

ZATOICHI ZATOICHI IN DESPERATION

For more background details on the history of the Shogunate, see our other liner notes, available on our website, www.animeigo.com; we do not have space to present them all here.

During the reign of Tokugawa Ieyasu (the first of the Tokugawa shoguns), the country was closed to international trade except for very limited commercial contact with China and the Netherlands. In consequence, internal trade between the fiefs (regions controlled by a particular feudal lord) blossomed. The government controlled public works projects such as castles, roads, and bridges. However, these could easily fall into disrepair after their construction, as Nobu unfortunately discovers.

There are very few of these rope bridges remaining in modern-day Japan.

Zatoichi meets Nobu outside of Sakura, approximately 30 miles east of Edo (now Tokyo). After their encounter, he travels to Choshi, about 90 miles from Sakura. Located on the eastern most part of mainland Japan on the Kashimada Sea, Choshi is a major port and center for deep-sea fishing.

Nobu plays the shamisen, which Zatoichi takes to Choshi to use as identification for her daughter. The shamisen is a three-stringed instrument that developed from the biwa, a classical Japanese stringed instrument, and has a body shaped like a pear sliced lengthwise and a neck with a fretted fingerboard that is usually bent just below the tuning pegs.

The predominant genre of music played by shamisen players was the nagauta, or long song. This genre dates from the late seventeenth century, and it was a very simple, lyrical style until the nineteenth century. After the nineteenth century, it grew into a more ornate lyrical style. Shamisen players also played a genre of music called joururi, after a singing style in the puppet plays (also called joururi). This music was meant to accompany the narrator as he sung the story of the play.

There is a tradition for wandering shamisen artists to perform in front of people's houses for small change or food.

The firefly (or "hotaru") has been a metaphor for passionate love in poetry since Man'yō-shū (an 8th century anthology). Their eerie lights are also thought to be the souls of deceased soldiers. Unfortunately, since fireflies only live in clean water, their numbers have been decreasing in recent years because of pollution.

Sashimi is sliced raw fish with various sauces for dipping. At fancy restaurants it will sometimes be presented in conjunction with the still living fish from which it was prepared. Given Zatoichi's skill with sharp blades, his joke about male fish and sashimi is particularly cutting.

"Zatoichi in Desperation" is the first film directed by Katsu Shintaro. The only other one that he

directed was the final Zatoichi film, "Zatoichi" (1989).

In Memoriam

Katsu Shintaro died of cancer on June 21st, 1997 at the age of 65. The famous, multi-talented actor-director-producer, affectionately called "Katsu-shin" by most Japanese, began his career in the 1940's, and was perhaps best known for his portrayal of the blind swordman, Zatoichi, in a long-running film series which was among the most successful in the history of Japanese cinema. As a producer, he fathered such hit movies as "Lone Wolf and Cub," which starred Katsu's brother, Wakayama Tomisaburo, which we have the honor of releasing in the United States.

Known for his love of alcohol and cigarettes, in the final years of his life Katsu-shin spent increasing amounts of time in the hospital, only to be seen lighting up cigars at press conferences held to announce his recovery.

Two days after his death, five thousand people attended his memorial service at a Tokyo temple.

For further reference, we suggest the following sources:

- 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 Sansom. Stanford Univ. Press, 1963