURAI PIRATE (*Daitozoku aka Lost World of Sinbad*) (1964) w/ Toshiro Mifune, Mie Hama ** 1/2 LASER (JAPAN) = TOHO, NO TAPE

SEICHIRO UCHIKAWA

RETURN OF THE SAMURAI (*Zankoku No Kawa or Cruel River*) (1963) (Shochiku) NO TAPE

SAMURAI FROM NOWHERE (*Dojo Yaburi or Dojo's Break-Up*) (1964) This had a reputation in the late sixties/early seventies as a very good samurai film. (Shochiku) NO TAPE

ONE ARMED SWORDSMAN (*Tange Sazen*) (1964) w/ Tetsuro Tamba, Michiko Saga *** Amer. subt. VHS = VIDEO ACTION (out-of-print)

Uchikawa also directed #2 of the 2 film NIKKATSU yakuza series, CHERRY TREE LOYALTY OFFERING - GAMBLING CODE (*Sakura Sakazuki - Jingi*) ('69) w/ Hideki Takahashi NO TAPE

KUNIO WATANABE

DAIBOSATSU PASS (*Daibosatsu Toge, Parts 1, 2, 3*) (all three films, 1953) w/ Chiezo Kataoka (Toei) NO TAPE(S)

BIRTH OF A WOMAN SAMURAI (*Onna Zamurai Tada Ima Tanjo*) (1958) w/ Hibari Misora, Junshiro Konoe (Shochiku) NO TAPE

AMBUSH AT IGA PASS (*Iga No Suigetsu*) (1958) 99 min. w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Raizo Ichikawa (Daiei) NO TAPE

BLOODY RIVER (*Tenpo Sui Kodan*) (1958) 74 min. w/ Kokichi Takada, Koji Tsuruta Remade in 1976 by Satsuo Yamamoto. VHS (JAPAN) = SHOCHIKU

LOYAL 47 RONIN (*Chushingura aka The Great Avengers*) (1958) 138 min. w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Raizo Ichikawa, Shintaro Katsu, Fujiko Yamamoto, Koji Tsuruta, Machiko Kyo VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER

MUSASHI'S TWO SWORDSMEN (*Futari No Musashi*) (1960) 92 min. w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Raizo Ichikawa, Shintaro Katsu, Kojiro Hongo, Tamao Nakamura VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

Watanabe (1899-1981) was an incredibly prolific director whose almost entire output was samurai or period films. He also, like fellow prolific filmmaker Masahiro Makino, worked at numerous studios, not seemingly tied-down to any one (Makino was under-contract to TOEI during the last years of his career). I've not seen a single one of Watanabe's films, but I get the impression he was of a somewhat old-fashioned style.

SATSUO YAMAMOTO

THE SCARLET CLOAK (*Akai Jimbaori*) (1959) (Shochiku) NO TAPE

ZATOICHI'S RESCUE (*Zatoichi Ro Yaburi or Zatoichi, The Breakout*) (1967) w/ Shintaro Katsu, Rentaro Mikuni #16 in the film series (see last issue's Part One of this article)

*** 1/2 (Daiei) VHS (JAPAN) = TOHO
BLOOD END (*Tengu To or Goblin Saber*) (1969) 102 min. w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Go Kato I've only seen a chopped-up Japanese TV print, but even still this is a great film.

*** 1/2 (Daiei) NO TAPE
BRIDE FROM HADES (*Botandoro aka Ghost Story Of Peonies And Stone Lanterns*) (1968) 89 min. w/ Kojiro Hongo, Ko Nishimura, Takashi Shimura Excellent, poetic ghost story. (see next issue) *** 1/2 VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI
TENPOSUIKODEN - OOHARA YUGAKU (1976)

147 min. w/ Mikijiro Hira, Etsushi Takahashi, Ruriko Asaoka Remake of Watanabe's BLOODY RIVER. Story of a non-violent samurai trying to help organize farmers as well as teach them more efficient rice-planting methods. Of course, this doesn't sit well with either a yakuza clan or government officials who have financial interests in the area. Yamamoto previously dealt with this as a subplot of ZATOICHI'S RESCUE. *** VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI (out-of-print)

Yamamoto (1910 - 1983) was a very politically-involved director. His films always showed how common people were exploited. Probably his most famous films in Japan were the first two of the NINJA, BAND OF ASSASSINS (Shinobi No Mono) series (both '62) (see next issue on ninja films) and THE GREAT WHITE TOWER (Shirai Kyota) ('66) w/ Jiro Tamiya and Eijiro Tono, a tale of corruption in the medical department of a great Kyoto university VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = DAIEI / PIONEER.

KIMIYOSHI YASUDA

FLOWER OF THE PLEASURE QUARTER (Hana No Yukyo-den) (1958) 98 min. w/ Kazuo Hasegawa (Daiei) NOTAPE

HOODLUM PRIEST (Yakuza Bozu) (1967) 85 min. w/ Shintaro Katsu First of two films with Katsu as rambunctious wandering priest. (see next issue on matatabi or wandering samurai gamblers) #1 of 2 VHS (JAPAN) = DAIEI

THE LEFTY FENCER (Nuresubame Katageri) (1969) w/ Michiyo Yasuda Second of two films about a one-eyed, one-armed swordswoman (see next issue on female samurai films) (Daiei) NOTAPE


Yasuda (1911-1983) also directed numerous entries in both the ZATOICHI, BLIND SWORDSMAN film series and the KYOSHIRO NEMURI, SON OF BLACK MASS film series (see last issue). He also directed one of Raizo Ichikawa's very last films before his death, GAMBLER'S LIFE - UNSTOPPABLE BLOODBATH (Bakuto Ichidai - Chimatsuri Fudo) ('69)(Daiei) NO TAPE. He also directed several supernatural period films such as THE MASSEUR'S CURSE (Kaidan Kasanegafuchi, 1960, then a remake in 1969) ('60 is VHS = DAIEI, '69 is NOTAPE), MAJIN, MONSTER OF TERROR (Dai Majin) ('66) (#1 in a trilogy) VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER; TOKAIDO HIGHWAY GHOST CONVENTION (Tokaido Obake Dochu aka Along With Ghosts) ('69) and the excellent 100 MONSTERS (Yokai Hyafu Monogatari or, Story Of One Hundred Ghosts) ('68) both VHS/LASER (JAPAN) = DAIEI/PIONEER. (see next issue on kaidan or in-period ghost story films).

Unfortunately, space prohibits my coverage of ninja films; specifically the excellent 8 film series from DAIEI, NINJA, BAND OF ASSASSINS (Shinobi No Mono). So, along with coverage on female samurai films (such as THE CRIMSON BAT and QUICKDRAW OKATSU series); matatabi films (wandering samurai gamblers), a director or two I may've missed this time, the kaidan or period ghost films, the ninja films will have to wait until next issue's concluding Part Three.

Thanks to Merlin David of SAMURAI VIDEO and Satoko Nakajima. SAMURAI VIDEO, P.O. BOX 372, Suffern, N.Y., 10901, fax# 914-357-0780, has quite a selection of both pre-record VHS samurai pictures as well as samurai films in the public domain. He has

films from the ZATOICHI, KYOSHIRO NEMURI-SON OF BLACK MASS, LONE WOLF AND CHILD, FANGS OF PUBLIC OFFICE (Hanzo The Blade), and NINJA, BAND OF ASSASSINS series as well as the first two Chiba STREETFIGHTER films as well as many others featured in these articles. Contact him for a catalogue. Also VIDEOSEARCH OF MIAMI has some samurai films, including LONE WOLF AND CHILD and HANZO THE BLADE films - their address is P.O. BOX 16-1917, Miami, Florida, 33116.

Corrections from last issue: LONE WOLF AND CHILD #4, HEART OF A FATHER... was directed by Buichi Saito NOT Kenji Misumi. ZATOICHI (1989) #26 was produced and directed by Shintaro Katsu NOT Shintaro Latsi. Also the film, HUNTER IN THE DARK (Yami No Kariudo) should've had **** instead of ***. Also ZATOICHI #9 ****, ZATOICHI #19 **** 1/2, ZATOICHI #23 **** ZATOICHI #24 **, ZATOICHI #25 ** 1/2 There were also three slightly-confused synopses - two of them were due to faulty memory on my part LONE WOLF AND CHILD #2 - it was one of the nefarious Hidari brothers pulling killers out of the sand by their heads, not Ogami. The problem/confusion about #5 is too complicated to go into and not that important. There was the omission of a couple of sentences in the synopsis of KYOSHIRO NEMURI AT BAY (#4) which made it sound like Princess Kiku was the one killed by Nemuri when it was in reality the shogunate informer (Naoko Kubo) posing as a nun and masquerading as Nemuri's long-lost, bastard sister....



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Takao Okawara Interview – Take II

by David Milner
Translation by
Yoshihiko Shibata

The first film Takao Okawara directed, the psychological thriller *Super Girl Reiko* (1991), was not very successful. However, his next movie, *Godzilla vs. Mothra* (1992), brought in more people than any Godzilla film produced since *Godzilla vs. The Sea Monster* (1966) had. *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla* (1993) and *Yamato Takeru* (1994), Mr. Okawara's most recent movies, were not as successful as *Godzilla vs. Mothra*, but they did well.

Cult Movies: *Yamato Takeru* is very different from the two Godzilla films you directed.

Takao Okawara: Godzilla films are dominated by special effects. *Yamato Takeru* is a drama.

CM: The movie also is a period piece. Did it present more of a challenge to the actors than your Godzilla films because of this?

TO: That is probably true. However, I allowed Yasuko Sawaguchi and Masahiro Takashima to act the way they normally do in the movie. I treated it not as a period piece, but instead as a futuristic drama imagined by people living in the past. (Mr. Takashima, who also appears in *Gunhed* (1989), *Zipang* (1990) and *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla*, plays Yamato Takeru, the heir to the Yamato throne. Ms. Sawaguchi, who also appears in *Godzilla 1985* (1984), plays Oto Tachibana, Yamato Takeru's consort.)

CM: Did you select Ms. Sawaguchi and Mr. Takashima for their roles?

TO: They were both cast before I was chosen to direct *Yamato Takeru*.

CM: I've heard that the battle between Yamato Takeru and the Kumaso gami (Kumaso god) was shot not by the special effects staff, but instead by you and your staff. Is this true? (The Kumaso tribe lived in Kyushu.)

TO: The battle was shot entirely by me and my staff. The Kumaso gami originally was going to be a giant spider, but I felt that it instead should be a creature made of stone.

CM: Did you come up with the idea to have the hands of the Kumaso gami turn into a bow and arrows?

TO: That was my idea.

CM: How much time was Kioko Ogino given to score *Yamato Takeru*?

TO: She started writing the music on May 20th. It was recorded on June 5th. (*Yamato Takeru* opened in Japan on July 9th.)

CM: Did you allow her to see the rushes?

TO: Since she was given so little time in which to do her work, I did allow her to see the rushes.

CM: How did you become aware of Ms. Ogino?

TO: I was introduced to her by a producer who works for Toho Music Publishing. (The Toho Company Limited produced *Yamato Takeru*. It also produced all of the Godzilla films.)

CM: Did you ask Akira Ifukube to compose the score? (Mr. Ifukube, one of Japan's most prominent classical composers, wrote the music for about half of the Godzilla films. He also worked on *Rodan* (1956), *War Of The Gargantuas* (1966) and many of Toho's other giant monster movies.)

TO: I did consider asking him to score *Yamato Takeru*, but since it was going to be so different from the Godzilla films, I decided to ask a different composer.

CM: I've heard that *Yamato Takeru* originally was going to be made much sooner than it was. Is this true?

TO: The movie was going to be made right after *Godzilla vs. Mothra*. It was going to mark the anniversary of Toho Geino, an organization made up of actors and actresses who work for Toho.

CM: Was the first version of the script for *Yamato Takeru* very different from the final one? (The script was written by Wataru Mimura. He also wrote *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla*.)

TO: A large number of changes were made. *Yamato Takeru* originally was going to be a remake of *Japan Birth* (1959). (Both films are based on *Kojiki*, the mythological story of the creation of Japan.) However, since the movie was going to be the first of three films based on *Kojiki*, I felt that it would be better to focus more on the relationship between Yamato Takeru and Oto Tachibana. So, I



omitted several of the events in the myth and inserted a number of new ones. For example, I decided to have Yamato Takeru retrieve the magatama (comma-shaped jewel), the circular mirror and the sword. (They are the three symbols of the Japanese imperial family.) I also decided to provide him with two companions skilled in the martial arts. (Seiryu, the older of the two, is played by Miyashi Ishibashi. Genbu is played by Bengal.)

CM: Is Toho going to try to export *Yamato Takeru*?

TO: A Taiwanese motion picture distribution company has already purchased rights to it.

CM: Which scenes in *Godzilla 1985* did you direct? (Mr. Okawara worked on the movie as an assistant director.)

TO: I just helped the other directors.

CM: Did you and Ms. Sawaguchi work together while you were shooting the film? (Ms. Sawaguchi plays Naoko Okumura, a woman who takes part in conducting research which leads to the discovery that Godzilla can be lured with a sound simulating the chirping of birds.)

TO: No – not at all.

CM: I've heard that Kenji Sahara originally was

going to be in *Godzilla vs. Mothra*. Is this true? (Mr. Sahara appears in *Rodan*, *Destroy All Monsters* (1968), *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla* and a number of Toho's other monster movies.)

TO: It's certainly possible. Toho always tries to arrange for actors who worked on the earlier Godzilla films to appear in the newer ones.

CM: Were any of the other actors who worked on Toho's earlier monster movies originally going to be in *Godzilla vs. Mothra* or *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla*?

TO: Frankie Sakai was going to be in *Godzilla vs. Mothra*. (Mr. Sakai plays a reporter named "Bulldog" Tsinchan in *Mothra* (1961).)

CM: Why didn't he work on the film?

TO: He had a scheduling conflict.

CM: Was it your idea to introduce the baby Godzilla in *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla*?

TO: Toho wanted to bring Minya back, but I didn't. So, I redesigned him. (Minya, the son of Godzilla, appears in *Son Of Godzilla* (1967), *Destroy All Monsters* and *Godzilla's Revenge* (1969).)

CM: *Godzilla vs. Mothra* is a lighthearted film, but *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla* is a very serious one. Did you intend to have the two movies turn out to be so different from each other?

TO: *Mothra* is a very feminine monster, but *MechaGodzilla* is hard and solid. Because of this, I did intend to have *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla* turn out to be more serious than *Godzilla vs. Mothra*. However, I used the baby Godzilla to provide some relief.

CM: Are there any improvised lines in your Godzilla films?

TO: We didn't do any improvisation while we were working on them. However, all of the bum's lines in *Godzilla 1985* were improvised. (The bum is played by Tetsuya Takeda.)

CM: There are a large number of outtakes from *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla*. What scenes are included in them?

TO: The simulated battle between the members of G-Force and Godzilla originally was going to appear to be a real one. We were going to reveal that it was simulated only at its conclusion. (G-Force is run by the United Nations Godzilla Countermeasures Center.)

Jun Sonezaki was going to fall in love with Catherine Burger. (*MechaGodzilla* co-pilot Catherine Burger is played by Sherry Sweeney. *MechaGodzilla* weapons officer Jun Sonezaki is played by Ichirota Miyagawa.)

Many shorter scenes also were not used.

CM: Are there many outtakes from *Godzilla vs. Mothra*?

TO: Fewer than there are from *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla*.

There was going to be a quarrel about Mr. Ando exploring Infant Island in a suit. It was going to provide comic relief. (Kenji Ando, an executive employed by the Marutomo Corporation, is played by Takehiro Murata.)

CM: Was there much special effects footage shot for but not included in *Yamato Takeru*?

TO: Yamato Takeru originally was going to jump onto one of the heads of the Yamata no orochi (eight-headed snake of Yamata) not just once, but twice. In addition, the sequence in which the utsu no ikusa gami (battle god of outer space) and the Yamata no orochi do battle originally was going to be much longer. (The utsu no ikusa gami is a huge metallic samurai into which Yamato Takeru and Oto Tachibana transmute.)

CM: Why was it edited?

TO: We showed a rush edit of *Yamato Takeru* to a number of Toho executives, and they felt that the sequence should be shorter. (The running time of the rush edit was one hour and fifty minutes.) So, Koichi Kawakita reworked it. I felt that his editing made the sequence a little too short, so I asked him to put several shots back into it. (Mr. Kawakita directed the special effects for *Yamato Takeru*. He also directed the special effects for the last five *Godzilla* films.)

CM: During our previous conversation, you mentioned that you got the idea to have Takuya Fujita flail his arms while you were watching *The Silence Of The Lambs* (1991). Were any of the shots in *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla* or *Yamato Takeru* inspired by shots in American movies? (Takuya Fujita, who is played by Tetsuya Bessho, flails his arms in *Godzilla vs. Mothra* after he learns that he is going to be stuck in jail for fourteen years.)

TO: I can't think of any.

CM: Did Tomoyuki Tanaka come to visit the set while the films you directed were being shot? (Mr. Tanaka produced virtually all of Toho's monster movies.)

TO: Yes.

CM: Very often?

TO: Only a few times.

CM: What is your professional relationship with Shogo Tomiyama like? (Mr. Tomiyama produced *Yamato Takeru*. He and Mr. Tanaka co-produced the last five *Godzilla* films.)

TO: Even though *Super Girl Reiko* was not very successful, I was chosen to direct *Godzilla vs. Mothra*. I think Mr. Tomiyama helped me get the job. When Toho was trying to decide upon a director for *Yamato Takeru*, I think he again helped me.

CM: Does Mr. Tomiyama come to visit the set

very often?

TO: Yes.

CM: Does he offer suggestions or just watch?

TO: He offers suggestions.

CM: What is your professional relationship with Mr. Kawakita like?

TO: We each have our own ideas. If they fit together, things go very smoothly. However, if they don't, we end up competing with each other.

CM: Do you and Mr. Kawakita work together at all while you are filming?

TO: We work together while we are planning movies, but we work separately while we are shooting them.

CM: Do you choose the special effects footage that will be used?

TO: I have the right to make the final decisions. However, I usually only offer suggestions when I see the special effects footage.

CM: Does Mr. Kawakita offer suggestions about the standard footage?

TO: Sometimes.

CM: Have you worked only as a film director?

TO: Toho employees must work for the company for six months before they officially will be hired. During my first six months with Toho, I worked at a number of different jobs. However, when I officially was hired, I was made an assistant director.

CM: Do you take part in writing the scripts for your movies?

TO: Wataru Mimura, Mr. Tomiyama and I take part in writing the scripts. After several different outlines have been written, we call in Mr. Kawakita.

CM: Many directors find it difficult to draw storyboards. Do you?

TO: Drawing storyboards is a painstaking job,

but it's one that must be done.

The sequence in which Yamato Takeru does battle with the Kumaso gami is made up of eighty different shots. Immediately after the script for *Yamato Takeru* was completed, I was asked to draw the storyboards for the sequence because without them, no one could have prepared to shoot it.

CM: During our previous conversation, you mentioned that you have a few story ideas. Are you willing to reveal any of them?

TO: I have two. One is a human drama about a zookeeper. The other is an occult comedy.

CM: Do you think either one will be made into a film anytime soon?

TO: I have sent them to Toho's planning office, but they haven't been picked up yet.

CM: Are you going to release a director's cut of *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla* on home video?

TO: I see filmmaking as the art of editing. Because of this, I am reluctant to release one on home video. (A director's cut was not released.)

CM: Are you going to direct the two sequels to *Yamato Takeru*?

TO: I unofficially have been selected to direct the first sequel.

CM: Will it be your next movie?

TO: Yes.

CM: When will it be released?

TO: That depends on when the American *Godzilla* film is released. (TriStar Pictures' *Godzilla* movie is scheduled to open during the summer of 1996.)

CM: Will Toho produce a *Godzilla* film in 1995?

TO: That also depends on when the American *Godzilla* movie is released. (Toho is going to release a new *Godzilla* film in Japan in December, 1995.)

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Jun Fukuda Interview

by David Milner

Translation by Yoshihiko Shibata

Jun Fukuda directed *Godzilla vs. The Sea Monster* (1966), *Son Of Godzilla* (1967), *Godzilla vs. Gigan* (1972), *Godzilla vs. Megalon* (1973), *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla* (1974) and several other science fiction films. He also directed a number of different crime dramas, comedies and documentaries.

Cult Movies: *Godzilla vs. The Sea Monster* originally was going to be called *King Kong vs. Ebirah*. Why was King Kong replaced with Godzilla?

Jun Fukuda: Godzilla was in the first draft of the script that I saw. I don't know what the earlier drafts were like.

CM: What changes were made after you received the script?

JF: All I can remember is that making *Godzilla vs. The Sea Monster* was like pouring two cups of water into one. I had to cut one sequence after another.

CM: Do you remember which specific sequences you cut?

JF: I don't remember.

My memories about *Godzilla vs. The Sea Monster* are not very clear because I was working on a script for a television drama while we were shooting the film. As soon as we completed it, I went to the NHK studios and confined myself so I could finish the script. (NHK is Japan's public television network.)

Toho sent me a copy of the VHS tape edition of *Godzilla vs. The Sea Monster* when it was released. It was like opening up an old wound. I didn't watch the tape. Instead, I gave it to my daughter as a present. (The Toho Company Limited produced all of the Godzilla movies. It also produced *Rodan* (1956), *Mothra* (1961), *Ghidrah - The Three-Headed Monster* (1964), *King Kong Escapes* (1967) and many other science fiction films.)

CM: Do you remember why Minya was created? (Minya, the *Son Of Godzilla*, appears in *Son Of Godzilla*, *Destroy All Monsters* (1968) and *Godzilla's Revenge* (1969).)

JF: We wanted to take a new approach. So, we gave Godzilla a child. We thought that it would be a little strange if Godzilla had a daughter, so we instead gave him a son. We focused on the relationship between Godzilla and his son throughout *Son Of Godzilla*.

CM: Was Minya created solely to appeal to children?

JF: No - we just wanted to take a different approach.

CM: Were the production budgets for the Godzilla movies produced during the 1970s smaller than those for the Godzilla movies produced during the 1960s?

JF: The production budgets for the 1970s Godzilla films were about half of those for the 1960s Godzilla films.

CM: Did you make the decision to include only stock music in *Godzilla vs. Gigan* (1972)? (The music was written by Akira Ifukube, one of Japan's most prominent classical composers. He scored *Godzilla - King Of The Monsters* (1954), *Terror Of MechaGodzilla* (1975), *Godzilla vs. Ghidrah* (1991) and many other monster movies.)

JF: Tomoyuki Tanaka made the decision. He was trying to save money. (Mr. Tanaka produced virtually all of Toho's monster movies.)

CM: How much time did you spend working on *Godzilla vs. Megalon* (1973)?



JF: We spent four months working on the film. The production budget for it was even smaller than the one for *Godzilla vs. Gigan*, so we had a very difficult time making the movie.

CM: How much time did you spend working on the other science fiction films you directed?

JF: About five or six months.

CM: In the trailer for *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla*, there is an alternate to the sequence in the movie showing MechaGodzilla emerging from its disguise as Godzilla. Why was the alternate sequence shot?

JF: The trailer was directed by the chief assistant director (Jozaburo Nishikawa), so I don't know much about it.

CM: Ishiro Honda took part in the planning of *The Secret Of The Telegian* (1960). Was he originally going to direct the film? (Mr. Honda directed many of the monster movies produced by Toho. He also directed a number of war films and documentaries and worked very closely with director Akira Kurosawa on *Kagemusha - The Shadow Warrior* (1980), *Ran* (1985), *Akira Kurosawa's Dreams* (1990), *Rhapsody In August* (1991) and *Maadadayo* (1993).)

JF: It is possible.

CM: Were you officially promoted to director before you began working on *The Secret Of The Telegian*?

JF: It was Toho's policy at the time to require assistant directors to direct three films before they would be promoted. Assistant directors were Toho employees, but once they became directors, they would have to quit. They then would have to sign contracts with Toho that came up for renewal annually.

The Secret Of The Telegian was my second movie. My third one was very successful, so I was promoted. (*Fangs Of The Underworld* (1962) was written in part by Mr. Fukuda.)

CM: Why wasn't the sequel to *The Secret Of The Telegian*, *Transparent Man Against Flame Man*, produced? (Mr. Fukuda took part in writing it as well.)

JF: The script wasn't accepted. The film wasn't as successful as Toho had hoped it would be. That's why the sequel wasn't produced.

CM: In what year was the sequel written?

JF: It was written four or five years after *The Secret Of The Telegian* was released.

CM: Do you remember anything about the plot?

JF: I just remember that the transparent man

was pitted against a flame man.

CM: *E.S.P./SPY* (1974) was written long before it was produced. Why wasn't it produced sooner?

JF: It was just a matter of timing.

CM: In the book *Japanese Science Fiction, Fantasy And Horror Films*, Stuart Galbraith IV suggests that *The War In Space* (1977) is based at least in part on *Atragon* (1963). Is this true? (In both movies, invading forces are countered with a ship commanded by a man who at first refused to fight.)

JF: Yes - it is.

CM: Why was Masaru Sato chosen to score *Godzilla vs. The Sea Monster*, *Son Of Godzilla* and *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla*? (Mr. Sato also scored a number of Akira Kurosawa's films.)

JF: Mr. Sato and I had been very close friends for a long time. I asked him to compose the music for those movies because I wanted them to have a different feel than Mr. Honda's Godzilla films. Mr. Sato's music is a bit lighter than Mr. Ifukube's.

CM: So you made the decision to ask Mr. Sato to score the movies?

JF: Yes - that's right. Mr. Tanaka didn't agree with the decision.

CM: Did he want you to ask Mr. Ifukube to score the films?

JF: Yes.

CM: How would you say your approach to making Godzilla films was different from Mr. Honda's?

JF: I generally think of my movies as action dramas.

CM: What was your professional relationship with Eiji Tsuburaya like? (Mr. Tsuburaya directed the special effects for *Godzilla - King Of The Monsters*, *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962), *Godzilla vs. The Sea Monster* and many of Toho's other science fiction films. He also founded Tsuburaya Productions, Inc., which produced *Ultraman* (1966), *Mighty Jack* (1968) and a number of other science fiction television series.)

JF: We were just like father and son. He offered suggestions about my work. He always took very good care of me.

CM: Did Mr. Tsuburaya act solely in an advisory role on *Son Of Godzilla* or was he more actively involved in the production of the movie? (Mr. Tsuburaya is credited as the "special skill supervisor" on the film. Teisho Arikawa is credited as the "special skill director." He previously had worked on many of Toho's monster movies as a special effects cinematographer.)

JF: Mr. Tsuburaya was actively involved in the production of the film.

CM: Was Mr. Tanaka actively involved in the production of the Godzilla movies you directed?

JF: He didn't take part in production. However, he did take part in preparing the production budgets.

CM: Did Mr. Tanaka come to visit the set very often?

JF: Yes - quite often.

CM: Would he offer suggestions or just watch?

JF: He would just watch.

CM: What was your professional relationship with Teruyoshi Nakano like? (Mr. Nakano worked as an assistant to Eiji Tsuburaya for many years. Shortly after Mr. Tsuburaya died in 1970, Mr. Nakano was placed in charge of special effects.)

JF: We worked together very closely. After reading the scripts, I would ask Mr. Nakano to draw

the storyboards. I would check them, and sometimes I would ask Mr. Nakano to make revisions. Once we both found the storyboards acceptable, we would begin filming.

CM: The two of you worked together during planning, but once shooting got underway, you worked separately. Is this correct?

JF: Yes - that's correct. However, we did ask each other for advice whenever we ran into problems.

CM: Did you or Mr. Nakano choose which special effects footage would be used?

JF: The final decisions were mine. If I didn't like the editing that Mr. Nakano had done, I would ask him to make revisions. I once even asked him to reshoot a sequence.

CM: I've heard that very little improvisation was allowed during filming. Is this true?

JF: It was very difficult to do improvisation because of the tight shooting schedule and the nature of the movies.

CM: Can you remember any improvised lines that made it into one of the Godzilla films you directed?

JF: I can't remember any such lines.

CM: You directed a number of episodes of the *Zone Fighter* (1973) television series. (The series is very much like *Ultraman*. Godzilla, Ghidrah and the cyborg Gigan all make guest appearances in it.)

JF: You don't have to mention that show!

CM: Just one question! How was this different from working on the monster movies you directed?

JF: The shooting schedule was very tight.

People watch television on a small screen in a well-lit room instead of a large one in a dark

theater. Because of this, I think television is not the right medium for giant monster movies.

CM: Which of the science fiction films you directed are your favorites?

JF: None of them.

CM: If you had to pick one?

JF: *The Secret Of Telegian*.

CM: Which of the Godzilla films you directed are your favorites?

JF: None of them.

CM: Are there any with which you are especially unhappy?

JF: Many.

CM: Do you feel that Toho should not have produced any sequels to *Godzilla - King Of The Monsters*?

JF: I don't think that any sequels to the first Godzilla movie should have been made.

CM: With which of the actors did you most enjoy working?

JF: I enjoyed working with the entire cast of *Godzilla vs. The Sea Monster*. However, both Akihiko Hirata and Kumi Mizuno stood out. They were very impressive. (Ms. Mizuno, who also appears in *Godzilla vs. Monster Zero* (1965), *War Of The Gargantuas* (1966) and several other science fiction films, plays Dayo, a native girl. Mr. Hirata, who also appears in *Godzilla - King Of The Monsters*, *Terror Of MechaGodzilla* and many other monster movies, plays squad leader in the Red Bamboo, the paramilitary organization producing nuclear weapons.)

CM: How did you like working with Robert Dunham? (Mr. Dunham plays Antonio, the leader of an underground civilization called Seatopia, in *Godzilla vs. Megalon*. He also appears in *Mothra* and *Dagora - The Space Monster* (1964).)

JF: He was not a professional actor. He was just an American living in Tokyo.

CM: You directed a number of comedies. Did you enjoy working on them more than you enjoyed working on monster movies? (Among the comedies Mr. Fukuda directed are *Young Guy In Japan* (1962) and *Young Guy In Hawaii* (1963).)

JF: Yes!

CM: Have you worked only as a film director?

JF: I've worked only as an assistant director and a director.

CM: I've heard that you recently finished working on a documentary. Is this correct?

JF: I recently finished working on two different documentaries. One tells the tragic story of a warlord living in a small country during the medieval era. The other is a documentary about the Sahara desert that was commissioned by a Moroccan television station. No people are shown in it. Instead, only images of the desert are shown.

CM: Have you seen the newer Godzilla movies? (Among them are *Godzilla vs. Biollante* (1989), *Godzilla vs. Mothra* (1992) and *Godzilla vs. Space Godzilla* (1994).)

JF: No.

CM: How do you feel about TriStar Pictures producing a Godzilla film in the United States?

JF: I'm looking forward to seeing it. It is easy for me to imagine what Mr. Nakano would do with the movie, but I can't imagine what Americans would do with it. I think that Godzilla films must be produced by Americans.

CM: Is that because Godzilla films cost so much to make?

JF: Yes - that's right. (Production budgets for movies made in the United States generally are ten times those for Japanese movies.)

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The Samurai Film: A Neglected Genre Part 3:

Kaidan (Ghost Stories): Female Samurai

by Chris D.

For all the discussions and comparisons, the similarities and differences between the Samurai film and the Western, one deeply rooted identical trait is the conception of hero. However grungy, cynical, rude he/she is in both genres, the bottom line is self-sacrifice. The hero/heroine is willing to go all the way, to fight the evil oppressor, to forego comfort, wealth, familial/conjugal love, freedom, and even life, itself (however reluctantly). And for what reason? To save a way of life or to save the lives of others. How the story evolves depends on the hero/heroine's individual circumstances. What draws the audience in, what creates dynamic tension and suspense comes with how human the filmmakers make their characters. The selfish vs. the selfless warring within the psyche. In fact, the amount of reluctance a hero/heroine manifests in resisting their role of savior and the time they spend on such soul-searching exponentially increases the audience's absorption in the tale. Why? Because the more human, i.e. vulnerable and imperfect, the hero/heroine; the more human, i.e. not-all-bad, the villains are, the more we're able to identify with them.

In America, the mythos of the Western evolved from the pioneer spirit, the role model of the immigrant fleeing from a land of oppression to a new land of freedom where one could pursue a way of life in regards to commerce, religion, familyhood without government interference. From the first generation frontiersman in the pioneer dream of expansion came the second



Yotsuya Ghost Story, 1927. Directed by Kichiro Sato.



Kanto Woman's Bad Temper, 1969 (Kanto Onna Dokonjo) #4 of 4.

generation gunfighter: displaced wanderers, especially after the Civil War, whom were alienated and disconnected by the horrors of a chaotic slaughter organized on a mass scale. Men who possessed the skill to fight and slay, then left in the lurch when deprived of their military status. How they adjusted to peacetime determined their status of hero, villain or just normal, everyday, peace-loving citizen.

Of course, the first two are what the mythmakers, the storytellers were/are interested in: the lawmen, train robbers, bank robbers, bounty hunters, killers who became lawmen and the killers who stayed killers. Obviously the Civil War wasn't the only catalyst — it *did* act as horrible nationwide trauma that affected virtually every family in North America. America also had its schizophrenic policy towards Native Americans with do-gooder contingents on the one side wishing to keep treaties and reserve vast, fertile land parcels for the Indian and genocidal militarists, industrialists and land/robber barons on the other side who believed "the only good Indian is a dead Indian." Think how this strange duality played out in the brains of most citizens. However, just the absence of law and the chaos it spawned in westward expansion served as perfect environment to create heroes-and-villains mythos.

And the only other environment since ancient Greece that was as ideal for the development of such heroes-and-villains mythologies was in Japan. First the clan wars in the 1500s into the early 1600s where the samurai warrior really solidified the code of *bushido* — the feudal code of honor and loyalty to one's master/clan above all else, including one's own family. Then came the comparative peace of most of the 17th, all of the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries — a result of the Tokugawa shogunate, a regime of iron clad rule. During their centuries of absolute power, the Tokugawas perfected a system of safeguards guaranteed to crush and suppress at the first symptoms of unrest. A nefarious cutthroat program of checks-and-balances made up of *ninja* spies, assassins and public executions. A *daimyo* (lord) was appointed by the Shogun to rule over a given province, protected in their castle and abetted by their clan. A clan was a *daimyo's* extended family and, for all practical purposes, his own private army.

Every other year or so a *daimyo* would have to spend a year in the capital, a practice the Shogunate employed to keep an eye on their underlings. Even still, corruption was rife in the hinterlands. But ultimately both the *daimyos* and the Shogunate could be held equally accountable for an increasingly unfair/unrealistic scale of taxes on the farmers. What with the straitjacket strictures of protocol and proper behavior for *daimyos* that proved-impossible-to-live-by, the impossible push-pull debt/obligation in unjust taxes represented by rice crop confiscation, the emergence of a financially stronger-and-stronger merchant class, more and more samurais saw the dissolving of their clans.

In the last one hundred years of the Tokugawa regime (it toppled in the 1860s), stories of *ronin*, or wandering, masterless samurai, became popular. These *ronin* might end up becoming bodyguards/mercenaries — *yojimbo*s — for rich merchants, lower echelon officials or newly appointed lords without clans of their own; they might become thieves, artists/artisans, or sword instructors; or *matatabi* — roving lone-wolf gamblers drifting from village to village in search of fortune.

There were also stories of clans and their retainers still glorying in *bushido* and allegiance to the Shogun; stories of misfits — swordsmen brought up inside a clan since birth but unable to fit into the mold; stories of swordsmen who were orphans adopted by a clan and brought up in the *daimyo's* or retainer's family only to have their bastard status eat away at their peace of mind, or some jealous fellow clansman using the protagonist's illegitimate status to throw a monkey wrench into their consideration as heir; tales of swordsmen and ladies-in-waiting brought up to marry arranged mates only to be unable to forget their true loves, thus instigating all manner of tragedy and, more than likely, prodigious bloodshed; accounts of men and women brought up in poverty to become thieves, cutthroats, brigands or shanghaied and trained as *ninja* spies/assassins.

Probably more than any other culture, Japan has the historical backdrop that provides a perfect psychological environment for the creation of the tortured hero/heroine (or anti-hero). A society that literally for centuries has stressed the group over the individual, oftentimes to the

point of familial destruction and unbearable transgressions against the individual conscience. Hundreds of years of forced practices to promote personal sacrifice for the good of the nation which in reality have too often turned out to be fascist scams rooted in bureaucratic hypocrisy, all to push along imperialist agendas.

Lest this begin to sound too much like Poly Sci 101, what I'm getting at is much of the hero/heroine mythology in Japan is rooted in a much more aggressive, and sometimes perverse, assertion of individual identity — however disguised and sublimated — than many Western cultures. Many times in Japanese genre films/books/comics, heroes/anti-heroes will end up making the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives to save others, not because they have to or are supposed to, but because after much wrestling with conscience, they have come to the conclusion it's the only path they can take.

There are two very well-known Hollywood schlockmeisters famous for their extremely successful, big-budget sci-fi and adventure films, films targeted primarily at children or "Gee, goo-goo, gah-gah the inner-child-in-all-of-us" who have openly acknowledged their plot-spinning debts to such *chanbara* (swordplay cinema) as *Seven Samurai* and *The Hidden Fortress*, elements of which they managed to effectively homogenize into archetypal pabulum for lowest-common-denominator mass consumption. Unfortunately, besides one of their number helping a great Japanese director find financing for one of his films, this acknowledged interest has not served to attract very many new fans to the samurai film as a genre.

There are many truly fine directors such as Martin Scorsese, John Millus, Paul Schrader (also a *yakuza* film fanatic), the late Sam Peckinpah, Francis Ford Coppola, Clint Eastwood et al. who have declared themselves avid samurai film aficionados. Clint Eastwood, in fact, had for years retained the rights to remake the *Lone Wolf and Child* (*Kozure Okami*) series but apparently was never able to make the elements coalesce into any coherent Western celluloid iconography. Doubtless the characters' class distinctions and feudal historical background posed problems. Still, making comprehensive to Western minds the complex spiritual ideas, the saga's transcendental nihilism, undoubtedly proved an even more insurmountable obstacle. Being able to transpose the story of a stoic, invincible warrior, a man suffused with integrity as well as lethal cold-bloodedness wan-



Ghost of Yotsuya, 1959. Directed by Nobuo Nakagawa.

dering with his infant son through the gory carnage of a hellishly existential wonderland — the mind boggles how one could do it justice in both a Western (as in culture) and western (as in film genre) context. I don't know the details of why it's never happened (it would seem too late at this point), but I surmise Eastwood had the good sense and taste to realize that he would be unable to do justice to the story, especially alongside the six original Toho masterpieces. If it ain't broke, don't fix it!

Why have I brought up all this about various film directors from the West being fans of samurai films? Subconsciously, I think, I'm trying to get across to at least a few of you more adventurous souls out there that it's okay to take a bit of initiative and search out some of these cinematic masterpieces... subtitles notwithstanding. For not only is the samurai film a neglected genre in the U.S., but also in its country of origin. Here in America we have access to most older American films what with specialty video shops, the American Movie Channel, etc... But in Japan, the only other country in the world with a film legacy comparable in quality and quantity to the U.S., the younger generation have

all but abandoned their cinematic roots. Open up most Japanese film magazines and you won't find Japanese films, you'll find 95% American films, 4% Euro and Hong Kong films and perhaps 1% newer Japanese cinema. No older Japanese films at all. The somewhat intellectual/artistic *Kinema Junpo* (which has been around for decades) is the sole exception. And Japanese video stores (at least in Southern California) are almost as bad — most have a tiny selection of older *yakuza* films, with one or two even having a handful of samurai films. Nevertheless, we're talking miniscule. Before going on to this article's main topics, two sub-genres of the samurai film, let me make one more statement to the younger, Generation X Japanese who are more familiar with *The Magnificent Seven* than *Seven Samurai*, more familiar with *Star Wars* than *Hidden Fortress*, more familiar with *Wolf* than *Lone Wolf and Child* — Use It Or Lose It!!! Stop being ashamed of a cinematic legacy every bit as spectacular and possessed of magic as America, stop being ashamed of some of the coolest films ever made!

Kaidan (Ghost Story)

Kai=strange, mysterious *Dan*=story

In and of itself, the term *kaidan* doesn't automatically evoke images of samurai swordsmen, period costuming and candle-lit interiors. But, as is the case with many horror films from the West, particularly Great Britain, the time/setting for *kaidan* opuses quite often ended-up pre-20th century. Japan, even more than Europe, delved into their treasure trove of ancient folk tales of ghosts, demons, imps, goblins, vampires and shape-shifters when looking for scenarios for the cinema. During the '50s and '60s, period horror films outnumbered contemporary, or *gendai*, horror films three-to-one. One reason is that, until the mid-'60s, in-period stories of any genre — especially adventure (samurai), love, *yakuza*, and sometimes even comedies — were the most popular. Also, the existence of ghosts and monsters automatically conjures up the irrational, an earlier time when strange, seemingly extraordinary happenings were attributed to the supernatural rather than being investigated coolly and calmly in a scientific manner. Gradually, contemporary subject matter took hold in Japanese horror cinema, going from about 50/50 circa 1970 to nearly 100% today. In-period *kaidans* do occasionally still pop up.

(continued)



100 Monsters, 1968. Directed by Kimiyoshi Yasuda.

but, alas, they are few and far between. Unhappily, this is now true of all Japanese period films.

The primary *kaidan* I'm going to discuss is the *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*) which has proven to be the most popular horror saga ever in Japanese cinema, being remade at least 14 times since the 1920s. To my knowledge all versions (except perhaps Kinji Fukasaku's *Yotsuya Ghost Story — Loyal 47 Ronin* from 1994) have been based on the Kabuki play *Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan* by Nanboku Tsuruya (1744-1829).

It's the story of Iemon, a samurai of dubious virtue and weak character who marries Oiwa, the daughter of a clan retainer. Almost immediately after their wedding, disaster strikes in the form of their clan being abolished by the Shogunate. Reduced to making parasols while Oiwa nurses their infant, Iemon is perpetually moody and grows more and more abusive to Oiwa. Oiwa's health, already weak, deteriorates. A commoner friend of Iemon, Naosuke, starts putting ideas into Iemon's head that his middle class life will only get worse, soon plunging him into poverty. Naosuke also desires Oiwa's sister, Osode, and schemes to kill her fiancée, Yomoshichi (in some versions with Iemon's knowledge/help, in some versions without). This accomplished, Naosuke gets Iemon thinking about looking for greener pastures re: a spouse.

One day while out walking, Iemon comes across Oume and her maid who are being victimized by ruffians. Iemon fights them off. Afterwards he is the image of humility, refusing any reward. A brief introduction is made and he departs. Naosuke has been watching, and when he has Iemon alone, immediately brings up the idea of killing Oiwa and marrying Oume. Iemon is initially repulsed by the idea and, again, depending on the version, puts up some resistance/no resistance. Naosuke obtains poison from a Dutch pharmacy (Holland was the only European nation Japan traded with until the Tokugawas fell in the 1860s) and gives it to Iemon to slip into Oiwa's tea. They've decided on poison since Iemon can't stomach the idea of slaying her with his sword.

Iemon and Naosuke decide to draw a lecherous masseur, Takuetsu, into their web. For some time he's been giving Oiwa massages for her back pains and is clearly desirous of her. Iemon explains he wants to divorce Oiwa and asks Takuetsu to seduce her so he'll have a legitimate excuse to leave and remarry. Already Oume's father is sending messages inviting Iemon to their house. It turns out she's fallen in-love with him, and her parents are only too happy since they've been unable to find her a suitable husband. Oiwa's only servant, Kohel (who is somewhat smitten with Oiwa) attempts to warn her of the chicanery afoot. But Oiwa is too trusting. Kohel leaves on an errand. Traversing an isolated rural path by a lake, he's waylaid by Naosuke and killed (some versions show Naosuke and Iemon both killing him) when Iemon accepts the invitation to come courting Oume; he lies to Oiwa, telling her he's going to see about a job. Before he leaves, he fixes Oiwa the first dose of poison in her tea, explaining it's medicine for her failing health.

Takuetsu arrives to give Oiwa her evening massage. As the massage progresses, he becomes physically more familiar with Oiwa. She doesn't immediately notice because she is becoming so ill. Takuetsu makes a grab for her inner thigh, and she slaps his hand away, reprimanding him. Turning into the light, he sees her face for the first time and shouts in horror. She has become hideously disfigured from the poison — ugly bruises and festering, bleeding sores have blossomed on her temple, puffing her eye out in a hideous swelling. She screams when she peers into her mirror then deliriously combs her hair. It comes out in large clumps, and both her and Takuetsu grow more distraught.

Meanwhile at the courtship meeting, Iemon is agreeing to marry Oume. He accepts a large sum of money from the girl's father. Back at the house, Oiwa grabs a small sword and tries to kill Takuetsu, who stumbles around the room, quaking with terror. She drives the sword/knife into the wall, and it becomes stuck. Just then Iemon returns. He's shocked at Oiwa's horrible state. Takuetsu's fear mushrooms as he hadn't known this was going to be part of the bargain. Realizing it was Iemon who poisoned her and destroyed her beauty, Oiwa lunges at him. She stumbles and falls against the stuck-in-wall-



Illusion of Blood, 1965. Directed by Shiro Toyoda.

blade, cutting her throat. In most versions, Iemon then slays Takuetsu (in some it's the servant, Kohel), surmising the masseur will serve as the ideal scapegoat.

Naosuke arrives and helps Iemon nail the bodies to either side of a large wooden door. When finished, they haul their grotesque cargo to the swampy lake where they usually fish and submerge it. The sky becomes darker, thunder cracks and lightning flashes. Oiwa's spirit appears to Iemon asking him, "Why? What wrong did I do you?" He slashes at the apparition, to Naosuke's amusement (he hasn't seen any ghosts yet). They part company. Iemon returns to his new family and marries Oume. Some versions don't even show the wedding, just an immediate cut to the bridal chamber in the family's home. Iemon is about to make love to his new wife when a snake appears on the bed. He promptly kills it, then turns back to Oume. But she's been replaced by an embracing Oiwa who asks, "Why did you kill me?" Iemon lashes at her with his sword. Turning the corpse over, he finds Oume. As result of the commotion, the father knocks on the door, but when Iemon slides it open, he sees Takuetsu (or Kohel, depending on the version). Iemon thrusts his blade, and when the body hits the floor, it's the father who is dying, drenched in blood. Outside the house, Iemon pauses in the moonlight to get his breath. Someone touches him on the shoulder. He whirls around to again face his deceased wife. Flailing away with his sword at the specter, he realizes he's just slain his new mother-in-law.

A day later at sunset, Naosuke is scrounging in the lake's marshy shallows, downstream from where they'd dumped the bodies. Not being particularly bright, he doesn't recognize Oiwa's heirloom comb and prized kimono when he digs them from clumps of seaweed. He wraps them up to take them as a gift for Osode (who, don't forget is Oiwa's sister). Iemon is totally demoralized by his state of affairs and has taken up residence in a temple, hoping to ward off the visions of ghosts he continually sees (Oume's family has joined Oiwa and Takuetsu/Kohel).

At Naosuke's, Osode is hanging her wash. Naosuke is wringing-out the newfound kimono in a bucket. He gives the comb to Osode, and

she immediately recognizes it as Oiwa's. This makes her remember a dream she had the night previous where Oiwa had appeared (Osode doesn't know yet she's dead since they live in a separate village); acting strangely and unable to speak. This clearly unnerves Naosuke, who tries to downplay the idea of the comb being Oiwa's. When Osode has her back turned, Naosuke feels something tugging at his ankle. He glances at the bucket and sees a woman's hand protruding from the water, holding tight to his leg. He screams. Osode asks what's wrong. He points at the bucket but the apparition is gone.

Just then Yomoshichi appears (Osode's fiancée Naosuke had supposedly killed). It turns out he was only wounded and was nursed back to health in a distant town. The night before, Oiwa had also come to him in a dream, revealing that Iemon and Naosuke had plotted her death and that Osode was living with Naosuke and where to find them. Naosuke panics and tries to run. Yomoshichi challenges him. Naosuke trips and is run through on Yomoshichi's sword. He confesses all as he dies. Yomoshichi and Osode dress in white, which is the customary color of death/revenge-seeking and make their way to the temple where Iemon is being tormented non-stop by the ghosts of those he's slain. Iemon fends off the avengers, racing through the forest, followed by not only the mortals but the ghosts. Finally he's stopped on the bridge over the lake. He's pierced by both Yomoshichi and Osode, then tumbles into the murky depths. In most versions, Oiwa's echoey, bloodcurdling laugh is all that is heard as the end titles fade to black.

Some Versions of the *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*).

Note: (No Tape) means not out on video at this time.

1927 *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*) Dir. Kiichiro Sato w/ Rokuro Akashi, Tsuruko Matsueda (No Tape)

1927 *Iro Alias Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Iro Wa Kamei Yotsuya Kaidan*) Dir. Kintaro Inoue w/ Ryunosuke Tsukigata, Sumiko Suzuki (Makino Productions) (No Tape)

1928 *New Yotsuya Ghost Story For The Stage* (*Shinban Yotsuya Kaidan*) Dir. Daisuke Ito w/ Taisuke Matsumoto, Naoe Fushimi (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1937 *Broken Dishes at Bancho Mansion* (*Bancho Sara Yashiki*) Dir. Taizo Fuyujima w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Kinuyo Tanaka (No Tape)

1949 *New Version of the Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Shinshaku Yotsuya Kaidan*) (Part One: 86 min, Part Two: 73 min.) Dir. Keisuke Kinoshita w/ Kinuyo Tanaka, Ken Uehara, Haruko Sugimura, Hisako Yamane, Choko Ida, Osamu Takizawa. This is one of the most critically respected versions of the story, at least in Japan. Kinoshita's reputation as one of Japan's "pantheon" directors is undoubtedly partly responsible. I haven't seen it, but, from what I've read, this version stresses the psychological deterioration of Iemon rather than any external supernatural forces. Rumor has it that this was, at least in part, due to the capricious strictures of U.S. Occupation forces, their paranoid perception that *Jidai-geki*, or "in-period" scenarios, particularly if they involved swordplay, were symptomatic of fascist sentiments. (Shochiku) (No Tape?)

1956 *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*) 86 min. Dir. Masaki Mori w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama, Haruo Tanaka, Chieko Soba, Matsuo Takahashi (Shintocho) VHS=Kurari (Clarion)

1957 *Ghost Story of Broken Dishes at Bancho Mansion* (*Kaidan Bancho Sara Yashiki* aka *Ghost of Yotsuya*) Dir. Juichi Kono w/ Chiyonosuke Azuma, Hibari Misora.

Another one I haven't seen. Kono has turned out some pretty respectable sword pictures, maintaining balance between drama/intense performances and genuinely exciting action se-

quences. However, one thing that gives me pause is the late Hibari Misora was best known for her singing prowess. Many *jidai-geki* and/or samurai films she appeared in, especially in the fifties, found some way to sneak in a musical production number, at the very least a song or two, which nine times out of 10 worked to the detriment of the picture. But Misora was also an extremely talented actress in her own right and one of the prime examples (along with the late performers Raizo Ichikawa, Hashizo Okawa and Jiro Tamiya) of a huge star and major talent subjected to insane pressures, merciless schedules, comparatively mediocre salaries worked/stressed into early graves. Not all of Misora's films had musical interludes. Sometimes, if a director found it inappropriate to the subject matter, Misora would skip the songs. Hopefully this was one of those times. (Toei) (No Tape?)

1959 *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Yotsuya Kaidan* aka *Thou Shalt Not Be Jealous*) 82 min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/ Kazuo Hasegawa, Yasuko Nakada, Yoko Uraji, Joji Tsurumi, Mieko Kondo, Hideo Takamatsu, Naritoshi Hayashi

Considering Misumi at the helm and that this was only a year before he directed Raizo Ichikawa in Parts One and Two of the masterpiece *Daibosatsu Pass* trilogy, it's frustrating that this isn't a better film. From the looks of things, I would surmise it's Kazuo Hasegawa's ego to blame. He was Daiei's biggest star in the fifties and undoubtedly could write his own ticket. But if you aren't familiar with the *Yotsuya* story, you'd never notice. Contrary to the very nature of the tale, Hasegawa's Iemon emerges as a not particularly bad guy, merely a sexist jerk tired of his wife. Yet there's no subtext, no previous history of Oiwa's family clan being abolished. It's implied that despite Iemon's samurai pride, there was no traumatic fall from social/economic grace that precipitated events. The real villains — at least as far as committing murders are concerned — are Naosuke and his henchmen.

Kohel, who has a much bigger role than in other versions I've seen, tries to warn Oiwa of the danger afoot. Unfortunately, while he's out picking up medicine for Oiwa, Naosuke and friends murder him, and Naosuke returns to Oiwa, substituting poison for the herbal remedy. She takes it and becomes horribly disfigured. Realizing poison, she tries to first stab the elderly Takuetsu (who, though weak and lecherous, doesn't really know what's going down), then one of Naosuke's sleazy *ronin* pals who's stopped in to torment her. After the *ronin*'s slashed her once, it's his sword that breaks and gets stuck in the wall. When Iemon returns home, he's repulsed by Oiwa, pushing her away from him; she falls against the blade in the wall and cuts her throat. Iemon flees, joining Oume at her home where he ends up severely wounding her when she appears to him as Oiwa. Frantic, he absconds again, this time finding Oiwa's and Kohel's bodies in the lake.

He retreats to a temple to pray for Oiwa. Meanwhile the whole episode with the comb, kimono and Oiwa's hand coming out of the laundry bucket still occurs, but with Takuetsu, not Naosuke. Yomoshichi and Osode confront Naosuke (Yomoshichi has never been wounded and separated from Osode in this version, and Naosuke has never gotten to make the moves on Osode as he'd desired). Naosuke confesses to Osode and Yomoshichi the murder of Oiwa. Iemon eavesdrops. He then kills Naosuke himself and takes his head to the bathhouse. Oume is recuperating there under the care of Ito, her patron, and Naosuke's two villainous pals. Iemon slays everyone involved in the plot to kill Oiwa.

Returning to the temple, he's followed by Osode and Yomoshichi who believe he's just as culpable as the others. But before they can confront him, Iemon finds Oiwa's kimono lying on the temple floor. It rises and descends upon him, smothering him to death.



The Cursed Pond, 1968, with Kyoko Mikage.

Despite the somewhat tame tone — compared to other versions I've seen — and the changes which unquestionably diffuse much of the tension and dramatic force of the narrative, Misumi still manages to create some unforgettably evocative images: foremost, Iemon praying in the temple when he's harassed by Oiwa's ghost, throwing his prayer beads at her which scatter, bursting into tiny balls of blue flame as they roll across the wood floor; Iemon succumbing under Oiwa's kimono, then the bluish-grey light of the temple becoming golden, illuminating the Buddha as the sun comes up.

Oddly enough, black-and-white promo stills from this production are much scarier and atmospheric than the color cinematography would lead you to believe. **1/2 VHS(Japan)=Daiei

1959 *Ghost of Yotsuya* (*Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan* aka *Yotsuya Ghost Story On The Tokaido Highway*) 96 min. (the version out on video from Hollywood Home Theater is closer to 79 min.) Dir. Nobuo Nakagawa w/ Shigeru Amachi, Kazuko Wakasugi, Noriko Kitaizawa, Junko Ikeuchi, Shuntaro Emi, Ryuzaburo Nakamura, Jun Otomo

This, along with Toyoda's '65 *Illusion of Blood*, are acknowledged as the best films of *Yotsuya Kaidan*. Although I haven't read the play, I suspect that Nakagawa has remained the most faithful to the source. In fact, the film begins with characters on a stage. Once the titles have unspooled, we leave that set and dissolve to Iemon prostrating himself in the moonlight before Oiwa's father, best friend and attendant as they walk home. Apparently he's been refused Oiwa's hand many times. The father grows angry, Iemon tries to keep his patience but when both older men call him a fool and no better than a thief, he boils over and slays them. He's about to cut down the attendant so there will be no witnesses, when the man makes a proposition to him... it's Naosuke.

We next see Iemon and Naosuke accompanying Oiwa, Osode and Osode's fiancée, Yomoshichi, down a country road in unbearably hot weather. They've been on a pilgrimage for many weeks searching for the "killer" of the girl's father. Naosuke has invented a story about a rogue who once had a run-in with their father. Oiwa is suddenly taken ill, suffering from heat prostration. Osode agrees to stay with Oiwa to rest while the men continue on to view the famous waterfall a couple miles away. Reaching the top of the waterfall, they push Yomoshichi over. Naosuke has blackmailed Iemon into helping dispatch Yomoshichi so he can move in on Osode.

In this version, Nakagawa and Amachi imbue Iemon with a tortured angst, a balance of

guilt and recrimination that, at times, almost makes Iemon a sympathetic character. Iemon constantly refuses to be part of Naosuke's sordid schemes but is so terrified of being exposed as a murderer, he ultimately caves in, sinking himself deeper and deeper into a nightmare of his own devise. This adds immeasurably to the horror of the story.

When Iemon and Naosuke return with Oiwa and Osode to Edo — where they've settled while on their revenge mission — the film pretty much follows the story elements I've already mentioned. However, both women characters are straining at the bit to find their father's killer (who the boys have explained was also Yomoshichi's slayer!) and this constantly being brought up adds to the discomfort and malaise Iemon is experiencing. At one point, Naosuke actually does track down the rogue he'd blamed — a bandit he doesn't even know — and slays the man in a bamboo grove while the man's drunk. Takuetsu is enlisted by Iemon to help him get a divorce from Oiwa. In this version, Kohel the servant doesn't appear at all. Once Oiwa dies, Iemon slays Takuetsu and nails his body to the door along with Oiwa. Nakagawa uses intense color schemes of glowing red skies, purple night, the sounds of insects, frogs, wind, thunder, rain to create an unnerving ambience and convince us that an all too obvious soundstage is anything but. Sounds and colors, too, are intensified to portray Iemon's accelerating emotional disintegration.

It's a real shame that the only video of this available is truncated, sheared of at least 15 minutes, possessed of fading color going to pink, full of scratches, and slightly squeezed (from its original scope ratio). This is one film Criterion should rush to put out on disc. I've seen a tape of the disc of Nakagawa's masterpiece, *Hell* (*Jigoku*) he made the following year, 1960, and the colors, shot compositions, everything about it is awe-inspiring. Even with this inferior, abbreviated video release I can tell this is, without question, in the same league. I've tried to order discs from Japan of both *Hell* and *Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan* but apparently they may now be out-of-print. ****American subtitled VHS=Hollywood Home Theater; VHS (Japan)=Kurari (Clarion); Laser (Japan)=Nikkatsu (probably out-of-print)

1961 *Ghost of Oiwa* (*Kaidan Oiwa No Borei* aka *Yotsuya Ghost Story*) 94 min. Dir. Tai Kato w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama, Yoshiko Fujishiro, Jushiro Konoe, Hiroko Sakuramachi, Sentaro Fushimi

The late Tai Kato is one of a handful of unsung masters of Japanese genre filmmaking. He

(continued)

made scores of *chanbara* (samurai sword pictures) in the late fifties/early sixties, turning more to the *ninkyō* (chivalrous)-type *yakuzā* film in the mid-sixties/early seventies. 1994 saw him receiving much re-evaluation in Japan with several retrospectives of his work. Stills from this version appear appropriately demented, especially with the late, great Wakayama as Iemon. The rest of the cast I'm sure is also stupendous with another great *chanbara* star, Jushiro Konoe, as the rat-bastard, Naosuke. Paul Schrader compared Tai Kato to Sergio Leone in a 1971 *Film Comment* article about *yakuzā* films; you can see that kind of vibrant visual energy jumping out of the promo stills. Unfortunately this is not out on video! (Toei) (No Tape)

1965 *Illusion of Blood* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*) 105 min. Dir. Shiro Toyoda w/ Tatsuya Nakadaï, Mariko Okada, Kanzaburo Nakamura, Junko Ikeuchi, Mayumi Ozora, Keiko Awaji, Masao Mishima, Eitaro Ozawa, Mikijiro Hira, Eijiro Tono

This is right up there with Nakagawa's '59 version, the best of many good versions. Toyoda seems to stick pretty closely to the original scenario. One problem is I haven't read the play which 99% of the films have been based on so I'm not absolutely positive.

Another problem is that I had to watch a dub off Japanese television that was not only shorn of approximately 10 minutes, but, even worse, pan-and-scanned. Toyoda composed many of his shots in intimate medium set-ups that, when deprived of a third of their visuals on the TV screen, create a claustrophobic sense of confusion. Amazing that this masterpiece transcends the horrible restrictions — I was just thinking, can you imagine any other form of art or media so bedeviled by setbacks as the wide-screen film? The answer is right there in the question: because not only is it art but media which implies commerce, which implies mediocre minds, insensitive technicians cutting corners (literally) to save money and not annoy the average consumer/viewer. Sorry for the digression.

Toyoda creates an almost unbearable descent into monstrous personal betrayal, showing the erosion of Iemon's (Nakadaï) ideals/morals/affections by greed and a kind of macho insecurity. Watching along with Takuetsu as Oiwa's (Okada) brow swells blue with seeping arterial blood, as she, groggy with staggering pain, pulls clumps of hair from her scalp then squeezes the clumps to have blood dribble between her fingers onto the tatami mat, is the kind of thing that makes the hair stand up on your neck. Once Oiwa is dead and a ghost, once Oume and her father have perished, this takes a bit different tack, having Oume's foster mother (Awaji) fall in love with Iemon, moving in with him to keep him company, to nurse him as his personality disintegrates into haunted madness.

Another different slant is the most developed subplot involving Osode (Ikeuchi) and Yomoshichi (Hira). Yomoshichi returns after recovering from near death, and Osode is overjoyed to see him alive. Naosuke (Nakamura), who is living with her, can barely contain his feelings which sway from indignant anger to fear of discovery. Yomoshichi doesn't quite know what to think, vacillating from happiness at finding his true love to sexual insecurity as he puzzles at Osode's relationship with the older Naosuke to anger at Naosuke's viciously envious jibes (he doesn't know it was Naosuke who attacked him). Osode puts two-and-two together, recalling what frightened Takuetsu had hinted at earlier in the day when he'd spotted Oiwa's dredged-from-the-swamp kimono, Naosuke's guilty demeanor and now Yomoshichi's comments about a dream of Oiwa, and deduces Oiwa's been murdered. She becomes hysterical and runs to the door. Naosuke, seeing his chance to catch Yomoshichi off guard, lunges with his knife. But Yomoshichi has intercepted Osode, pulled her to him, and



Trapped, *The Crimson Bat*, 1964, #2 of 4.

the blade pierces her in the chest. Instead, she dies immediately. Yomoshichi draws his sword, his heart breaking into fury, chases Naosuke out into the yard and kills him.

Already possessed of a strange, off-kilter reality, Toyoda pulls out the stops towards the end as the temple where Iemon and Oume's foster mother are staying and the snowy rural area of the adjoining lake become a phantasmagorical wonderland of simultaneously beautiful/grotesque color. When the inevitable happens and Iemon mistakes his new woman for Oiwa, killing her, then follows Oiwa's ghost out onto the bridge across the lake, the film makes the final jump into totally baroque, surreal dreamworld. If only this would be released in the U.S. on video. How about it, Criterion? How about a double-feature disc set of Nakagawa's '59 version and this *Illusion of Blood*? If even Toho would release it on video. Stranger things have happened but I'm not going to hold my breath. ****(A Tokyo Elga Production/Toho Release) (No Tape)

1969 *Curse of the Ghost* (*Yotsuya Kaidan — Oiwa No Borei*) 93 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Kei Sato, Kazuko Inano, Yoshitiko Aoyama, Shoji Kobayashi, Kyoko Mikage, Sonosuke Sawamura

When I first saw this I wasn't all that impressed. However, on second and third viewings, I grew more and more enamored of its austere, pared-to-the-bone visual style. Something undoubtedly predicated by a low budget and diabolically hurried schedule, but metamorphosed in Mori's hands into a straight-ahead no-nonsense parable of self-betrayal and guilt. Mori turns liability into attribute, striving for simplicity in set-decoration and color scheme and an unrelentingly focused microscope on Kei Sato's grimly mean-spirited Iemon, a man hiding from his feelings, from any tenderness or love because that's not the samurai way — at least the way he's been taught. Iemon's betrayals, even more than in Nakagawa's or Toyoda's versions, are a function of the feudal-system-in-collapse in a microcosm.

Here Iemon and Oiwa are well-off when married at the beginning, but all too soon Oiwa's family clan is abolished. Her father goes from rich garments to poor brown muslin kimonos. Nevertheless he keeps his ideals and pride because it's all he has. Iemon hires thugs to put on a show, threatening Oume from a rich family so he can save her and curry favor. When his father-in-law witnesses Iemon paying off the ruffians behind a temple, the die is cast. Iemon

kills him and the machinery is set in motion. Kohei ends up as the anti-thesis of Iemon, a commoner well-educated, but sensitive and caring, not polluted by bushido and ambition. When Oiwa dies, it's Kohei who joins her being nailed on the other side of the door, not Taketsu. One eye-catching motif that Mori throws in after Oiwa and Kohei become ghosts, is the advent of flying aquamarine balls of fire, devil lights that whirl around Iemon, tormenting him. Because of Mori's more-straightforward-than-usual drive, this is probably one of the easiest versions to follow without subtitles. *** VHS (Japan)=Datei 1981 *Demonic Summer — Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Masho No Natsu — Yotsuya Kaidan Yori*) 95 min. Dir. Yukio (Takao?) Ninagawa w/ Kenichi Hagihara, Keiko Sekine, Masako Natsume, Renji Ishibashi

A massively re-hauled version of the story with a self-deprecating humor (de-rigueur for just about any "serious" Japanese film between 1980 and 1991 — in other words a feeling of self-consciousness comes across, being ashamed of the culture and source material so it's made fun of instead of taken seriously). Fortunately, this is one of the few times I've seen such irreverent rearrangement of story elements work.

Hagihara plays a dissolute, manic depressive samurai whom you'd swear was drunk-on-his-ass even when he isn't. A decadent contingent of fringe-dwelling misfits continually congregate at the house where he lives with his common-law wife, Oiwa and their baby. When Iemon (Hagihara) and Naosuke (Ishibashi) commit their first murders, the two acts happen simultaneously within a hundred yards of each other behind separate woodpiles on a sunset-illuminated beach. Both are arguing with their victims, then begin delivering physical blows and before you know it, the men are dead. Emerging from behind their respective piles of lumber, they scare-the-hell out of each other. Each now has something on the other, so they arrange things to look as if the two men killed each other. Things continue at a seemingly normal pace, but the two "friends" slowly start to become unraveled inside.

Kohei is a fellow party animal that Iemon, in the presence of everyone else, decides to gag, tie up and throw into the cellar. Though Oiwa's the only kind, decent person, she's completely ineffectual, lacking in the self-esteem and confidence to ever challenge the insanity of her mate.

When the rich girl, Oume, first catches sight of Iemon, it's not through any chivalrous rescue of her. A self-centered, psychotic brat, she's just finished pitching a fit with a pair of scissors on her family's veranda and accidentally sees Iemon strolling down the busy street. Her parents are relieved that she's spotted someone she wants to marry and immediately make arrangements to find Iemon. Once this "good fortune" befalls Iemon, his entire coterie of "friends" frantically try to find ways of jumping on his coattails. Iemon cruelly relegates Oiwa to the role of "sister," still keeping her in the house with their child but with no more function than a housekeeper. She stoically bears it. But Oume, who at certain times is framed to resemble a demon, cannot tolerate Oiwa's presence. Iemon conspires with Takuetsu (a skinny young masseur that goes against the usual aging, overweight stereotype of the role) and Naosuke to do away with her.

Meanwhile, Oiwa's sister, Osode, has become a prostitute to help make ends meet. Naosuke, who's hopelessly in-love with her, is reduced to waiting next to a hole in the next room's paper wall while Osode, bored and restless goes through her routine. Oiwa finally starts feeling the poison Takuetsu/Iemon have been feeding her while out at a theater performance with Iemon and Oume. The Kabuki play coincidentally is a dead-ringer for *Yotsuya Kaidan*.

Dying, Oiwa ends up inspiring Iemon into a lunatic frenzy. First he slays Takuetsu, then,

seeing Oiwa's ghost, kills Oume and at last her parents. He tips over a lantern and sets the whole house ablaze. Yomoshichi has returned to find Osode living with Naosuke. The two men fight and Osode is accidentally killed. Overwrought with grief, Naosuke lets down his guard and is killed by Yomoshichi. Yomoshichi splits. Drunken with visions of ghosts, Iemon crawls into Naosuke's darkened room, passes out between the corpses of his two friends whom he believes to be asleep. Yomoshichi awakens him the next morning. The two draw their swords, drag their brawl outside, trip down a steep sand dune (where they both comically nearly break their necks), and finally kill each other on the beach. A parting shot homes in on the ghost of disfigured Oiwa holding her baby, sitting amongst the blackened timbers and glowing embers of their destroyed house. ***VHS (Japan)=Shochiku.

1994 *Yotsuya Ghost Story — The Loyal 47 Ronin* (*Yotsuya Kaidan — Chushingura Gaiden*) Dir. Kinji Fukasaku w/ Koichi Sato, Hayaki Takaoka, Renji Ishibashi, Tsunehiko Watase, Masahiko Tsugawa, Eriko Watanabe, Takahiro Tamura, Hiroyuki Sanada.

Fukasaku, who made another version of *Chushingura* called *Fall of Ako Castle* (*Akojo Danzetsu*) (1978, 140 min. VHS (Japan)=Toei), blends the tale with the second-most filmed saga in Japan. Seeing the video box art and the ads in *Kinema Junpo* magazine (when it was first released last year), you get the impression it's more of a *Loyal 47 Ronin* film than the *Yotsuya Ghost Story*. Nevertheless, Fukasaku balances the two scenarios fairly well.

Sato plays Iemon, who becomes a masterless ronin when his mentor and master, the young lord Asano is forced to commit *hara-kiri* after attacking Lord Kira (Takahiro Tamura) in the Pine Corridor of the Shogun's Edo castle. Although we see the other members of the clan methodically plan their revenge on Kira in various clandestine subterfuges, and although we're privy to head loyal retainer (Masahiko Tsugawa) faking a life of dissolution to throw Kira's spies off the track, it's Iemon the camera concentrates on. Iemon plays the *biwa* (guitar-like string instrument) and, for a time, performs for coins on the street with two fellow ronin. It's also part of the revenge plot for them to appear destitute. But, even though he was close to Asano, he begins to feel alienated from the idea of vengeance. He hires Oiwa (Takaoka), a young prostitute as a housekeeper, and she almost immediately falls in love with him.

Events quickly spiral downwards into an inferno of nightmarish happenings. A mad dog gets loose in the street, terrifying everyone in its path. It makes a beeline for Iemon's house and ends up killing one of the older *Ako ronin* (several of the retainers are living there with Iemon). Shortly thereafter, Iemon rescues rich stranger, Oume,



Quick Draw Okatsu, 1969.

from the usual band of villains, but his precious *biwa* is broken in half in the process. Oume is mute and barely sane, a demonic-appearing creature with rows of sharp little teeth and a kind of shimmering heat/haze aura around her. Iemon, becoming for all intents and purposes bewitched, is ripe for a 'possessed' seduction having already lost all his ideals over the preceding months.

The poisoning of Oiwa occurs when Oume's monstrous maid approaches the lecherous peeping tom, Takuetsu, with a gold coin and bids him give Oiwa a potion (implying that it's an aphrodisiac). When the toxin takes effect, Oiwa goes into screaming convulsions, spewing blood from between her legs and developing the hideous facial lesions. She attacks Takuetsu but falls on her own knife. The returning Iemon slays Takuetsu. Oume's father has some of Lord Kira's men help Iemon nail the bodies to a door and throw it in the lake.

Iemon's wedding to Oume is an overt panorama of crossing over into a demon world. Oume does a dance before a mesmerized Iemon, at times exhibiting evidence that she's a dreaded fox ghost. Unknown to Iemon, various members of Lord Kira's contingent of bodyguards/samurais preside over the celebration from the shadows. They're given a corpse-like, bluish cast to their features, bestowing a melodramatic abandonment of ambiguity so we'll be certain that these people are directly linked to hell. That night the other remaining 47 ronin are preparing for their attack on Kira's mansion.

Before dawn, Iemon has done the requisite slaying of Oume and family, mistaking them for Oiwa's ghost. Hysterical handmaidens alert Lord Kira's men who search for Iemon. They find him huddled in a dark corner in his home and extort help from him against the *Ako* contingent, forcing him to kill the *Ako* head retainer. Iemon goes to Tsugawa's to kill, draws his blade but is himself slain by his *Ako* brothers. He becomes a ghost, too, and with Oiwa observes Tsugawa leading the loyal samurai into Kira's stronghold.

This is where I found some of the weakest moments of the film. Oiwa is given supernatural, superhuman powers to blast various squads of Kira's samurai, intervening when certain *Ako* clan avengers are endangered: Fukasaku really destroys the balance between the ethereal spirit world and the violent world of physical humanity. It's unexplainably jarring in what otherwise is a very good film. These effects, obviously achieved through digital computer work, have a different look and have not been integrated particularly well into the "normal" fight footage. Also, the whole climactic massacre seems hurried, the pacing destroyed. Anyway — once the clan avengers have beheaded Kira and are disappearing down the street, some of them gaze back as if they actually see Iemon and Oiwa forlornly standing there at the mansion's gates. ***VHS (Japan)=Shochiku.

That's it for coverage of the *Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*). Here's a listing of some other *kaidan*: Because of limitations of space and time, this represents perhaps only 35 to 40% of the *kaidan*s filmed in Japan.

1953 *Ugetsu* (*Ugetsu Monogatari* or *Stories of Moonlight and Rain*) 96 min. Dir. Kenji Mizoguchi w/ Masayuki Mori, Machiko Kyo, Kinuyo Tanaka (see issue #13 of *Cult Movies*, Part 2 of this article under Mizoguchi) VHS/Laser (Japan)=Daiei; American subtitled VHS=Home Vision, Laser=Criterion.

1953 *Ghost Cat of Arima Palace* (*Kaibyō Arima Goten*) 49 min. Dir. Ryohel Arai w/ Takako Irie, Kotaro Bando, Michiko Ai VHS (Japan)=Daiei

1954 *Terrible Ghost Cat of Okazaki* (*Kaidan Okazaki Sodo*) 86 min. Dir. Bin Kado w/ Takako Irie, Kotaro Bando, Shosaku Sugiyama VHS (Japan)=Daiei

1955 *Peonies and Stone Lanterns* (*Botandoro*)



The Friendly Killer (Nobori Ryu Tekka Hada), 1969.

Dir. Akira Nobuchi w/ Chiyonosuke Azuma, Yuriko Tashiro (Toei) (No Tape)

1956 *Spy's Secret Scroll — Phantom Castle* (*Onmitsu Hicho — Maboroshi Jo*) 99 min. Dir. Ryo Hagiwara w/ Ryutaro Otomo, Eitaro Shindo (Toei) (No Tape)

1957 *The Depths* (*Kaidan Kasane Ga Fuchi* aka *Ghost of Kasane Swamp* aka *The Masseur's Curse*) 65 min. Dir. Nobuo Nakagawa w/ Katsuko Wakasugi, Tetsuro Tamba, Takashi Wada, Noriko Kitazawa (Shinto) VHS (Japan)=Kurari (Clarion)

1957 *Necromancy* (aka *Ghost Cat of Yonaki Swamp* aka *Kaibyō Yonaki Numaj*) 89 min. Dir. Kazuhiko Tasaka w/ Shintaro Katsu, Toshio Chiba, Tokiko Mita, Takako Irie VHS (Japan)=Daiei

1958 *Ghost Cat Wall of Hatred* (*Kaibyō Noroi No Kabe* or *Cursed Wall of the Ghost Cat*) 88 min. Dir. Kenji Misumi w/ Shintaro Katsu, Yoko Uraji, Mieko Kondo.

Katsu plays Takeuchi, a fencing instructor, whose sister, Shino, is governess to Lord Maeda's son. A widower, Lord Maeda proposes to Shino, but she's in love with someone else. She meets her lover in the castle mausoleum. They're attacked by Maeda retainers who are, in reality, intent on usurping power. They kill Shino, but her lover, Atsumi, escapes. The two main villains wall up her body as well as a live cat that keeps scratching at them. Takeuchi gives refuge to Atsumi. The villains bring in an exorcist to get rid of the cat ghost that's attacking people as well as cast a spell to make Maeda's ill son/heir recover. But they actually have the priest place a curse on the boy. Events escalate until the two villains are discovered, the boy heir's made well and Shino receives a proper burial. VHS (Japan)=Daiei

1958 *Black Cat Mansion* (*Borei Kaibyō Yashiki*) 69 min. Dir. Nobuo Nakagawa w/ Toshio Hosokawa, Ryuzaburo Nakamura, Midori Chikama, Fumiko Migata (Shinto) (No Tape)

1959 *The Three Treasures* (*Nippon Tanjo*) Dir. Hiroshi Inagaki w/ Toshiro Mifune Not exactly a "*kaidan*" but certainly in the fantasy/period piece realm. Remade as *Yamato Takeru* (and not nearly as good) in 1994 by Toho. (see issue #13 of *Cult Movies*, Part 2 of this article; section on H. Inagaki). VHS/Laser (Japan)=Toho.

1959 *Ghost From The Pond* (*Kaidan Hitotsu-Me Jizo*) 66 min. Dir. Kinnosuke Fukada w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama, Shinobu Chihara, Hiromi Hanazono (Toei) (No Tape)

1959 *Ghost of Kagami Swamp* (*Kaidan Kagami Ga Fuchi*) 61 min. Dir. Masaki Mori w/ Noriko Kitazawa, Masaburo Date (Shinto) VHS (Japan)=Kurari (Clarion)

1960 *Legend of Kasane Swamp* (*Kaidan Kasane Ga Fuchi* aka *The Masseur's Curse*) 90 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Ganjiro

(continued)



Yotsuya Ghost Story — Loyal 47 Ronin, 1994.

Nakamura, Yataro Kitagami, Tokiko Mita, Yoko Uraji VHS (Japan)=Daiet

1960 *Invisible Goblin (Tomte Tengu)* 73 min. Dir. Mitsuo Hirotsu w/ Yutaka Nakamura, Mieko Kondo, Chitose Maki, Ryuzo Shimada, Shinobu Araki Remade in 1970 by Yoshiyuki Kuroda as *Invisible Swordsman (Tomte Kenshi)*. Reformer a la Kurama Tengu is invisible and terrorizing various corrupt officials. **1/2 VHS (Japan)=Daiet

1961 *Ghost Story of Kaku Street (Kaidan Kaku Dor)* 78 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Eiji Funakoshi, Kazuhiko Kobayashi, Matasaburo Tamba VHS (Japan)=Daiet

1962 *Love, Thy Name Be Sorrow (Koi Ya Koi Nasuna Koi aka Love Not Again aka The Mad Fox)* 109 min. Dir. Tomu Uchida w/ Hashizo Okawa, Michiko Saga, Sumiko Hadaka Okawa falls in-love with a benevolent fox-ghost who becomes human with tragic results. Supposedly a beautiful and moving fantasy/love story. (Toei) (No Tape)

1962 *Ghost Story of Stone Lanterns and Crying In The Night (Kaidan Yonaki Dor)* 73 min. Dir. Kazuhiko Tasaka w/ Ganjiro Nakamura, Kazuhiko Kobayashi, Reiko Fujiwara, Hiroshi Nawa VHS (Japan)=Daiet

1963 *Ghost Story of Devil's Fire Swamp (Kaidan Onibi No Numa)* 78 min. Dir. Bin Kado w/ Tomisaburo Wakayama (aka Kenzaburo Jo), Mieko Kondo, Matasaburo Tamba, Kazuhiko Kobayashi VHS (Japan)=Daiet

1964 *Kwaidan (Kaidan aka Studies of Strange Things)* 183 min. Dir. Masaki Kobayashi Composed of four stories. Kobayashi painted many of the surreally beautiful sets/backdrops himself. Also Toru Takemitsu composed the soundtrack before the film was made and many scenes were shot playing the music in the background. If you haven't seen this, you're missing a truly gorgeous treat for the eyes — a feast for the visual senses equivalent to gorging yourself on your fave foods but without any gastrointestinal repercussions.

"Black Hair" (*Kurokami*) w/ Rentaro Mikuni, Michiyo Aratama, Misako Watanabe, Kenjiro Ishiyama. A poor samurai is offered wealth and position if he'll leave the wife he's in love with to marry a rich official's daughter. Tortured though he is and despite his wife's humble pleas, he decides to take the offer. Years pass and when next we see him he is bitterly unhappy, constantly humiliated and taunted by his vain, cold shrew of a wife. Realizing he's left behind what's most important, he abandons his rich house and

travels back to his previous home. It's late at night when he returns to a rundown, ramshackle ruin that's surrounded by an overgrown yard. Surprisingly enough, he finds his beloved inside, serenely working her spinning wheel. She greets him warmly, overjoyed at his presence. He's beside himself with joy, much of it relief that he wasn't too late. They go to sleep in each others' arms. However, next morning he awakens to discover the house's insides are as dilapidated as the exterior and the thing he holds in his arms is a skeleton with long, lustrous black hair. Horrified, he stumbles to his feet. The floor is rotten and keeps giving way beneath him as the tendrils of hair reach out to caress him.

"Woman of the Snow" (*Yuki Onna*) w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Keiko Kishi, Mariko Okada, Jun Hamamura. A young and old woodcutter become lost in the forest when a devastating blizzard catches them by surprise. They take shelter in a hut. During the night, the younger man awakens to find a woman in white crouching over his companion, breathing freezing air into him and sucking life out of him. The ghost catches him watching and is so taken with his handsome countenance, she agrees to spare him if he promises to never tell another soul. The next day he makes it back to the village. This sequence, with giant eyes staring down from the sky will be indelibly etched on your retinas. Shortly thereafter the young man meets a woman who resembles the snow lady. They fall in love and marry. Several years and a couple of children later, villagers remark on her beauty, kindness and seemingly perpetual youth. That night, it snows, and the young man is moved to tell a strange story that happened to him. He relates the experience. Suddenly, the countenance of his wife changes, and he recognizes the snow spirit. She reprimands him for breaking his promise, genuinely regretful that things must end — the reason she'd spared him was she'd fallen in love with him that freezing night in the hut. She can't bring herself to kill him because the children would suffer, but she assures him he'll never ever see her again. With that, she wafts out of the door.

"Hoichi, The Earless" (*Mimi Nashi Hoichi*) w/ Katsuo(Kazuo) Nakamura, Takashi Shimura, Ganjiro Nakamura, Kunie Tanaka, Tetsuro Tamba, Yoichi Hayashi, Rentaro Mikuni, Ichiro Nakatani. Near the shore where the Heike clan perished in a sea battle hundreds of years ago, is a temple. Hoichi (Nakamura), a young blind priest talented at singing old songs and playing the *biwa*, resides there. One night he's approached by a samurai (Tamba) who bids him secretly accompany him to the encampment of his lord, a descendant of the great Heike clan. Once at the destination we see that it's a ghostly court of noblemen/women. Hoichi senses something strange but doesn't guess the truth. Night after night, they drag Hoichi off to sing songs of that last great battle. My fondest memories of the film are the flashbacks of the battle — the Heikes on long flat boats sailing through the fog and attacking their enemy. After losing, the Heike wives, the prominent clanswomen jump to their deaths with their babes-in-arms, disappearing into the mist that blankets the blood red sea.

One night the head temple priest (Shimura) has two attendants follow Hoichi. Petrified with fear though they are, they manage to drag him back to the temple. The priest explains that Hoichi's hosts are spirits, that the noble encampment is, in reality, a graveyard, and that if he continues to entertain them, they'll eventually rip him limb-from-limb. The priests paint his body with sacred text to render him invisible to the ghosts. At the appointed time the following evening, he sits there perfectly still, not answering when the ghost calls out to him. Unfortunately the assistant had forgotten to paint Hoichi's ears. The samurai sees them and fig-

ures he should bring something back to his lord so the lord will know he attempted to find Hoichi. Miraculously, Hoichi remains mute as the demon tears off his ears. The next day the monks minister to him, and Shimura blames himself for not double checking to make sure the job had been done correctly. Hoichi's reputation grows due to the story, and he becomes rich as noblemen travel from far and wide to hear him sing.

The last story is "In A Cup Of Tea" (*Cha Wan No Naka*) w/ Kanemon Nakamura, Jun Tazaki, Noboru Nakaya, Haruko Sugimura, Kei Sato, Ganjiro Nakamura A writer attempts to figure out the ending for the story of a man who sees a strange face every time he looks into a cup of tea. The image of this phantom eventually torments him full-size in the guise of several ghost samurai. The climax has the writer's publisher come to visit, but he finds the writer not at home. He reads what's on the man's worktable and is impressed. He then goes into the main room and approaches a pot of water on the floor. The writer's face peers mournfully back at him, his spirit caught in the water's reflection. The publisher screams. The End.

This is a must-see film. The only drawback is some viewers may not be able to tolerate the slow pacing. I took a couple of friends (literate, intelligent people) to see *Kwaidan* at a revival theater in 1982, but we had to leave after "Hoichi, The Earless" because they could not abide the slow pace. It hadn't bothered me at all; in fact, it hadn't even occurred to me that the movie might move a tad slow for some folks. Be forewarned.

****American subtitled VHS=HOME VISION Laser=Criterion(it's not out on tape or laser in Japan!)

1964 *Oni-Baba (Devil Witch aka The Hole)* 104 min. Writ./Dir. Kaneto Shindo w/ Nobuko Otowa, Kei Sato, Jitsuko Yoshimura, Jukichi Uno, Tatsuya Nakadai A mother and daughter-in-law make their living during the great clan wars (1500s) by waylating retreating, wounded samurais, finishing them off, then stealing their weapons and armor. A scruffy young man (Sato) who had gone off to battle with the younger woman's husband / older woman's son, returns to tell them the fellow died in combat. The young girl drifts into an affair with the man. The mother is bitterly jealous and uses a demon mask to scare the couple when they're having sex at night. The scheme backfires when the mask becomes stuck. The mother has to tell the daughter it was her all along and not a devil. The daughter tries to pull off the mask. Finally she manages to split it open, but it's disfigured the mother's face (as if acid had been poured on her flesh). The mother can't understand her daughter-in-law's fright and chases after her through the fields in the darkness. There's a bottomless pit where the two have thrown the dead samurais' corpses. When they reach it, the younger woman leaps. The scene freezes frame as the mother jumps, is caught frozen in the air above the hole. ***1/2

American subtitled VHS=Cinemateque Collection (?) VHS(Japan)=Toho

1964 *The Spying Sorceress (Kuroichi Gesho)* Dir. Sadao Nakajima w/ ? (Toei) (No Tape)

1966 *The Magic Serpent (Kairyu Dai Kessen aka Grand Duel In Magic aka Great Battle Of The Giant Dragons)* 86 min. Dir. Tatsuya Yamauchi w/ Hiroki Matsukata, Ryutaro Otomo, Tomoko Ogawa, Bin Amatsu, Nobuo Kaneko Bin Amatsu and Ryutaro Otomo are villains who usurp the throne. They manage to assassinate the *daimyo* and his wife, but the little boy prince flees with the help of a loyal retainer. Otomo is a black magician who changes into a dragon as the fugitives row across the nearby lake. A giant eagle (really an old wizard) suddenly descends and scratches the dragon's face, which enables the little prince to escape. He's subsequently brought

up by the wizard (Kaneko) in the mountains and grows up to be a strapping young hero (Matsukata).

When Matsukata intervenes to save some helpless people, Amatsu and Otomo realize that he's the noble heir they've been searching for all these years. Matsukata falls in love with Otomo's daughter, who doesn't take after her father. After many special effects scenes, *ninja* attacks and swordplay, Matsukata slays Amatsu. Once again Otomo becomes the dragon. Matsukata conjures up a giant, fire-breathing toad. The two monsters do battle, destroying the lakeside castle. The princess uses a ring her grandmother had given her to summon a giant spider which wraps the dragon in a spider web. Coerced into resuming his human form, Otomo is forced to fight Matsukata on the shore with swords, and Otomo perishes. Prince Matsukata and the girl fly off into the sunrise on a giant eagle.

Despite being aimed at kids (with an occasionally annoying children's song), the film holds up as an action packed fantasy/samurai thriller. The special effects and miniature work are more than adequate for the time period. This was released in dubbed English directly to American TV, however it's never received an authorized U.S. video release. VHS (Japan)=Toei Laser (Japan)=Toei (out-of-print)

1966 *Majin, Monster of Terror (Dai Majin aka The Great Man Demon)* 84 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda Special Effects Dir. Yoshiyuki Kuroda w/ Miwa Takada, Jun Fujimaki, Ryutaro Gomi, Tatsuo Endo ***#1 VHS/Laser (Japan)=Daiei/Pioneer

1966 *Return of Giant Majin (Dai Majin Ikaru or The Great Man Demon's Anger)* 79 min. Dir. Kenji Misumi Spec. Eff. Dir. Yoshiyuki Kuroda w/ Shiho Fujimura, Kojiro Hongo, Asao Uchida, Tara Fujimura ***1/2 #2 VHS/Laser (Japan)=Daiei/Pioneer

1966 *Majin Strikes Again (Dai Majin Gyakushu or The Great Man Demon's Counterattack)* 87 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori Spec. Eff. Dir. Yoshiyuki Kuroda w/ Hideki Ninomiya, Shinji Hori, Toru Abe, Hiroshi Nawa ***#3 VHS/Laser (Japan)=Daiei/Pioneer

This trilogy concerns the great man demon, or *Dai Majin*, and how it from time to time is awakened from its slumber as a giant stone idol to punish blasphemers, rampaging until the powerful evildoers who are victimizing the poor are destroyed. The catch is things have to get really bad before Majin will come to life. So all manner of atrocities are perpetrated on the helpless before redemption can be achieved.

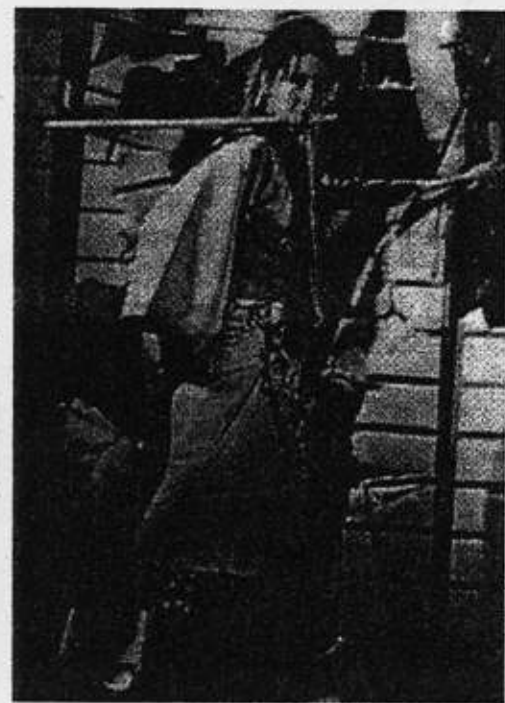
The first film sees two noble children escape when their benevolent father, the reigning lord, and mother are deposed, then murdered by traitorous subordinates. They grow to maturity in the mountains. Once they're young adults (Takada and Fujimaki), they attempt to save the province from the wicked ruler (Gomi) and his sadistic right-hand man (Endo). The princess is about to give herself up to keep Gomi from executing her captured brother when Majin awakens and attacks the scoundrel's compound, stomping on soldiers, pulling down buildings and finally nailing Gomi to a wall with a giant spike.

The second film sees evil government forces using villagers for forced labor. Knowing that the people pray to the stone image of Majin on a tiny nearby island, the rulers resolve to blow it up. A young woman (Fujimura) tries to stop them and is nearly killed in the explosion. After much villager persecution, Majin awakens, emerging from and parting the sea (apparently after piecing himself back together with the aid of a ball of white energy that has descended from the heavens). He rescues Fujimura, Hongo and others who have been crucified (tied with ropes, not nailed). The panicking evil ruler tries to sail away, but Majin follows. The frightened man climbs the mast, becomes tangled in ropes and strangles, crucified to the sails as the boat burns.

Fujimura's tears falling in the lake cause Majin to dissolve and return to the netherworld.

In the third tale, a band of children (amazingly not obnoxious) traverse forest and mountain to reach a distant plateau where the stone god is rumored to rest. Most of their parents are being held as slaves at the local lord's sulphur mine. It takes the death of a couple of the children and more violations of Majin's territory by the lord's men to get him angry enough to wake up and accomplish the good deed of thrashing the evildoers. The local tyrant (Abe) is thrown by Majin into a bubbling sulphur pit, the same pit into which the villain had thrown rebellious slaves.

The special effects in all three films are very impressive, especially when you consider the budgets. In fact, I'd say that Yoshiyuki Kuroda is quite underrated. He's at least the equal of the late Eiji Tsubaraya, and, in some scenes from these films, surpasses him. The score for all three pictures represents, next to his *Godzilla* themes, Akira Ifukube's most recognizable work, and the music is uniformly excellent.



Lefty Pencer, 1969.

1968 *The Cursed Pond (Kaibyō Noroi No Numa or Cat Ghost Of The Cursed Swamp)* 87 min. Dir. Yoshihiro Ishikawa w/ Ryohel Uchida, Kotaro Satomi, Kyoko Mikage, Yuriko Mishima, Hiroshi Nawa. I'd love to see this as Mikage portrays what seems like, from the stills, the sexiest cat-ghost in any of these cat-ghost films. The photos show her with a gleefully maniacal smile, toying with a decapitated head and licking an amputated foot. (Toei) (No Tape)

1968 *Kuroneko (Yabu No Naka No Kuroneko or Black Cat In The Forest)* 99 min. Writ./Dir. Kaneto Shindo w/ Kichieemon Nakamura, Nobuko Otowa, Kei Sato, Kiwako Taichi, Rokko Taura. Just as amazing but not as well known as Shindo's *Oni Baba*. An older woman and daughter-in-law living in a rural hut are raped and slaughtered by a passing band of animalistic mercenaries. They burn the house as they leave. In the dying embers, a black cat licks at the blood seeping from the two women's still intact, untouched-by-fire bodies. Several years pass, and samurai traveling alone through the nearby woods are being found slain, their throats ripped out. The two women have been transformed into vampire cat-ghosts, dedicated to the absolute eradication of any and every samurai who passes through their domain.

The brutal local warlord (Sato) summons his best man (Nakamura) to find the monsters and

destroy them. Much to both Nakamura's and the ghost-women's surprise, Nakamura is the long-lost husband of the younger woman and the son of the older one. He doesn't recognize them immediately nor they him. They're masquerading as rich lonely widows, desirous of male companionship and he, too, has changed in his appearance, now a respected samurai with beautiful clothes, swords and horse. The two ghosts go through agonizing tribulation, trying to resolve to kill him because he's a samurai but reluctant because they both still love him. Having fallen in love with the young woman, Nakamura nearly goes insane when he realizes who the two really are and how they had perished in his absence. The wife cannot bring herself to kill him, and she is thus banished from the land of the living. The mother explains this to her son, and why she must kill him. The son manages to exorcise her spirit but is found dead the following morning. There are no further ghostly disturbances in the area. ***1/2

VHS (Japan)=Toho

1968 *Curse of the Blood (Kaidan Zankoku Monogatari or Cruel Ghost Legend)* 88 min. Dir. Kazuo Hase w/ Masakazu Tamura, Yusuke Kawazu, Rokko Taura, Hiroko Sakurai, Nobuo Kaneko, Masumi Harukawa, Saeda Kawaguchi Three part revolving narrative that begins with a poor samurai killing the masseur who'd loaned him money. The dying masseur curses the samurai and his children. First the samurai dies after having murdered his wife. Then his first son's beloved dies and the young man goes mad with grief, embarking on a life of crime. The second son falls in love with another woman and kills his current girlfriend. The masseur's ghost appears to him and, when he tries to kill it, he accidentally kills his new woman instead.

This second son next discovers the head of his dead brother who has finally been caught and executed for his crimes. It's revealed to him that the dead woman with whom his brother had been in-love was actually the daughter of the masseur. He then comes across the mother of his latest dead girlfriend. She tells him that the girl was actually his half-sister. Horrified, he kills her and then himself. The curse is complete. Confused? Adapted from a novel "*Kaidan Rui Ga Fuchi*" by Renzaburo Shibata (creator of *Kyoshiro Nemuri*), this quite similar to the traditional "*Kaidan Kasane Ga Fuchi*" legend. VHS (Japan)=Shochiku

1968 *Ghost Story of Peonies and Stone Lanterns (Botan-doro aka Bride From Hades)* 89 min. Dir. Satsuo Yamamoto w/ Kojiro Hongo, Mayumi Ogawa, Miyoko Akaza, Michiko Otsuka, Ko Nishimura, Takashi Shimura. Hongo is a samurai intent on divorcing his loveless spouse, refusing to stay in an unhappy marriage despite the fact both her and his family will disown him. He moves to a small town and teaches school to the poor village children. However he remains lonely.

It's the time of the Obon Festival (Festival of the Dead) when paper lanterns are lit representing the souls of deceased friends and relatives then floated down the river. Yamamoto conveys the mood of a warm summer night with everything he shows, with the sounds of the happy children and the buzzing insects, and an excellent moody score by Sei Ikeno. Two women appear to Hongo and introduce themselves. He's out with his students and merely says hello. But he's haunted by the younger woman. For the next several nights the women come to visit him at his house. Nishimura, Hongo's servant — a harmless but not altogether innocent fellow who's involved with the local criminal element — tells the local priest, Shimura.

Shimura realizes the two are ghosts who are taking advantage of Hongo's loneliness. Told the next day, Hongo, at first, refuses to believe it. The priest explains that if he keeps on seeing

(continued)

the two, they'll eventually drain him of life, and he'll die. Shimura and his helpers from the village paste sacred text on the doors, windows, any cracks or openings in the house so the ghosts will be repelled that night.

But Nishimura and his girlfriend are approached by the ghosts instead and told they'll be paid a fortune in gold if they remove the sacred papers from Hongo's cottage. They agree. Going to the cemetery, they find the graves of the two women and dig up a small cache of gold that's been buried there. Meanwhile, the two spirits enter Hongo's place. At first he's terrified, but then his loneliness and love for the younger ghost overcomes his fear. He embraces her. The next morning he's discovered by the priest and villagers, dead with the skeleton of a woman in his arms. Nishimura and girlfriend are already on the outskirts of the village. Greedy, one suggests to the other that there was probably more gold buried in the grave. They return to the graveyard and almost immediately come upon more gold. But this gold has been buried by thieves who coincidentally are just returning to recover their loot. They murder Nishimura and the woman, leaving them sprawled on the graves. That night the whole village turns out in force to bury and honor their young samurai teacher.

***1/2 VHS (Japan)=Daiel

1968 *100 Monsters (Yokai Hyaku Monogatari or Story of 100 Ghosts)* 79 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda Special Effects: Yoshituki Kuroda w/ Jun Fujimaki, Miwa Takada, Mikiko Tsubouchi, Ryutarō Gomi A *yakuza* clan takes over a local temple, intent on turning it into a brothel despite the protests of the villagers. On opening night, they have a celebration, calling in a storyteller to relate the "Hundred Monster Collection." The man tells a few stories, a couple of which are dramatized in the film. Afterwards, the blasphemous *yakuza* boss neglects to have the exorcism read, something necessary to keep real ghosts and monsters from appearing. From then on the brothel is haunted by the ghosts. The boss, himself, mistakes his right hand man for a monster and slays him, then falls on his own sword.

A young samurai of the village (Fujimaki) goes to kill the local magistrate (Gomi) who's allowed corruption into the town. But he sees the magistrate being tormented by monstrous apparitions which causes the corrupt official to kill himself. The ghosts then leave the village. This is probably one of the most entertaining horror films to ever come out of Japan and captures perfectly, much as the same as *KWAIDAN*, that strange ambience and atmosphere of Japanese supernatural fiction. An excellent score by Chumei Watanabe adds immeasurably to the whole undertaking. ***1/2 VHS/Laser (Japan)=Daiel/Pioneer

1968 *Big Ghost War (Yokai Dai Senso aka Spook Warfare)* 78 min. Dir. Yoshituki Kuroda w/ Yoshihiko Aoyama, Akane Kawazaki, Asao Uchida. A great bloodsucking creature called Daimon that once ruled over Babylon comes to Japan and takes over the body of the local governor. The man who had once been kind and gentle has been transformed into a vicious tyrant. His daughter and retainers don't know what to make of his sudden change. A local water-spirit — that looks like a cross between a frog, a duck and a green devil — recognizes the governor for what he is, Daimon. He first tries to do battle with the evil spirit himself. This part is played for comedy and actually is fairly amusing. When the water-imp understands Daimon is way too powerful he calls in all his ghost and spirit friends to help rid the land of this foreign invader. It takes a while, but finally, with the help of some humans, they eventually destroy Daimon. ***VHS/Laser=Daiel/Pioneer

1968 *Woman of the Snow (Kaidan Yukijōrō aka Yukionna aka The Snow Woman)* 80 min. Dir.

Tokuzo Tanaka w/ Shiho Fujimura, Akira Ishihama, Machiko Hasegawa, Taketoshi Naito, Fujio Suga Basically the same story as the Snow Woman tale of *KWAIDAN*, expanded to feature-length. From what I've read quite effective in it's own right. VHS (Japan)=Daiel

1969 *Along With Ghosts (Tokaido Obake Dochū or Tokaido Highway Ghost Convention)* 78 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda Special Effects: Yoshituki Kuroda w/ Kojiro Hongo, Ryutarō Gomi, Rokko Tōura, Bokuzen Hidari. A follow-up to *100 Monsters* and *Big Ghost War*. Hongo plays a decent samurai who finds himself helping a couple of children being pursued by an evil *yakuza* clan. The kids have a document signed by their slain grandfather that will cost the villains much money if it falls into the wrong hands. Along the way, various ghosts and goblins help fight against the bad men. *** VHS/Laser (Japan)=Daiel/Pioneer

1969 *Portrait of Hell (Jigoku Hen or Hell Screen)* 91 min. Dir. Shiro Toyoda w/ Tatsuya Nakadai, Kinno Suke Nakamura, Yoko Naito, Shun Oide. A Korean artist (Nakadai) living in Japan under



Red Peony Gambler — Death to the Wicked. 1970.

the rule of a boorish, uncultured tyrant (Nakamura) is forced to paint pictures of paradise. However, all the artist sees around him is misery and horror caused by the dictator. These pictures anger the lord, and when he sees the artist's beautiful daughter for the first time, he takes her by force to be his mistress. The artist strikes a bargain with the lord that if he can paint a picture of hell the lord likes, the girl will be returned. The artist asks for a carriage to be burned in the castle yard so he'll have a model for the portrait.

But the lord has chained the daughter inside the carriage and asserts he'll burn her alive if the artist doesn't apologize for his continuously rebellious and insulting behavior. The artist is a stubborn man, and, not believing that the lord would burn the girl because he's in-love with her, calls his bluff and refuses. The lord is just as proud. Never guessing that the artist would refuse, he realizes he has to now go through with his threat or lose face before his entire court. He orders the carriage set alight. The daughter is consumed in flames.

Having gone mad, the artist paints a picture of the lord in the carriage burning to death, has it delivered, then hangs himself. When the lord sees the painting, he, too, loses his mind, imagining that the fire has jumped from the picture to the walls and floor around him. He falls into the inferno of hell. **** VHS (Japan)=Toho

1969 *The Haunted Castle (Hiroku Kaibyōden or Story of the Ghost Cat's Secret)* 83 min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/ Kojiro Hongo, Naomi Kobayashi, Mitsuyo Kamei, Rokko Tōura, Akane Kawazaki. In 1730, Lord Nabeshima killed the former lord of the Saga clan. The murdered lord's sister, Sayo, committed suicide as a result. Her favorite cat then lapped up her blood, attaining

supernatural powers through transference of her soul. A loyal samurai (Hongo) tries to track down the cat ghost that seems to be indiscriminately killing people in the castle. The ghost possesses Lady Otoyō (Kobayashi), Nabeshima's favorite mistress. Eventually Hongo discovers the origin of the ghost, exposes the murder and kills the demonic Otoyō. VHS (Japan)=Daiel

1970 *The Masseur's Curse (Kaidan Kasane Ga Fuchi aka Ghostly Depths of Kasane aka Ghost Story Of Kasane Swamp)* 82 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Ritsū Ishiyama, Maya Kitajima, Reiko Kasahara, Ryūko Mizugami, Mitsuko Tanaka, Kenjiro Ishiyama, Akane Kawazaki Much the same story as *Curse of the Blood* (see above). A samurai murders the masseur who loaned him money, then his own wife. Tortured by ghosts, he kills himself. His mistress steals his money. When the samurai's son, Shingaro, returns home from training, he learns of the death of both his parents.

One of the masseur's daughters has become a whore and falls in love with Shingaro, but kills herself when she discovers who he is. The masseur's other daughter then also falls in love with him, but is disfigured with boiling water by one of her business enemies. A worker in the business begins an affair with Shingaro. The disfigured woman becomes insanely jealous, and Shingaro murders her. He runs away with his new girl, but they become hopelessly lost in the swamp where his father had disposed of the masseur's body.

I haven't seen this, but it has the reputation of being one of Daiel's goriest productions. Yasuda's earlier version made in 1960 and Nakagawa's made in 1957 are both available on video. (Daiel) (No Tape)

1970 *Invisible Swordsman (Tomte Kenshū)* 78 min. Dir. Yoshituki Kuroda w/ Osamu Shal, Hachirō Oka, Kiyoshi Nishikawa

A remake of 1960's *Invisible Goblin (Tomte Tengu)*. (Daiel) (No Tape)

1970 *Blind Woman's Curse (Kaidan Nobori Ryu aka Tattooed Swordsman aka Haunted Life of A Dragon-Tattooed Lass aka Rising Dragon Ghost Story)* 85 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Meiko Kaji, Hōki Tokuda, Makoto Sato, Ryōhei Uchida, Toru Abe, Yoshi Kato (see "Female Samurai" section in this article under *Rising Dragon* series) VHS (Japan)=Nikkatsu

1972 *Sex Story of Peonies and Stone Lanterns (Seidan Botanodō)* Dir. Chusei Sone w/ Setsuko Ogawa, Fusatomi Hara, Miki Hayashi, Hajime Tanimoto Remake of the famous period ghost story done in the soft-core *Roman Porno* style Nikkatsu pioneered in the seventies. (Nikkatsu) (TAPE?)

1975 *Under the Cherry Blossoms (Sakura No Mori No Mankai No Shita)* 95 min. Dir. Masahiro Shinoda Tomisaburo Wakayama, Shima Iwashita, Hiroko Isayama, Ko Nishimura. Wakayama is a notorious bandit living in the forest. He waylays a noble couple traveling through his territory, killing the husband and abducting the beautiful wife. From the very start she calls the shots, making Wakayama carry her on his back, then arriving at his mountain hideout, making him kill his other wives. Tiring of their debauchery in the wilderness, she has him take her to the city. There she has him decapitate various rich personages, bringing back their heads to keep in her collection. He quickly grows weary of this butchery and begs her to return with him to the flowering cherry trees of his home. Finally getting her to agree, he once again carries her on his back.

As they traverse the blossoming cherry grove, a strange transformation occurs, and he's able to see her as she really is, a hideous demon witch. She tries to strangle him, but he manages to throw her to the ground and run her through with his sword. As she dies, she disappears into the mounds of falling cherry blossoms. Even though he's killed her, Wakayama becomes

more frightened than before at his aloneness. Slowly he disappears too. Along with *Pale Flower (Kawaita Hana)* and *Banished Orin (Hanare Gozoe Orin)*, my favorite film by Shinoda. **** VHS (Japan)=Toho

1979 *Demon Pond (Yasha Ga Ike)* 124 min. Dir. Masahiro Shinoda w/ Tomasaburo Bando, Go Kato, Tsutomu Yamazaki. In 1910 a school-teacher journeys to a remote area of Japan to see the Demon Pond. The area, though seemingly lush and fertile, is in the midst of a serious drought. The people won't take water from the Demon Pond on the other side of the mountain due to its haunted status. The teacher (Yamazaki) meets a young woman, Yuki (Bando playing a female role) who lives in a cottage with her husband (Go Kato). They both guard the pond. It turns out Kato is Yamazaki's long-lost friend who'd disappeared many years before when traveling in the same area.

Kato had befriended an old priest who was responsible for ringing the giant bell beside the cottage once at sunrise and once at sunset to keep the pond from overflowing its banks and flooding the surrounding countryside. A legend proclaims a fairy princess and her entourage of elves, goblins and fishmen live at the bottom of the lake, and the ringing of the bell is the only way to keep them contained. Many centuries before the spirits had promised to remain imprisoned there if the villagers always remembered to ring the bell at the two appointed times of day. The priest had died just as Kato was going to return home from his vacation. Initially he'd been going to leave anyway, but his devotion to the old priest and his growing affection for the young girl, Yuki, had made him stay.

Yamazaki asks to see the pond, which takes a couple of hours to reach. While hiking there in the moonlight, he begs Kato to return with him to his scholarly life in the city. Kato refuses, knowing his wife would die of a broken heart. While they're gone on their hike, the villagers are worked into a frenzy by a visiting member of the Diet who exclaims what they need to end the drought is a human sacrifice. Since all of the villagers think Yuki/Bando a strange person, they decide she'd be the perfect choice. They know, too, that her husband is gone for the night. The whole town gathers at the cottage and they drag her out.

The villagers' actions are interrupted a couple of times to show the fairy princess (also Bando) and her creature minions in all their colorful glory cavorting at the bottom of the lake. Shinoda uses kabuki costumes and obviously theatrical effects in these scenes rather than attempting a realism that would come off as phony.

Sensing danger, Kato and Yamazaki return just as Yuki's sacrifice is about to take place. They try to talk sense but the townspeople are too frightened of the consequences should they not go through with what they've started. Kato threatens to not ring the bell, to destroy it if they take her life, which will cause an apocalyptic flood. The people have lost faith in the legend and don't care whether he rings it or not. Yuki cuts her own throat to rob the villagers of their sacrifice. Kato, bidding adieu to his friend, follows her in suicide. The time for the bell to ring has already passed. The princess and fairies in the lake are overjoyed that they're free at last. The pond overflows and floods the surrounding countryside, drowning everyone except the teacher, who has tied himself to the poles holding the bell. Once the waters stop raging, Yamazaki peers out over the flooded plains and valleys. Right beside his perch are gigantic, majestic waterfalls. He watches as the princess and her court fairy ladies float up to heaven. *** (Shochiku) (No Tape)

1981 *Samurai Reincarnation (Makai Tensho)* 122 min. Dir. Kinji Fukasaku w/ Kenji Sawada, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Ken Ogata, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Akiko Kana, Tetsuro Tamba, Hideo

Murota, Hiroyuki Sanada. Story of executed Christian revolutionary, Shiro Tokisada Amakusa (Sawada) returning from the grave to renounce God and use Satanic Black Magic to resurrect various prominent samurai killers from the past to help him take revenge on those who persecuted him. **1/2 American subtitled VHS=American Toei (out-of-print) Laser (Japan)=Toei

1982 *Black Magic Ninja Wars (Iga Ninpo Cho aka Ninja Wars aka Scroll Of Iga Ninja Magic)* 100 min. Dir. Mitsumasa Saito w/ Hiroyuki Sanada, Noriko Watanabe, Mikio Narita, Yoshiji Nakagashi, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Jun Miko, Gojiro Sato **1/2 American Dubbed VHS (shortened version)=Prism Entertainment (out-of-print) VHS (Japan)=Toei

1983 *Legend of Eight Samurai (Satomi Hakkenden)* 136 min. Dir. Kinji Fukasaku w/ Hiroyuki Sanada, Etsuko Shtomi, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Mari Natsuki. Big budget remake of a 1959 three-part serial (each part approx. 58 min.) directed by Kokichi Uchida and starring Sentaro Fushimi and Kotaro Satomi. **VHS (Japan)=Toei (Has also been available in EP speed, budget, dubbed-in-English VHS here in U.S., though I don't know the company)

Female Samurai Films:

What's the appeal, the attraction of a woman with a sword, the female of the species in (or out-of) period costume brandishing a razor sharp blade? I'm sure I don't have to tell you I'm talking about motion pictures and not the banalities of everyday reality. To most women viewers, this unfortunately rare archetype (especially rare on these shores) represents a powerful image of identification. They get to bask in the wonderfully virulent fallout of the heroine/anti-heroine in celluloid fiction: pushed to its most potent distillation.

Male viewers, in addition to sharing with female fans the vicarious thrills, the spectacle of macho sadists having their villainous private parts pierced by righteous lady avengers (ahem!), also experience more. And the more is in the realm of the erotic. Both subtle, subliminal eroticism — the sensuality of the entire visual idea, the beguiling charm of the Special Female, Mother/Goddess, fertile Bringer-of-Life becoming a literal Death Harvester of the corporeal shells sheltering the soul; and the obvious eroticism, sometimes clumsy, immature, coarse, sometimes strikingly beautiful, gracefully refined, majestic and divinely awe-inspiring — individual shots of a ravaged woman suddenly possessed of near-superhuman strength, overcoming adversity. Even if everyone she loves has been destroyed, she enjoys nihilistic triumph not only surviving the Evil done unto her but mowing down all Evil-doers — of course, all the more delightful inspiration of the senses when the carnage has been preceded or occurs simultaneously to this bewitchingly comely avenger losing her clothes.

In Chinese period genre films, swordplay by celluloid heroines happened throughout the sixties and continues to this day. Witness the recent revival of Wu Ma's *Deaf and Mute Heroine* from 1972 as well as the recent *Swordsman* trilogy. That is another article. However, in Japanese films the swordswoman has not proliferated in as great a number. Today, especially, the samurai heroine has all but vanished. Part of that is due to the fact there are only four or five *chanbara* productions a year (at the most!), whereas in the '50s-'70s time period there were at least ten times that annual number. Today sword-wielding heroines show up in the uneven, for the most part disappointing *Women Ninja (Kunoichi Ninpo)* or more literally *Female Black Magic Ninyas* series and in various trashy, though entertaining *yakuza* potboilers.

The real heyday for sword heroines in Japanese cinema began in the late fifties in various comparatively tame productions with such actresses as Hibari Misora, Michiko Saga and Fujiko Yamamoto and climaxed in glorious, blood-spurting profusion between 1968 — 1974 with the likes of Meiko Kaji, Junko Fuji, Michiyo Yasuda, Hiroko Ogi, Junko Miyazono, Reiko Ike, Yoko Matsuyama, Keiko Nakamura, Yumiko Nogawa et al.

Strangely enough there's much greater evidence of female warriors and in particular, swordswomen, in Japanese history than in any period of Japanese cinema. Jessica Amanda Salmonson wrote an excellent article, "Swordswomen in Japanese Cinema," in the March, 1982 issue of *Martial Arts Movies* magazine, mentioning, among others, the real-life Hangaku Moritsuna in 1201, Itagaki, who led soldiers for the Taira (Heike) clan, Tomoe Gozen, a Minamoto clan leader, Masako Hojo, mother of the infamous holy man/priest, Nichiren, and various women warriors of the Meiji era Satsuma clan.

Some Female Samurai Films:

(I'm also including some in-period [usually set in 1920s] *yakuza* and contemporary *yakuza* films that have sword-brandishing heroines)

1958 *The Swishing Sword (Hitohada Kujaku or Peacock With Human Flesh)* Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Fujiko Yamamoto, Raizo Ichikawa, Seizaburo Kawazu Yamamoto was, along with Machiko Kyo, Daiet's biggest female star in the 1950s. She starred in at least two pictures as a sword-wielding heroine. (Daiet) (No Tape)

1958 *Peony With Human Flesh (Hitohada Botan)* Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Fujiko Yamamoto, Raizo Ichikawa (Daiet) (No Tape)

1958 *Lady Detective in Edo (Jiraiya Koban)* Dir. Kinnosuke Fukada w/ Hibari Misora, Chiyonosuke Azuma (Toei) (No Tape)

1959 'Young Blades' Obligations (Iro Ha Wakashu) series:

1959 *Young Blades' Obligations — Flower Palanquin Pass (Iro Ha Wakashu — Hana Kago Toge)* Dir. Juichi Kono w/ Hibari Misora, Kotaro Satomi, Denjiro Okochi Female *matatabi* series. Misora played a woman samurai and/or wandering gambler in many films, most of them produced between 1952-1965. Other roles included geishas, stewardesses, gangsters, detectives, housewives, nightclub singers, etc. She was a child prodigy of sorts, an extremely popular singer/actress appearing in her first film in 1949 at the tender age of 12. She made the majority of her films at Toei, but also starred in many movies for Shochiku, Daiet and even a couple for Toho. She was only 52 when she died in 1989. #1 (Toei) (No Tape)

1959 *Young Blades' Obligations — Cherry Blossom in Long Sleeves (Iro Ha Wakashu — Furtisode Zakura)* Dir. Ko Sasaki w/ Hibari Misora, Kotaro Satomi, Shinobu Chihara, Hiromi Hanazono #2: (Toei) (No Tape)

1960 *Oja Kissa* Dir. Ko Sasaki w/ Hibari Misora, Tomisaburo Wakayama (Toei) (No Tape)

1960 *Three Female Racketeers (Ojo Sando Gasa)* Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Tazuko Niki, Matasaburo Tamba Female *matatabi* action/comedy. (Daiet) (No Tape)

1961 *Okesa Uta Eba* Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Raizo Ichikawa, Yoshie Mizutani, Yukio Hashi, Tamao Nakamura Mizutani plays sword carrying heroine and, along with Ichikawa and Hashi, one of the three lead characters. (Daiet) (No Tape)

1965 'Cat Girl Gamblers (Toba No Mesu Neko) series:

1965 *Cat Girl Gamblers (Toba No Mesu Neko)* Dir. Haruyasu Noguchi w/ Yumiko Nogawa, Hideaki Nitani, Ichiro Sugai, Tatsuya Fuji, Eiji Go I'm not positive but this seems to be the first

(continued)

of the more violent knife/sword-wielding female *yakuza* series. I'm not sure of the period — from the photos these could be set anytime between 1920 — 1960. #1 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1965 *Cat Girl Gamblers — Naked Flesh Paid Into the Pot (Toba No Mesu Neko — Su Hada No Tsubo Furi or Debt Paid With Flesh)* Dir. Haruyasu Noguchi w/ Yumiko Nogawa, Hideaki Nitani, Tatsuya Fujii, Ryuji Kita #2 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1966 *Cat Girl Gamblers — Abandoned Fangs of Triumph (Toba No Mesu Neko — Sha Kiba No Shobu)* Dir. Haruyasu Noguchi w/ Yumiko Nogawa, Elji Go, Yo:io Yamamoto, Jyo Shimidu, Dalzaburo Hirata #3 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1966 *The Spider Tattoo (Irezumi)* 85 min. Dir. Yasuzo Masumura Screenplay: Kaneto Shindo w/ Ayako Wakao, Akio Hasegawa, Kei Sato, Gaku Yamamoto, Fujio Suga, Asao Uchida, Reiko Fujiwara. This is an in-period erotic thriller loosely-derived from the Junichiro Tanizaki tale of the same name. A couple are running away to elope aided by a husband and wife who own an inn/gambling den. But the young lovers are betrayed with the girl, Otsuya, sold into prostitution and her beau, Shinsuke, carted away by an assassin to be murdered. Shinsuke turns the tables, slaying his killer and then going into hiding. Otsuya is totally disillusioned. Her ideals destroyed and not yet knowing that Shinsuke has escaped, she becomes a sexually voracious and vindictive destroyer of nearly every male that falls into her bed.

A famous tattoo artist has gotten the brothel owner to let him create his masterpiece on Otsuya's beautiful back. Otsuya claims that the rendering of a black widow spider with a woman's head on her flesh is to blame for her drastic change of heart from sweet young girl to evil murderess. Shinsuke reveals himself to Otsuya, and she promises to hide him. However she's promised Gonji, the gambling den owner that she'd marry him if he killed his wife. When Otsuya refuses Gonji, he becomes abusive, and Shinsuke slays him to protect her. Tokubei, the brothel owner and Otsuya plan to blackmail Lord Serizawa (Kei Sato) but the scheme backfires. Tokubei is seriously wounded by Serizawa. Later, once they've escaped, Otsuya decides to finish off Tokubei, and Shinsuke is forced to help. Shinsuke is tortured by Otsuya's changed character.

Serizawa pursues her and she ends up falling in-love with the lord, much to Shinsuke's jealousy. When Shinsuke tries to kill her, she manages to deflect the blade and stab him instead. The tattoo artist, Seikichi, who's witnessed these depraved events, asks Otsuya to show him her tattoo one last time before she returns to Lord Serizawa. He then drives a knife into the tattoo, killing her, then kills himself. Another one of Masumura's masterpieces. As you probably already know he directed the excellent *Blind Beast (Moju)*, *Hoodlum Soldier (Heitai Yakuza)*, *Razor Hanzo's Hell Torture (Goyo Kiba #2)* (see *Cult Movies* #13, Part 2 of this article under *Fangs of Public Office/Hanzo the Blade*), *Red Angel (Akai Tenshi)* et al. VHS (Japan)=Daiel

1968 Women's Prison (Hiroku Onna Ro) series:

In-period (1860-1900) women in prison series of films from Daiel with heavy erotic and S&M/horror overtones. At least the first four were in black-and-white. Each picture had different characters from the last, the series aspect being in the subject matter, i.e., women in jeopardy and torture and in the time period:

Women's Prison (Hiroku Onna Ro or Secrets from A Women's Prison) 76 min. Dir. Akira Inoue w/ Michiyo Yasuda (now known as Michiyo Okusaku), Sanae Nakahara, Mayumi Nagisa, Shigako Shimegi #1 VHS (Japan)=Daiel; *Women's Cell (Zoku Hiroku Onna Ro)* 1968, 84 min. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Michiyo Yasuda,

Sanae Nakahara, Machiko Hasegawa, Kayo Mikimoto, Rokko Toura, Saburo Date #2 (Daiel) (TAPE?); *The Yoshiwara Story (Hiroku Onna Gura or Secrets of a Pleasure Quarter Brothel)* 1968 78 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Masakazu Tamura, Machiko Hasegawa, Kayo Mikimoto #3 (Daiel) (Tape?); *Secrets of a Women's Temple (Hiroku Onna Dera)* 1969, 79 min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Sanae Nakahara, Shigako Shimegi, Machiko Hasegawa #4 (Daiel) (Tape?); *Island of Horrors (Onna Ro Hizu or Women's Prison Secret Plan)* 1970 82 min. Dir. Toshiaki Kunihara w/ Masakazu Tamura, Maya Kitajima, Reiko Kasahara #5 VHS (Japan)=Daiel; *Women's Prison for Torture (Hiroku — Nagasaki Onna Ro or Secrets — Nagasaki Women's Prison)* 1971 85 min. Dir. Akikazu Ota w/ Tomoko Mayama, Akane Kawazaki, Yoshiko Hara #6 VHS (Japan)=Daiel. Note: I'm not 100% positive films #2, 3, 4 are out on video. I'm presupposing that they are since #1, 5, 6 are out. Also, you probably don't recognize the names of the last two directors (of #5 and 6) because they started working at Daiel (at least as full-fledged directors) right before Daiel went bankrupt and suspended production. Kunihara and Ota both went on to direct a lot of television in the '70s-'80s, particularly many episodes of the *Zatoichi* TV show.

1968 Woman Sazen (Onna Sazen) series:

1968 *One-Eyed, One-Armed Swords Woman (Onna Sazen)* Dir. ? w/ Michiyo Yasuda First of two films with Yasuda as young girl (growing into a woman) losing an eye and arm when her whole family is massacred by villains for rare sword in their possession. Supposedly the first film deals with the massacre, her survival, then training as vengeance-bent swordswoman. The second film is her following through on her vendetta. From the two photos I've seen these look excellent. However they seem fairly obscure, especially this first one which I could only find mentioned in Jessica Salmonson's 1982 article in *Martial Arts Movies* mag. The *Sazen* reference in the Japanese title relates to the famous one-eyed, one-armed samurai hero, *Tange Sazen*. #1 (Daiel) (No Tape)

1969 *The Lefty Fencer (Onna Sazen — Nuretsubame Katate Giri or Woman Sazen — Wet With Blood From One Armed Sword Style)* Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Kojiro Hongo, Isamu Nagato, Asao Koike #2 (Daiel) (No Tape)

1968 Quick Draw Okatsu series:

1968 *Poisonous Story of a Beautiful Witch — 100 Prayers of the Demoness (Yoen Dokufuden — Han Nya No Hyaku)* 90 min.

Dir. Yoshitomo Ishikawa w/ Junko Miyazono, Tomisaburo Wakayama Similar to above, with Miyazono portraying young noblewoman whose family's been slaughtered and how she transforms herself into "Quick-Draw Okatsu" vengeance-bent wanderer up against all manner of depraved lords, degenerate *yakuza* bosses, etc... #1 (Toei) (No Tape)

1969 *Quick Draw Okatsu (Yoen Dokufuden — Hitokiri Okatsu or Poisonous Story of a Beautiful Witch — Okatsu The Killer)* 89 min. Dir. Nobuo Nakagawa w/ Junko Miyazono, Ko Nishimura, Reiko Oshida, Shunji Imai, Yukie Kagawa, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Chujiro Tomita Oshida co-stars as another sword heroine. Nakagawa is the same Nakagawa who directed *Hell (Jigoku)* 1960 and *Tokaido Yotsuya Ghost Story (Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan)* 1959 as well as many other *kaidan* and *chanbara* at Shintoho in the fifties. (see section on *Kaidan/ghost story* films elsewhere in article). #2 (Toei) (No Tape)

1969 *Vendetta of a Samurai Girl (Yoen Dokufuden — Okatsu Kyofotabi or Poisonous Story of a Beautiful Witch — Okatsu, The Fugitive)* 84 min. Dir. Nobuo Nakagawa w/ Junko Miyazono, Tatsuo Umetsu #3 (Toei) (No Tape)

1968 Red Peony Gambler (Hibotan Bakuto) or Woman Gambler series:

1968 *Red Peony Gambler (Hibotan Bakuto)* 1968 98 min. Dir. Kosaku Yamashita w/ Junko Fuji, Ken Takakura, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Minoru Oki, Kyosuke Machida, Rinichi Yamamoto, Nobuo Kaneko. First in a series with Junko Fuji as Oryu — aka Hibotan or Red Peony because of a tattoo on her right shoulder — a beautiful woman gambler in 1920s Japan. In this initial outing, her father, a benevolent *yakuza* boss, is killed by Oki's clan, and she gives up much of what is traditionally feminine so she can avenge his death. Once accomplished, however, she finds the die is cast. She continues to wander as a respected independent boss from adventure to adventure in the next seven films. Amazing piece of cinematic evolution when you consider this was the most popular of all sword/knife-wielding heroine series in Japan, with a graceful, feminine yet strong, independent female protagonist capable of killing scores of villains to achieve justice/vengeance. This was undoubtedly influenced by Daiel's series *Woman Gambler (Onna Tobakushi or Woman Gambling Expert aka Woman Yakuza)* with the great Kyoko Enami. It started in 1966 and ran for 17 films (till 1971). However, Enami hardly ever did any fighting leaving the knife-swinging and fistcuffs to the males 90% of the time (that and the fact it's set in a much more contemporary milieu is why you won't find it included here). ***1/2 #1 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1968 *Red Peony Gambler — Bowl of Rice and a Place to Sleep (Hibotan Bakuto — Isshuku Ippan)* 95 min. Dir. Norifumi Suzuki w/ Junko Fuji, Koji Tsuruta, Bunta Sugawara, Bin Amatsu, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Kyosuke Machida, Ko Nishimura, Mari Shiraki Director Suzuki is Fuji's uncle and contributed much of the screenwriting for the series. ***1/2 #2 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1969 *Red Peony Gambler — Flower Cards Showdown (Hibotan Bakuto — Hana Fuda Shobu)* 98 min. Dir. Tai Kato w/ Junko Fuji, Ken Takakura, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Kanjuro Arashi, Kyosuke Machida, Asao Koike

This, along with several other of Tai Kato's films, is among a handful of critically-acclaimed *yakuza* films in Japan. ***1/2 #3 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1969 *Red Peony Gambler — Second in Succession (Hibotan Bakuto — Nidaime Shumei)* 95 min. Dir. Shigehiro Ozawa w/ Junko Fuji, Ken Takakura, Kanjuro Arashi, Bin Amatsu, Hiroyuki Nagato #4 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1969 *Red Peony Gambler — Field of Broken Swords (Hibotan Bakuto — Tekkaba Retsuden)* 110 min. Dir. Kosaku Yamashita w/ Junko Fuji, Koji Tsuruta, Tetsuro Tamba, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Seizaburo Kawazu, Bin Amatsu, Kotaro Satomi ****#5 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1970 *Red Peony Gambler — Oryu's Allies (Hibotan Bakuto — Oryu Sanjo aka Oryu's Visti)* 99 min. Dir. Tai Kato w/ Junko Fuji, Bunta Sugawara, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Toru Abe, Kanjuro Arashi, Shingo Yamashiro ***1/2 #6 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1971 *Red Peony Gambler — Death to the Wicked (Hibotan Bakuto — O Inochi Itadakimasu)* 93 min. Dir. Tai Kato w/ Junko Fuji, Koji Tsuruta, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Minoru Oki, Seizaburo Kawazu, Kenjiro Ishiyama, Asao Uchida, Hiroshi Nawa, Kyosuke Machida ****#7 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1972 *Red Peony Gambler — On the Eternal Just Path (Hibotan Bakuto — Jingi To Oshimasu or To Side With Duty)* 95 min. Dir. Buichi Saito w/ Junko Fuji, Bunta Sugawara, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Hiroki Matsukata, Kyosuke Machida, Hiroyuki Nagato ***#8 VHS (Japan)=Toei

1968 *Kanto Woman Yakuza (Kanto Onna*

Yakuza series:

1968 *Kanto Woman Yakuza (Kanto Onna Yakuza aka Duel At The Quay)* 74 min. Dir. Akira Inoue w/ Michiyo Yasuda This series with Yasuda was initiated, I suppose, so Daitai could have their own "fighting" woman yakuza heroine as opposed to their *Woman Gambling Expert (Onna Tobakushi)* who did nothing but gamble while the males did the nasty, violent stuff. #1 (Daitai) (No Tape)

1969 *Kanto Woman Scoundrel (Kanto Onna Gokudo aka Badge Of Guts)* 87 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Fumio Watanabe, Hosen Komatsu #2 (Daitai) (No Tape)

1969 *Kanto Woman's Bad Reputation (Kanto Onna Akumyo aka The Lone Avenger)* 83 min. Dir. Kazuo Mori w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Shintaro Katsu, Ko Nishimura, Yoshie Mizutani #3 VHS (Japan)=Daitai

1969 *Kanto Woman's Bad Temper (Kanto Onna Do Konjo aka Justice And Fury)* 78 min. Dir. Akira Inoue w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Teruo Yoshida, Ichiro Nakatani, Asao Koike #4 VHS (Japan)=Daitai

1969 *Bamboo Leaf Omon (Sasabue Omon aka Girl With The Bamboo Leaves aka Omon's Bamboo Leaf Whistle)* 76 min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Ryohei Uchida, Akane Kawazaki, Asao Uchida Yasuda plays Omon, a woman skilled in using bamboo leaves as blades/darts to kill her enemies. (Daitai) (No Tape)

1969 *The Mankiller (Onna Shikaku Maryu aka The Woman Killer aka Fylyot Woman Assassin)* 90 min. Dir. Kosaku Yamashita w/ Junko Miyazono In-period follow-up to the Okatsu series. (Toei) (No Tape)

1969 (?) *The Temptress (?)* Dir. ? w/ Junko Miyazono I read about this particular film in Jessica Salmonson's 1982 *Martial Arts Movies* article, but I've not yet been able to find any other documentation re: date, director, Japanese title, etc... Supposedly the most sadistic and perverse of Miyazono's sword pictures. (Toei) (No Tape)

1969 *Crimson Bat (Mekura No Oichi)* series:

1969 *Crimson Bat — Blind Swordsman (Mekura No Oichi Monogatari — Makka Na Nagare Dor)* 88 min. Dir. Teiji Matsuda w/ Yoko Matsuyama, Isamu Nagato, Bin Amatsu, Chizuko Arai Oichi as a child darting down a woodland trail in the midst of a violent thunderstorm, calls out for her mother. Her mom has run away with a gambler, abandoning the little girl. Suddenly a tree next to Oichi is struck by lightning. It topples in her path, and Oichi falls beside it. The next morning she awakens to darkness — blind.

A well-meaning older man Oichi called 'Granddad' brings her up. Granddad had once been part of a trio of thieves operating along the Tokaido Road. One day several *matatabi* come looking for the old man. The leader is Denzo (Amatsu) aka Devil Denzo who was one of the three. Denzo is starting to accrue tremendous income through respectable legitimate channels and is afraid his previous partners will show up sometime in the future to blackmail him. Blind Oichi shouts in panic as her 'Granddad' is murdered. When Oichi later visits his grave, the villains approach again: Oichi lashes out at them with a sword, but she doesn't yet have the skill to produce lethal results. A passing *ronin* (Nagato) steps in to help, kills two of the three, but lightning-fast Denzo escapes.

Nagato later explains to Oichi that she has a natural balance, grace and talent with the sword that can't be learned, it's something you're born with. He teaches her swordsmanship over the next year or so. Oichi has fallen in-love with him and he with her. But he feels he isn't worthy enough to be her spouse, and he leaves one evening without saying goodbye.

The rest of the film is taken up with Oichi helping her 'Granddad's' other partner, an even

older fellow who has escaped from prison to try to buy back his daughter from a brothel. It transpires the girl is staying at a whorehouse run by Oichi's long-lost mother. While Oichi is paying off the girl's debt with money she's won from gambling, Denzo sneaks in and kills the girl and her father. When Oichi and her estranged mother discover the bodies, Oichi is convinced mom knows who killed them. Oichi is so angry with past resentments it won't take much for her to kill her own mother. Mom is now, belatedly, racked with tremendous guilt. Nagato arrives and explains it was Denzo who killed the pair. Nagato is supposed to meet Denzo for a sword match in a nearby clearing. Oichi asks to go in his place, and he agrees.

She shows up on the windy plain and within minutes of ferocious battle has slain Denzo. Nagato watches Oichi's lonely figure disappear into the distance. Despite the storyline, this first entry in the series emerges as one of the less sentimental in tone. However, compared to the next three, there's also less fighting, not as much



Women's Cell, 1968.

location work with more exterior shots shot on a soundstage. *Crimson Bat* was also a TV show but I've no information at all on those productions.

All four of these films are exceedingly rare. These versions are the dubbed-English ones with the dubbing sounding as if it was done by the same folks who dubbed many kung-fu sagas. In other words, the dubbing is poor-to-mediocre. Fortunately, none of these films sink to the level of incoherence found in sixties and seventies' Chinese productions. Also, despite having been transferred from Dutch video (Holland seems to be the only place they've been released on video), the film image is fairly clear and letterboxed! *** #1 (Shochiku) Dubbed-in-English VHS=from Holland, available on limited basis through Samurai Video (Suffern, N.Y.)

1969 *Trapped, The Crimson Bat (Mekura No Oichi — Jigoku Hada or Hell Flesh)* 87 min. Dir. Teiji Matsuda w/ Yoko Matsuyama, Jushiro Konoe, Toru Abe, Kikko Matsuoka, Yasunori Irikawa, Tadao Nakamaru This is probably my favorite of all four films. The pre-title sequence shows Oichi tangling with an outlaw *ronin* (Nakamaru in a cameo) with a price on his head. After an exciting fight, Oichi kills him and collects the bounty.

There's another female bounty hunter in the area played by Kikko Matsuoka, a sadistic villainess with a whip woven from human hair — "from the heads of men who broke women's hearts!" Not a bad sentiment, but otherwise Matsuoka's about as wicked as they come. Oichi and her are constantly at odds. Matsuoka nearly

kills Oichi in a duel where she hurls numerous poisonous snakes at her. Only one survives Oichi's sword, and it manages to bite her. Near death, Oichi's found by a young farmer.

He takes her to his cottage and nurses her back to health. They fall in-love, and Oichi accepts his marriage proposal. The village yakuza boss (Abe) knows he can never continue to victimize the farmers if Oichi and a benevolent *ronin* (Konoe) who is friend to the farmers continue to live. With Matsuoka's help, he snares Oichi's naive hubby in a crooked dice game. When the poor fellow can't pay the exorbitant amount that he's lost, the boss displays the body of one of the farmer's pals who'd dared to complain about the boss to the local magistrate. He orders the farmer to have Oichi kill the *ronin*, or he, himself, will be killed.

Returning home, he can't bear to tell Oichi. She remains outside, thinking. Two of the boss' men appear out of the darkness and confront her, hinting at the boss' ultimatum to her spouse. She can't get much more out of them, and they order her to be ready to accompany them at dawn. She realizes the marriage is doomed to failure. The next morning, she leaves only to be met again by yakuza clan members. They coerce her into leaving with them, explaining that otherwise her husband and friends will die. Suddenly the stocky *ronin* appears in the morning mist. The gangsters yell out for Oichi to kill him, but the *ronin* kills the pair with as many strokes. Oichi isn't positive who it is and is on the defensive till she hears Konoe's voice. He advises her to return to her husband. She declines, declaring she has her own score to settle.

Oichi meets Matsuoka, the boss and the rest of the clan. What follows is probably the most excitingly choreographed swordfight in the series, with Oichi finally overcoming the whipwoman, various swordsmen and the craven boss. In the last third of this protracted battle, the lighting abruptly changes. The early morning sunlight is blotted out as a deep dark blue envelopes everyone. Oichi slashes and tears in slow motion, red spurting in surreal geysers. Then a freeze-frame on her face and "The End." Also of note is the excellent score by the virtually unknown (in the U.S.) Hajime Kaburagi, a much more traditional sound than usual for this series with the eerie echoing of shamisens and biwas. ***1/2 #2 Dubbed-in-English VHS=Dutch video through Samurai Video

1969 *Watch Out, Crimson Bat! (Mekura No Oichi — Midare Gasa)* 87 min. Dir. Hirokazu Ichimura w/ Yoko Matsuyama, Goro Ibuki, Asahi Kurizuka, Rokko Taura, Shunji Imai, Jun Hamamura, Yoichi Numata, Gajiro Sato

Oichi runs into a dying courier and agrees to deliver a scroll for him to its appointed destination. Of course, all kinds of dastardly villains are also after the papers — a formula for a new kind of gunpowder. Oichi befriends a couple of teenage orphans and a young *ronin* (Ibuki) who is a former pupil of the gunpowder's inventor and also in pursuit of the scroll. The evil clan who are after the gunpowder formula are planning to overthrow the Shogunate and have been trying in vain to coerce the plans from the old gunsmith himself. Oichi loses the scroll when fighting with the clan samurai then falls over a cliff. She's nursed back to health by the *ronin*. They then journey with the two orphans to the gunsmith's village.

Oichi decides to go her own way, leaving her new friends behind. Since the village is the orphans' hometown and the *ronin* is engaged to the gunsmith's daughter, Oichi feels useless and unnecessary. However when the *ronin*, gunsmith and daughter are held hostage by the samurais, Oichi returns to rescue them. She holds her own during the climactic fight, but it seems hopeless. Without warning the hired sword who'd

(continued)

been helping the samurais, switches to Oichi's side, disgusted with the extreme cruelty of his employers. The two free Ibuki and the tide is turned. **1/2 #3 American dubbed-in-English VHS (pan-and-scan)=Video Action (out-of-print). Dubbed-in-English VHS=Dutch video through Samurai Video

1970 *Crimson Bat* — *Oichi! Wanted Dead or Alive!* (Mekura No Oichi — Inochi Moraimasu) 86 min. Dir. Hirokazu Ichimura w/ Yoko Matsuyama, Yuki Meguro, Hitoshi Omae, Tetsuro Tamba, Jun Tazaki, Reiko Oshida Oichi becomes the hunted with three bounty hunters — a huge, fake priest, a chain-and-sickle master and a young, embittered ex-doctor (Meguro) — after her hide. She manages to elude them, taking refuge in a fishing village that is being redeveloped as a port. The governor and *yakuza* boss are partners in the venture and are forcing the fishermen and other villagers from their homes without adequate compensation. Eventually Oichi becomes involved when she protects the kindly Kamecho, an elder leader of the village and his daughter, Ohan (Oshida).

The ex-doctor captures Oichi, holding her in a cave. He realizes they have much in common, and his heart changes towards her when she appeals to his idealistic side that has been long suppressed. When the other two bounty hunters intrude, trying to kill Oichi, he takes her side, and they slay his two former partners together. But the governor and *yakuza* boss are still victimizing the village. Kamecho is found murdered with evidence planted to make it look as if Oichi did it. The villagers are about to lynch Oichi when the young doctor intervenes with an eyewitness to the killing. The young man explains that the gangsters had stolen Oichi's sword and had dropped it at Kamecho's side after stabbing him to death.

Everyone returns to the village to find the governor's forces pulling down houses to make way for port construction. A battle erupts. Oichi, the doctor and few competent villagers seem outnumbered when help arrives from an unexpected quarter. The *ronin* (Tamba) the governor had hired as bodyguard turns out to be a Shogunate inspector investigating corruption in the province. He lauds Oichi for her help in rooting out the wicked. *** #4 Dubbed-in-English VHS=Dutch video through Samurai Video

1969 *The Woman Gambler* (Anego aka Elder Sister aka The Boss' Wife) 88 min. Dir. Buichi Saito w/ Hiroko Ogi, Akira Kobayashi, Shinjiro Ebara, Eiji Go VHS (Japan)=Nikkatsu

1969 *Vermillion Sword Scabbard and Gambling Code* (Shuzaya Jingi) series:

1969 *Storm of Violence* (Shuzaya Jingi — Tekka Midare Zakura or Vermillion Sword Scabbard Gambling Code — *Sword Amongst The Swirling Cherry Blossoms*) Dir. Buichi Saito w/ Hiroko Ogi, Meiko Kaji, Tatsuya Fuji Ogi, like Meiko Kaji, was a popular singing star in the latter sixties. She also sang theme songs for films (even one of the *Crimson Bat* pictures although I can't recall which one). In addition to appearing in quite a few films as a sword-wielding heroine, she also performed in more traditional roles in various *yakuza* and 'seishun' (young people) opuses, virtually all for Nikkatsu Studios in the late sixties. #1 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1969 *Go To Hell!* (Shuzaya Jingi — *O Inochi Chodai* or *Vermillion Sword Scabbard Gambling Code — Take A Life*) 94 min. Dir. Buichi Saito w/ Hiroko Ogi, Ryo Ikebe, Tatsuya Fuji #2 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1969 *Rising Dragon* (Nobori Ryu) series:

1969 *The Friendly Killer* (Nobori Ryu Tekka Hada aka *Rising Dragon's Iron Flesh*) 90 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Hiroko Ogi, Akira Kobayashi, Tatsuya Fuji, Toru Abe, Kokan Katsura Ogi's other *yakuza* sword series for Nikkatsu. She plays a boss' daughter who becomes his successor when he's murdered at a rival boss(Abe)'s

instigation. Kobayashi is a lone wolf who always seems to be around to help her at the crucial time. At the end, as he dies, she discovers he was the one hired by Abe to kill her father, and he'd been trying to redeem himself ever since. #1 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1969 *The Dragon Tattoo* (Nobori Ryu Yawa Hada Kaicho aka *Rising Dragon's Soft Flesh Exposed*) 85 min. Dir. Masami Kuzuo w/ Hiroko Ogi, Tatsuya Fuji, Akira Kobayashi, Tamio Kawaji, Ryohei Uchida #2 (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1970 *The Tattooed Swordsman* (Kaidan Nobori Ryu aka *Blind Woman's Curse aka Rising Dragon's Ghost Story aka Haunted Life of a Dragon-Tattooed Lass*) 85 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Meiko Kaji, Hoki Tokuda, Makoto Sato, Yoko Takagi, Toru Abe, Ryohei Uchida, Hideo Sunazuka, Yoshi Kato, Yuzo Harumi

Kaji takes over Ogi's role (although Kaji is called by a different name). Incredibly entertaining tale of female *yakuza* boss in turn-of-the-century Japan who accidentally blinds a woman in another clan during a gangfight in the rain. Although very few overtly supernatural events occur, the whole atmosphere of the picture is one of nocturnal spiritual evil looking for an outlet in violent individuals. Ishii keeps the film straddling the border — very successfully I might add — between bizarre, surreal horror film and period *yakuza*/samurai tale. A mesmerizing hybrid, and the kind of tale at which Ishii really excels (see SAMURAI S&M/EROTICA section elsewhere in this article for coverage of Ishii's in-period horror/cruelty sextet of films — virtually all anthologies — *Jays of Torture*, *Hell's Tattoos*, *Orgies of Edo*, *Shogun and 3,000 Women*, *Love and Crime*, and *Yakuza Punishment—Lynch Law!*) ***1/2 #3 VHS (Japan)=NIKKATSU

1969 *Tales of Japan's Chivalrous Women* (Nihon Jokyoden) series:

Five film female *yakuza* series (some set in the '20s, one set immediately in post-war '40s another in the '60s), all starring Junko Fuji with #s 1, 2, 4 co-starring Ken Takakura, #s 3, 5 co-starring Bunta Sugawara: *Chivalrous Geisha* (Nihon Jokyoden — *Kyokaku Geisha*) '69 99 min., Dir. Kosaku Yamashita, #1; *Brave Rd. Flower of the North* (N.J. — *Makka Na Doko Bana*) '70 94 min., Dir. Yasuo Furuhata, #2; *A Lively Geisha* (N.J. — *Tekka Geisha or Iron Geisha*) '70 100 min., Dir. Kosaku Yamashita, #3; *Duel of Swirling Flowers* (N.J. — *Ketto Midare Bana*) '71 107 min., Dir. Kosaku Yamashita, #4; *Trials of an Okinawan Village* (N.J. — *Geki To Hime Yuri Misaki*) '71 96 min., Dir. Shigehiro Ozawa #5. *Spaghetti Cinema's* Bill Connolly asked me once if I knew of a *yakuza* film with Junko Fuji and Bunta Sugawara set in Okinawa where, at the end, Sugawara's character is executed by a U.S. Occupation firing squad and Fuji does a mournful dance in the rain on the spot where he died. As a young teen, Bill had been an extra in the film when his family was stationed in Okinawa at the U.S. base. Well, Bill, this is it!

So far only #1, *A Chivalrous Geisha* (*Kyokaku Geisha*) is available on VHS (Japan)=Toei; others are all (Toei) (No Tape)

1969 *Flower of Chivalry, Torn Asunder — Gambling Heir* (*Kyo Ka Retsuden — Shumet Toba*) 93 min. Dir. Keiichi Ozawa w/ Meiko Kaji, Chieko Matsubara, Tatsuya Fuji, Hideaki Nitani, Shinjiro Ebara (Nikkatsu) (No Tape)

1969 *The Woman Killer* (Showa Onna Jingi aka *Showa Woman's Duty* or *Showa Woman's Gambling Code*) 78 min. Dir. Taro Yuge w/ Kyoko Enami, Yusuke Kawazu, Kazuo Kitamura, Kenji Sugawara, Mikko Narita, Rokko Taura, Kikko Matsuoka, Asao Koike Enami stars as woman trying to find the murderer of her lover, a man belonging to the Horikawa gang. Much more violent as far as Enami's character's participation than her *Woman Gambling Expert* (Onna Tobakushi) series. According to one source, this was supposed to be the first of a series w/ Enami

as a female detective. (Daiei) (No Tape)

1970 *Woman Boss* (Onna Kumicho aka *The Geisha Firefighter*) 82 min. Dir. Masahiro Makino w/ Kyoko Enami, Makoto Sato, Izusu Yamada, Mikio Narita, Masahiko Tsugawa, Nobuo Kaneko, Michitaro Mizushima (Daiei) (No Tape)

1970 *Naked Ambition* (Onna Gokaku Cho or *Evil Woman's Diary*) Dir. Kazuo Ikehiro w/ Michiyo Yasuda, Kei Sato (Daiei) (No Tape)

1971 *Orphan Gambler* (Onna Toseinin) series:

1971 *Okoma, the Orphan Gambler* (Onna Toseinin or *Modern Woman*) 90 min. Dir. Shigehiro Ozawa w/ Junko Fuji, Koji Tsuruta Fuji's other woman gambler series set in period milieu. But instead of being a more seasoned, established and respected personality in the *yakuza* community, she supposedly appears in these films as a bit of a neophyte, a newcomer learning the ropes in a dog-eat-dog world. Unfortunately — and surprisingly considering Fuji's ongoing popularity — neither of these are out on video. #1 (Toei) (No Tape)

1971 *Orphan Gambler 2* (Onna Toseinin — *Ota no Moshimasu*) 103 min. Dir. Kosaku Yamashita w/ Junko Fuji, Bunta Sugawara, Kyosuke Machida, Shogo Shimada #2 (Toei) (No Tape)

1972 *Cherry Blossom Fire Gang* (Kanto Hizakura Ikka aka *Kanto Actress' Clan*) 102 min. Dir. Masahiro Makino w/ Junko Fuji, Ken Takakura, Koji Tsuruta, Bunta Sugawara, Chiezo Kataoka, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Kanjuro Arashi. Fuji's swan song, retiring at the height of her popularity to get married to a kabuki stage actor. She's since reappeared in a couple of films in 1989 and 1991 respectively. This pretty much sums up the pattern for other 'ninkyō' or 'chivalrous' type *yakuza* films such as *Tales of Showa Era Cruelty* (*Showa Zan Kyoden*), *Tales of Japanese Chivalry* (*Nihon Kyokakuden*) and *Red Peony Gambler* (*Hibotan Bakuto*) series — program filler elevated to blood ritual status. Despite the repetitive nature of the genre, when these films are done right (which at Toei, NIKKATSU and Daiei was 85 to 90% of the time) they are nothing less than excellent. **** VHS (Japan)=Toei

1972 *Showa Woman Gambler* (*Showa Onna Bakuto*) 91 min. Dir. Tai Kato w/ Kyoko Enami, Hiroki Matsukata, Shigeru Amachi, Kanjuro Arashi *Red Peony Gambler*. Junko Fuji had just retired, and Daiei, Enami's parent contract studio had just gone belly-up. So Toei, apparently testing the waters, teamed up excellent *yakuza* director, Kato, with charismatic Enami hoping, I suppose, to start another female *yakuza* series and strike box-office lightning. This appears to be the only one that they made so I guess things didn't pan out as far as attendance. Nevertheless this has a good critical rep, and I would very much like to see it. (Toei) (No Tape)

1972 *Ginjo* series:

1972 *Ginjo Wanderer* (*Ginjo Wataridori*) Dir. Kazuhiko Yamaguchi w/ Meiko Kaji, Tatsuo Umemiya, Akiko Koyama, Tsunehiko Watase. Yamaguchi, director of the majority of the *Sister Streetfighter* series turns out two pictures with Kaji as a lone wolf *yakuza* avenger. These seem pretty obscure since I had to really dig through back issues of *Kinem Junpo* to find out about them. #1 (Toei) (No Tape)

1972 *Ginjo Drifter — Cat-Girl Gambling* (*Ginjo Nagaremono — Mesu Neko Bakuchi*) Dir. Kazuhiko Yamaguchi w/ Meiko Kaji, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Shingo Yamashiro #2 (Toei) (No Tape)

1972 *Tiger Lily* (*Hichirimen Bakuto* aka *The Silk Gambler*) Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Keiko Nakamura, Bunta Sugawara, Sanae Tsuchida, Hiroko Fuji, Reiko Ike, Junko Matsuhai, Midori Hoshino, Minoru Oki, Shingo Yamashiro, Hiroshi Nawa, Asao Koike Toei's next bid to strike lightning a la *Red Peony Gambler*. They really seemed

to push this when it first came out with full page ads in two different issues of *Kinema Junpo*. However, except for an enthusiastic mention by Jessica Amanda Salmonson in her *Martial Arts Movies* article about female samurais, this seems to have sunk without a trace. Too bad, especially with the ad's multiple swordswomen imagery and Teruo Ishii's sure-to-be-perverse involvement. The first of a prospective series — they even say so in the ad — but no more were forthcoming. (Toei) (No Tape)

1973 Ocho series:

1973 *Story of a Depraved Elder Sister — Ocho's Sake Cup* (*Furyo Anego Den — Cho No Roku Ocho*) Dir. Norifumi Suzuki w/ Reiko Ike, Setzaburo Kawazu, Hiroshi Nawa Another gambling swordswoman pair of pictures from Toei that was praised in the 1982 *Martial Arts Movies* article on swordswomen. Yet again I had to dig like an archaeologist to find info on these two films. Why doesn't Toei bring all these undoubtedly viscerally exciting pictures out on the miracle of video? #1 (Toei) (No Tape)

1973 *Story of a Depraved Elder Sister — Wide-spread Lynch Law* (*Yasugure Anego Den — Sokatsu Rinchi*) Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Reiko Ike, Ryohhei Uchida #2 (Toei) (No Tape)

1973 Lady Snowblood (*Shura Yukihime*) series:

1973 *Lady Snowblood* (*Shura Yukihime*) 97 min. Dir. Toshiya Fujita w/ Meiko Kaji, Toshio Kurosawa, Eiji Okada, Ko Nishimura A band of brigands assaults a young couple out for a walk in the country. The husband is brutally murdered in literal geysers of crimson. The wife barely holds onto her sanity as she is violated and then thrown into jail. Already pregnant, she gives birth to a little girl one snowy night with the other inmates tearfully attending. She christens the little tyke, Yuki, because of the blizzard outside, then expires. Yuki grows into a young girl. An elderly martial arts master, Nishimura, instructs her mercilessly in the art of sword and killing so when the time comes she can avenge her parents.

Yuki grows into a beautiful young woman (Kaji). Okada, leader of the bandits, is now a respected and wealthy right-wing fanatic helping to raise havoc behind the scenes of the 1920s' Japanese government. Yuki finds each of the men involved in her parents' death and slays them. Along the way, a sadistic whore who'd been tagging along with the evil men, nearly kills Yuki. A political writer, Kurosawa, has joined Yuki in her mission and helps her kill the monstrous bitch. He finally sacrifices himself to pin Okada to the wall so Yuki can run him through. Shot several times, Yuki stumbles away from the mansion and the masked ball in progress. She falls prostrate in the snow and falls asleep. We assume she could never survive. However when the sun rises, a yellow glow on her face awakens her. She rises and staggers away. ***1/2 VHS (Japan)=Toho

1974 *Lady Snowblood — Web of Treachery* (*Shura Yukihime — Urami Kot Uta or Love Song of Resentments*) 89 min. Dir. Toshiya Fujita w/ Meiko Kaji, Yoshio Harada, Juzo Itami, Shin Kishida, Rinichi Yamamoto Yuki is attacked by police in a cemetery as she visits a loved one's grave. The film opens up with an intoxicatingly delirious tracking shot as Yuki slashes her way down a forest path, dispatching her pestering official pursuers in a rain of blood. In fact, the whole first ten minutes or so of the film are unrelieved carnage, a visceral vicarious stretch of nihilistic thrills that end only when Yuki tires and gives herself up.

Being carted away to prison, a band of caped men ambush the prison wagon and kidnap her to their elegant lair. Classic Toho villain, Shin Kishida, plays the ringleader of another bunch of fascist maniacs who want to shanghai Yuki

to use as one of their assassins. To escape their clutches, she'll agree to just about anything. They plant her as a maid in the house of another subversive, this time a Marxist writer. They don't count on her befriending the fellow. Finally they kidnap him, and Yuki escapes. Horrible torture of the writer follows.

Yuki hides out with a cynical ex-doctor (Harada) who'd helped her earlier. He's now living in abject poverty in a ghetto. The writer is released on the edge of the ghetto, and Harada reluctantly tends the man's wounds. But he's been beaten too ferociously and dies. The dead writer's other maid, who was his lover, goes crazy. She assaults the evil detective (Yamamoto) who'd interrogated the writer and stabs him in the eye. Even after several of the inspector's colleagues slash at her with their swords, she has to be pried off of his bleeding face.

Having locked Yuki in one of the mansion's rooms, the fascists set fire to the ghetto. Yuki escapes and kills all the fascists at the house. She makes a beeline to the smoking ashes of the ruins. Harada has survived the inferno but is near collapse. He draws his sword and insists on accompanying Yuki to attack the remaining rightist ringleaders. All of them are cut down on the grounds of a temple. Kishida is the last to die, and he pumps both Harada and Yuki full of lead. Once again the male lead (this time, Harada) sacrifices himself, holding onto Kishida even though it means death, so Yuki can approach and stab him.

Director, Fujita, helmed several yakuza and many anarchic juvenile delinquent pictures at NIKKATSU in the 1969-1971 period before the studio changed over to an almost exclusively "Roman Porno" output. Kaji appeared in many of his pictures, and their Nikkatsu relationship probably explains their teaming-up here. Fujita was also a protege of Seijun Suzuki, and later appeared as actor in Suzuki's 1980 experimental ghost story, *Zigeunerweisen*. ***1/2 #2 VHS (Japan)=Toho

1986 *Death Shadows* (*Jittemai*) 116 min. Dir. Hideo Gosha w/ Mariko Ishihara, Mari Natsuki, Takuzo Kawatani, Tsunehiko Watase, Eitaro Ozawa (see *Cult Movies* #12, Part 1 of this article on Hideo Gosha) *** Amer. dubbed VHS=J.A. Video Productions (out-of-print) VHS (Japan)=Shochiku

1991 Women Ninja (*Kunoichi Ninpo* or *Female Black Magic Ninjas*) series:

1991 *Women Ninjas* (*Kunoichi Ninpo* aka *Female Black Magic Ninjas*) Dir. Katsu Tsushima w/ Yasuyo Shirashima, Reiko Hayama, Hitomi Okasaki Produced directly for video (with some scenes on film, some on very high-definition videotape), this is a reprise/remake of a mid-'60s film of the same name directed for Toei by Sadao Nakajima (see "Ninja" section of this article in next issue). This isn't exactly bad. But it isn't very good, either. The costuming which consists of micro minis made out of obvious 20th century materials is probably the worst and most visible fault. The stories seem to gradually improve as the series progresses, but this is basically a soft-core porno enterprise as well as action one, and the heroines and villainesses drop their drawers at the slightest instigation. I used to think this was bad. Since then I've seen some films that are worse, so I guess I've gotta be happy this is at least mediocre. *1/2 #1 (Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

I'm not positive, but Video Search of Miami may have this series available with English subtitles

1992 *Women Ninjas — Holy Woman's Treachery* (*Kunoichi Ninpo — Seisho Jo No Hiho*) 80 min. Dir. Katsu Tsushima w/ Yuki Sumida, Kenji Yamaguchi, Miki Mizuno, Reiko Hayama A bit of an improvement over the first installment with even more supernatural overtones. ** #2

(Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

1993 *Women Ninjas 3* (*Kunoichi Ninpo —*) 79 min. Dir. Katsu Tsushima w/ ? #3 (Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

1994 *Women Ninjas — Secret Summary of the Loyal 47 Ronin* (*Kunoichi Ninpo — Chushingura Hisho*) 73 min. Dir. Katsu Tsushima w/ ? #4 (Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

1995 *Women Ninjas 5* (*Kunoichi Ninpo*) Dir. Katsu Tsushima w/ ? #5 (Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

1995 Secrets From a Women's Prison (*Onna Ro Hisho*) series:

1995 *Secrets From a Women's Prison — The Magistrate's Daughter* (*Onna Ro Hisho — Musume Bugyo*) 78 min. Dir. Ryoji Nishimura w/ Ayako Takahashi, Takeshi Shinya, Mieko Arai, Kazushige Otake. From the video packaging this is apparently the third film of an ongoing series. It's made by the same people who make the *Women Ninjas* (*Kunoichi Ninpo*) series and is also straight to video without any theatrical release. It seems to be inspired by the Daito *Women's Prison* (*Hiroku Onna Ro*) series from the sixties. There's plenty of nudity, torture and swordplay. However, this looks nowhere near as cheesy as the first couple of *Women Ninjas* films. The costuming is not perfect but it's reasonably authentic compared to this company's previous efforts. **1/2 #3 (Sumikawa Film/Cinemarion) VHS (Japan)=King Video

That's it for Part 3. Originally this was supposed to be the concluding part of "Samurai Films: A Neglected Genre." But all of it just went on too long, even after editing, so — one more part, Part 4, The Conclusion(!) will appear in the next issue of *Cult Movies*. I promise! (not just to you, the readers, but to the editors who are, I'm sure, about ready to order yours truly to commit *hara-kiri*). The concluding Part 4 will include the *Ninja* and the *Matatabi* films I've promised for so long as well as some excellent (believe it or not) *Erotic/S&M Samurai* films.

I want to acknowledge obtaining quite a bit of information — titles, credits, etc., for some of the more obscure *Kaidan* films from Stuart Galbraith IV's *Japanese Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy Films*, published by McFarland Press. I've also, as I've mentioned in the text, perused countless back issues (1954-1975) of *Kinema Junpo* magazine (it's in Japanese so you should be a bit familiar with the language if you hope to get anything out of it) to glean titles and credits for movies not found in the "usual" places. For other bibliographical info see Parts 1 & 2 of this article in *Cult Movies* #s 12, 13).

Several samurai films have been released on video since Part 2 of this article: *Hara-Kiri* (*Seppuku*), *Sword of Doom* (*Daibosatsu Toge*), and *Sanyuro* (*Tsubaki Sanyuro*), all excellent, all three subtitled and letterboxed from Home Vision. *Sanyuro* was also released on Criterion laser disc (now Criterion, how about *Sword of Doom* and *Hara-Kiri*?). *Chambara* Entertainment just brought out three more *Zatoichi* films: *Zatoichi, the Fugitive* (*Zatoichi Kyototabi*), #4 in the series; *Adventures of a Blind Man* (*Zatoichi Sekisho Yaburi*), #9; and *The Blind Swordsman's Cane Sword* (*Zatoichi Tekka Tabi*), #15. All three are excellent, especially *Zatoichi, the Fugitive*. *Chambara's* video store, *Video Action*, is located in downtown L.A. on 1st Street just east of Figueroa (not only do they sell *Zatoichi* videos but they also rent them as well as several other out-of-print samurai films such as *Red Lion*, *Death Shadows*, etc...). Also Merlin David's *Samurai Video* continues to be an excellent source for samurai films (*Zatoichi*, *Lone Wolf and Child*, *Kyoshiro Nemuri*, *Ninja-Band of Assassins*, *Crimson Bat*, *Lady Snowblood*, *Illusion of Blood*, etc...) at P. O. Box 372, Suffern, N.Y., 10901, fax# 914-357-0780. ■