

LONE WOLF AND CUB BABY CART IN THE LAND OF DEMONS

See the Lone Wolf & Cub: Sword of Vengeance Liner Notes (also available online at <http://www.animeigo.com/samliner/lwcliner.t>) for general details on Tokugawa-era Japan.

Trivia: The Lone Wolf & Cub movies are based on the original comic book (Story by Koike Kazuo, Illustrations by Kojima Goseki), a 142-episode epic, which ran in the “Manga Action” comic book between September 10, 1970, and April 1st, 1976. Repackaged and re-issued in 28 volumes (over 8400 pages), it is still among the most popular of its kind.

The Beasts of Hell

“Gozu-mezu,” short for “Gozu-rasetsu” and “Mezu-rasetsu,” refers to beasts that exist in hell (in Buddhism). With heads resembling those of cows (“Gozu-”) and horses (“Mezu-“), they are said to torture and feed upon the flesh of those of the dead who have committed sins.

The Saikaidoo region

The Saikai-doo (lit. “The Road of Western Seas“) region is roughly equivalent to what is now called “Kyuushuu” (lit. “Nine states”), a large land mass in the southern end of Japan. Kyuushuu is named for the nine major provinces, including Chikuzen and Satsuma, that were located there until the end of Tokugawa Era.

Zen and the Art of Assassinating Buddhas

To properly appreciate the role of the Buddhist priest, Jikei, in Lone Wolf and Cub 5, some understanding of Zen Buddhism may come in handy. As a full discussion is of course beyond the scope of these notes, those who are interested should refer to the many books available on the subject.

In Zen Buddhism, emptiness is defined as a state of mind. Clearer understanding of the world can come only when the mind is empty, cleared of extraneous thoughts (for example, through meditation). This is a fundamental concept, analogous to the mathematical concept of the number “zero” (the discovery of which had caused quite a philosophical revolution) which made possible mathematics that were once considered impossible.

“Mumonkan” is a collection of forty-eight koan (philosophical questions) compiled in China by a monk, Mumon Ekai, in 1228 A.D. Each koan is followed by a commentary by Mumon. One koan, entitled “Joshu's Dog,” states:

A monk asked Joshu Jushin, a Chinese Zen master: “Does a dog have Buddha-nature?”

Joshu answered: “Mu.”

Even though “Mu” is the Chinese character meaning “nothing,” “null,” etc., the answer does not mean that a dog lacks Buddha nature. What does Mu mean then? That is the point of the koan! Zen practitioners must try to find the answer by themselves. Mu has no concrete definition. The

solution to the Mu problem is for one to be integrated with it.

(Editor's Note: this means that in Zen, to become part of the solution, you must become part of the problem. But I digress...)

What Jikei recites in one scene inside a temple, in fact, are parts of Mumon's commentary on Joshu's Dog.

Among the many sources we have consulted in preparing these liner notes, the following were especially helpful:

- 1) "Tokugawa Japan - The Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan" Chie Nakane, Shinzaburoo Ooishi and Conrad Totman, eds. Univ. of Tokyo Press, 1990
- 2) "Japan - A Historical Survey" Mikiso Hane. Scribner, 1972
- 3) "A History of Japan: 1615 - 1867" George Sanson. Stanford Univ. Press, 1963
- 4) "Kozure Ookami", vols.1-28, Koike Kazuo & Kojima Goseki, published by Koike Shoin, 1995 (re-issue)