

ZATOICHI ZATOICHI'S CONSPIRACY

“Give me back my stomach-band!”

A stomach-band was a long band of cloth, usually woolen, that was traditionally wrapped around a man's abdomen to keep them warm. A money pouch was also often stored therein.

“I was sure there was a Jizo statue around here somewhere.”

One of the most beloved of all Japanese divinities, Jizo Bodhisattva (“one who seeks enlightenment”) is the patron protector of infants, mothers, travelers, and firemen. He is usually portrayed as a child-monk, often carrying a pilgrim's staff with six rings that jingle to warn animals of his approach. Jizo also carries the bright jewel of Dharma truth, whose light banishes fear.

As the patron saint of infants, Jizo takes particularly keen interest in children who die prematurely. When they are sent to the underworld to build stone towers (as punishment for the grief caused to their parents by their early death) and beaten by a demon, Jizo comes to rescue them. Even today, there are often heaps of stones around Jizo statues, as many believe that a stone presented to Jizo will shorten the time that their child suffers in the underworld.

Although originating in India, Jizo is more widely revered in Japan, China and Korea. He entered Japan around the sixth or seventh century. Jizo has achieved enlightenment but postpones Buddhahood, and therefore the rest of Nirvana, until all can be saved.

“The size of the 1-to box used to measure the rice tax is 1-to and 2-sho.”

Abandoning traditional weights and measures, Japan began to adopt the metric system in the early 1890s, with the official conversion finalizing in 1959. In metric measurements, 1-to is approximately equal to 18 liters, and 2-sho equals 3.6 liters.

An accomplished filmmaker with over two dozen titles to his credit, “Zatoichi's Conspiracy” is director Kimiyoshi Yatsuda's final foray into the story of Zatoichi. This film was his sixth involving the character, among them “Zatoichi meets the One-Armed Swordsman” (also released by AnimEigo's Samurai Cinema).

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 the hit movie series “Lone Wolf and Cub,” which starred Katsu's brother, Wakayama Tomisaburo, which is now being released in the US by Samurai Cinema.

Known for his love of alcohol and cigarettes, in the last 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 Oishi 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