

“Just Ahead: Utsunomiya Inn District”

Utsunomiya is the capital of the Tochigi Prefecture (formally the Shimotsuke province) in the Kanto region of Japan. The most populous city in Tochigi, Utsunomiya was a major post-town along the Nikko Highway during this time. Today, it is particularly known for its flavorful gyoza dumplings (aka “potstickers”).

“I'm Jokichi from Mikogami Village in Boshu. Remember that.”

Boshu (also known as Awa) is located in the southern part of the current Chiba Prefecture. It was one of the eight original provinces of the Kanto region.

“But I'm the sworn brother of Kunisada Chuji, Boss of the eight provinces of Kanto.”

During the Tokugawa Period, there were eight provinces in the Kanto region: Musashi, Awa (Boshu), Kouzuke, Shimotsuke, Kazusa, Shimo-Usa, Hitachi and Sagami. Today, the seven Prefectures of Kanto are: Chiba, Gunma, Ibaraki, Kanagawa, Saitama, Tochigi and Tokyo.

Kunisada Chuji

The cold-blooded Yakuza boss of Kanto's eight provinces is based on a famous outlaw from the mid-19th century of the same name. Born in Joshu province (present day Gunma Prefecture) in 1810, Chuji was a mysterious gambler who lived in the forests around Mount Akagi (in the Gunma Prefecture). He is often referred to as a Japanese Robin Hood, known for helping the poor and defeating evil gangs who threatened the innocent.

His cameo in this film is far from unique, as the Kunisada character has appeared in numerous films, mainly portraying him as a rebellious “good guy.”

As film expert Michael Jeck noted in his essay on “Zatoichi and the Chest of Gold” (which also features the Kunisada character), “pairing Zatoichi and Chuji Kunisada is like having Clint Eastwood's nameless gunslinger bump into Wyatt Earp.”

“As sure as my name is Chogoro of Kaiun, you won't get past the Nikko Highway.”

One of the five major highways of the Tokugawa Period, the Nikko-kaido was the shortest, connecting Edo (Tokyo) with the town of Nikko (located in Tochigi Prefecture), the final resting place for the first and third Tokugawa Shoguns. The highway ran north to south and was an important gathering place for funeral processions and rituals.

To this day, the funeral procession of Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu is reenacted each year along the road.

“They're the biggest wholesale outfit in Yashu province, right?”

Yashu is another name for the former Shimotsuke province, which became the present-day Tochigi Prefecture. The Yashu province was the home-base for Chogoro and Kyubei's gangs.

“Hey Jokichi, so you married Okinu and live in Honjo, right?”

Honjo is located in the northern tip of Saitama Prefecture, just a few miles over the present-day Gunma border. During the late Tokugawa Era, Honjo was a bustling market town on the Nakasendo Highway and specialized in the silk thread trade.

“So our Boss and Boss Chogoro met him at Bushu to help him get away.”

Bushu is another name for Musashi province, which comprises the present-day Saitama, Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefectures.

Signpost: “Deer Hot Springs”

Located in the Nasu Highland in the northeast part of the Tochigi Prefecture, the Deer Hot Springs is the oldest public bathing site in the Highland region. The springs contain natural hydrogen sulfide and acidic alum, which really help you relax after a tough day of battling yakuza bad-guys. The area around the springs is a popular spot for vacationers, with its flat rocks and gentle streams. The legend surrounding the name of the springs comes from an old tale about an injured deer who quickly heals after resting in the warm waters.

“When the farmers rioted in Koshu last year, they joined in just to raise some hell.”

The Koshu, or Kai province is located just outside of the Kanto region in the present-day Yamanashi Prefecture.

“So whenever Boss Chuji travels the Nakasendo Highway, he always stays at the inn.”

Nakasendo Highway (literally “Road through the Central Mountains”) is, along with the Tokaido, one of the original two roads that connected Edo and Kyoto. Unlike its sister-road, which runs near the coastline, the Nakasendo runs over a more mountainous terrain, through the heart of Japan. Among the 67 post-towns along the 310 mile highway, two, Honjo and Oiwake, are mentioned in the film.

Flag: “Sweet-potato Liquor”

The symbol on the flag outside of Ginzo's inn, “Sweet-potato liquor” (imo-shochu) is also commonly known as Japanese vodka. Unlike sake, imo-shochu can be mixed with water, tea, fruit juice or any assortment of liquids, depending on the season and the drinker's personal taste. This is evident when Ochika's aunt offer some to Jokichi and shows him how she likes to drink it.

“I'm Ginzo, Mitsuya Kiju's inn-keeper here in Oiwake.”

Oiwake (which literally means “parting of the way” or “road junction”) gets its name from a junction in the Nakasendo Highway. The post-town at Oiwake lies at the foothills of Mt. Asama and was typical of other junction towns in that it had a busy nightlife and marked a place for entertainers and outlaws to gather.

“Don't screw this up! Attack him as a group!”

Our research staff believes this to be the first instance of a bad guy actually coming up with the concept of attacking as a team rather than one-at-a-time - or at least, it's the first time they've seen it on film! It is indeed ironic that, once one of the bad guys finally figures out what has to be done to kill the good guy, his boss won't let him do it! It just goes to show you, [it ain't easy being a minion!](#) And for that matter, if you're the head bad guy, it might pay to [review these helpful tips](#) before dispatching your minions to dispose of the hero.

“Yes. Tomorrow morning at the fifth hour, at Chomeiji Temple, right around the corner.”

Chomeiji Temple is located between Nagano and Gunma Prefecture, close to Mt. Asama. The area near the temple is famous for Chomeiji cherry rice cakes and Kototoi dumplings.

Mikogami II - The Fearless Avenger

“Itako! The Boss went to Itako!”

The city of Itako is located in Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan, and it is known for its annual Iris festival (the Itako Ayame Matsuri).

“With the Enokimatsu's. He's attending the third memorial of Enokimatsu's previous boss.”

Although memorial customs vary locally, they usually take place during the Obon (around August 15th), which honors the dead. These memorial gatherings are usually held in the 1st year, sometimes in the 3rd and 5th, 7th and 13th years, and a number of times afterwards up to either the 39th or the 50th year. A popular sequence follows the days of the Thirteen Buddhas (where a memorial is held the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, twenty-eighth, thirty-fifth, forty-second, forty-ninth, and one hundredth days and on the first, third, seventh, thirteenth and thirty-third years after a believer's death).

“Banker Kamimizo.”

Enokimatsu is addressing his guests by their positions, giving us an insight into the hierarchy of the yakuza in this area and time. The higher ranking is “Kashimoto,” translating to “Banker” or “Financier,” and it is held by Kamimizo, Sukesaburo, and Juzaburo (the boss known as “Thunder”). The kashimoto controls territories for gambling, hosts gambling events, and charges commissions. The lower designation, “Daigashi,” is more of an assistant to the kashimoto. This position, held by men like Seizo and Enokimatsu, is responsible for actually running the gambling sites. They can also be in charge of rolling the dice for the games.

“Boss Umezo of Yashiro.”

Yashiro is a town located in the Kato District of Hyogo Prefecture, Japan. It is the Japanese sister city of Olympia, Washington.

“Don't you know? That's the nickname of Boss Juzaburo of Nirasaki.”

Nirasaki is a city located in Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan.

“I cannot express my gratitude.”

“Moshiwake Goizaimasen” literally means “I have no words to say,” so it's something you say when you've screwed up bigtime. In “The Fearless Avenger,” Jokichi prostrates himself before the elderly gentlemen, repeating the phrase as an acknowledgment that he can do nothing to repay them for risking their lives to retrieve him from the water.

Cho-Han Bakuchi

After Jokichi is rescued and returns to the road, we see him participating in a game of Cho-Han Bakuchi (also called Cho Ka Han Ka, or simply Cho-Han) in a gambling house. This game uses two standard six-sided dice, which are shaken in a bowl or cup and overturned. Players then place bets on whether the sum total of the numbers will be “Cho” (even) or “Han” (odd). The dealer then removes the cup, displaying the dice, and the winners collect their money. However, the specific rules of the game vary depending on the region and time period during which it was played.

In this version of the game, the dealer acts as the house, collecting all losing bets. More often, the players will bet against each other (which requires an equal number of players for the even and odd sides) and the house will collect a set percentage off winning bets. This game was a mainstay of the bakuto, the itinerant gamblers of old Japan, and it is still played by the modern yakuza. The game is often seen in chambara and yakuza movies.

At the AnimEigo offices, Cho-Han is a drinking game. Every time we hear “Cho” or “Han”, we want to run away and get a drink.

“Chuji is at the Nagataya Inn in Matsudo.”

The city of Matsudo is located in Chiba Prefecture, Japan.

“I hear they've come down with food poisoning, and will have to rest up for four or five days.”

A foodborne illness (sometimes incorrectly referred to as food poisoning) is any illness resulting from the consumption of food contaminated by pathogenic bacteria, toxins, viruses, prions, or parasites. These contaminations usually arise from improper handling, preparation, or food storage.

Symptoms can begin several hours to several days after ingestion of the contaminated food, and can include nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, headache, and fatigue. In most cases, the sufferer recovers after a short period of discomfort and illness, but foodborne illness can result in permanent health or even death, especially in babies, pregnant women and their fetuses, elderly people, and others with weak immune systems.

There are about 76 million foodborne illnesses in the United States every year (26,000 cases for 100,000 inhabitants). Of those, 325,000 were hospitalized (111 per 100,000 inhabitants), and 5,000 people died (1.7 per 100,000).

“I don't want sake.”

In Japanese, “sake” refers to an alcoholic beverage brewed mainly from rice and known as nihonshu, but it can also simply mean “an alcoholic beverage.” In English, we use “sake” to refer to nihonshu alone.

Sake is produced by the multiple parallel fermentation of polished rice, which removed the protein and oils from the exterior, leaving behind starch. The starch is then converted to sugar by enzyme action, and this sugar is converted to alcohol by yeast. This is similar to the brewing of beer, but the starch conversion comes from the action of a mold called koji, where in beer the enzymes come from the malt itself.

After fermentation, the produce is heavily clouded with grain solids and is generally filtered. The product is not generally aged because customers tend to prefer the flavor of the fresh product, which degrades quickly in light, air, and heat.

Slight variations in the brewing process can lead to many different types of sake being created. There are two basic types of sake: sanzoshu (“normal sake”) and tokutei meishoshu (“special designation sake”). Tokutei meishoshu is distinguished by the degree to which the rice is polished and the added percentage, or absence, of jozo alcohol.

“There's going to be a fight with Gosuke of Nagareyama.”

Nagareyama is a city located in Chiba Prefecture, Japan.

Mikogami III - Slaughter in the Snow

“It's against the law for an outcast to speak with a samurai, let alone elope with one.”

Oyae is a “hinin” (outcast), literally translated as “non-people.” The hinin were both below and outside the highly regulated social structure of feudal Japanese society, and were not allowed even the most basic of interactions with other classes.

“...you'll both be crucified, and that's just the start of it.”

Crucifixion is an ancient method of execution, in which the victim is tied or nailed to a large wooden cross and left to hang there until dead. It was an extremely painful and dishonorable form of death in the Roman Empire, where it was used until AD 313. Death came from asphyxiation, physical shock from the scourging that preceded the crucifixion, the nailing itself, dehydration, and exhaustion.

Crucifixion (called "Haritsuke") was used in Japan before and during the Tokugawa Shogunate. The victim (usually a sentenced criminal) was hoisted upon a T-shaped cross, whereupon executioners impaled him with spears. The body was then left to hang for a time before the burial.

"...to cut up a dirty ronin like you."

Literally, the word "ronin" means "wave person" - one who is tossed about, as on the waves in the sea. In its most common usage, it refers to a samurai who no longer has a master to serve. A samurai became masterless from the ruin or fall of his master, or after the loss of his master's favor or privilege. Without a reliable income, status, or power, ronin were often disreputable, and the group was a target of humiliation and satire.

"I've heard stories about a master of knife-throwing."

In knife-throwing, the knives are almost always one-piece, as opposed to the traditional knives that have a handle manufactured separately from the blade and attached later. They can also be double-edged.

In "Slaughter in the Snow," Kobunji's knives travel in a straight line, the point always facing forward, but that is only possible using a weighted blade and a special throwing grip. He uses a type of knife called "Deba-bocho," a double-edged, heavy duty knife mostly used for gutting fish. Most typically, the knife will rotate when thrown, making it difficult to predict what part of the knife will hit the target. Figuring these variables into calculations requires a good sense of distance and the ability to change the number of spins the knife makes before striking.

"I already took a 20-ryo advance."

A ryo was the gold piece in pre-Meiji Japan, worth about sixty monme of silver or four kan of copper (depending on the exchange rate fluctuation). It was eventually replaced with a system based on the yen.

1 ryo can be considered roughly equivalent to 350,000 Yen. (Based on the gold exchange rates, reported by NHK in the late 1990's). 1 ryo bought roughly 1 koku (approx. 180 liters or 5 bushels) of rice, which is about a year supply of rice. In a recent NHK documentary, it was reported that Tokugawa Ieyasu (the 1st Tokugawa Shogun) had amassed by the time of his death approximately 6 million ryo of gold (about 64% in Koban, 14% in Oban, the rest in other forms of gold), roughly equivalent to 2.1 trillion Yen.

"I heard that Chuji's staying with Boss Matsutaro of Kofu."

Kofu is the capital city of Yamanashi-Prefecture, Japan, and it contains many monuments to Takeda Shingen, a preeminent daimyo who fought for control of Japan during that country's warring period.

"Kobunji's consumption is pretty bad. A little patchwork's not going to help him."

Tuberculosis (Consumption) is a common and deadly disease which usually affects the lungs. Most common in Africa and Asia, over one-third of the world's population now has the TB bacterium in their bodies. Tuberculosis is spread by aerosol droplets expelled by people with the active disease of the lungs when they cough, sneeze, speak, or spit. However, not everyone who is infected develops the disease.

Symptoms of tuberculosis include a prolonged cough (more than three weeks in duration), chest pains, and coughing up blood. Systemic symptoms include fever, chills, night sweats, appetite loss, weight loss, and easy fatigue. The disease is commonly treated with antibiotics.

In the past, tuberculosis has had a variety of names: Consumption, Phthisis (Greek for “consumption”), Scrofula, Wasting Disease, White Plague, King’s Evil, and Pott’s Disease.

“It’ll add a nice touch of color... to your gravestone.”

In the present day, the Japanese typically have a family grave, where the ashes of a deceased relative are interred. The gravestone usually consists of a stone monument, with a place for flowers, incense, and water in front of the monument and a chamber or crypt underneath for the ashes. The names of the deceased are often but not always engraved on the front of the monument.

“Big Brother... Big Brother, are you all right?”

Aniki is a Japanese honorable term for an older brother or a superior. It is frequently used in yakuza speech.

“...I look over to the flowing Sumida River.”

The Sumida River flows through Tokyo, Japan. It branches from the Arakawa River at Iwabuchi and flows into Tokyo Bay. Its tributaries include the Kanda and Shakuji rivers.

What is now known as the “Sumida River” was previously the path of the Arakawa, but towards the end of the Meiji era, work was carried out to divert the main flow of the Arakawa to prevent flooding.