

Tangé Sazen

One of the all-time most popular fictional samurai characters, the one-armed, one-eyed Tangé Sazen was created by Fubo HAYASHI (real name: Kaitarō HASEGAWA) in 1927. Tangé has appeared many times on the silver screen, including at least twice in a female incarnation.

Title - Tangé Sazen - Hien laigiri

"Hien laigiri" literally translates as "Flying-Swallow Sword-Draw Slash"; 'flying swallow' is a metaphor for extremely fast motion, instantaneous, fast-as-lightning, and so on. 'I'ai-giri' is the technique of drawing a sword while seated, but can also mean a sword-strike starting with the sword sheathed in its scabbard.

The Nikko Toshogu Shrine

This famous shrine is dedicated to Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa shogunate. Originally built in 1617, a 5-story pagoda was added in 1650, and rebuilt in 1818 after a fire.

"The Yagyu fief is barely worth 13,000-koku. The renovations will be extremely expensive."

'koku' = unit of fief wealth. Originally, it was the volume of rice a person would eat in one year.

How much is 1 million ryo?

It is difficult to make precise comparisons between historical and current prices, but some comments in the film give us a rather risqué idea of just how much money a million ryo is. It is mentioned that the services of a streetwalker cost 100 mon, and there are 4000 mon to the ryo. Thus, 1-ryo buys the services of 40 cheap streetwalkers, and a million ryo would permit 40 million such transactions. If we assume the going rate for a cheap streetwalker is \$50 (note: upper management did not permit us to go and do any research to confirm this figure!), then it follows that a million ryo would be worth about 2 billion dollars!

"80-li (314 km, 195 miles) from Oshu Soma, Chiyoda Castle in Edo"

1-li = approx. 3.9 kilometers

"Ippusai... You are a "living encyclopædia" who has served the Yagyu for three generations."

Since Ippusai is a very old man, we used the archaic spelling of encyclopedia.

"Inquire of the clan treasure known as the 'Earless Monkey Urn.'"

The actual name of the urn is "koke zaru no tsubo", and is short for "mimikokezaru no tsubo" or "ear-missing-monkey urn". In the original story, the urn probably had 3 or 4 small handles (the ears), but the urn used in the movie doesn't feature any ears, broken or otherwise.

"With dough? For real, 'uncle'?"

"Uncle" is often used simply as a title of respect towards an older man (who is of about "uncle" age). This type of reference is very common in Japan, and young women get upset when kids stop referring to them as "big sister" and start calling them "auntie."

Film Bloopers

At 24:52, when Tange rolls over, you can see his "missing hand" tucked inside his clothes!

"Hey, boss. Some hair of the dog for you."

"Hair of the dog" is an expression predominantly used to refer to alcohol consumed with the aim of lessening the effects of a hangover.

“Destroying dojos, being a bodyguard, I’ve done it all.”

‘Dojo yaburi’ is literally ‘dojo destroy[er/ing]’, and involves martial artists challenging the masters or strongest students of a martial-arts school to a fight; if the challenger wins, the challenger essentially “destroys the school”; in some cases, the winner would take the school's name-plaque (containing the name of the school, master’s name, style, etc.) from the gate in front of the school, and keep it as a trophy.

Lanterns

The lanterns in the background in the scene about 33 minutes into the film are being carried by the local constabulary (police). Their lamps are inscribed with the word ‘Goyo,’ which has no English equivalent, but it indicates they are on official police business, in particular in pursuit of suspect(s). Sometimes, the constables will also shout out the word, so it is similar in use to today’s lights and sirens.

Biographies:

Kinnosuke NAKAMURA (November 20, 1932 - March 10, 1997)

Born in Tokyo to the son of a famous kabuki actor, Kinnosuke became one of the biggest stars in post-war Japanese cinema. Beginning with his first film in the early 1950s, Kinnosuke worked almost exclusively for Toei Studios during the decade, completing over 80 films, an average of over 13 a year.

By the start of the 1960s, Kinnosuke was a certified movie star and one of the top contract actors at Toei. Apart from the monumental Musashi Miyamoto series, some of his highlights of the decade include this film -- Gosha Hideo's *The Secret of the Urn and Gyokin*; Inagaki Hiroshi's final film, the star-studded *Incident at Blood Pass*; and the Golden Bear winning *Bushido zankoku monogatari* (*Bushido: The Cruel Code of the Samurai*). Over the course of the decade, he appeared in almost 50 films.

During the 1970s, Kinnosuke split his time between television and film. His most notable small screen work was the hit Japanese television series “*Lone Wolf and Cub*,” playing Ogami Itto from 1973-1976. At the end of the decade he appeared in two Fukasaku Kinji films, *Ako-Jo danzetsu* (*Swords of Vengeance*) and *Yagyu ichizoku no inbo* (*The Shogun's Samurai*).

His last film was 1989's *Sen no Rikyu* (*Death of a Tea Master*). During the 90s, he appeared in a handful of television dramas, culminating in an appearance on the Japanese television series “*Kanpani*” (“*Company*”) in 1996. A year later, he died from pneumonia at age 64.

By the end of his career, Kinnosuke had acted in over 140 films.

He was twice nominated by the Japanese Academy, for the 1978 film *The Shogun's Samurai* and for the 1989 film *Death of a Tea Master*. A year before his death, the Academy presented him with a Lifetime Achievement Award and one year after his death he was bestowed a Special Award for his career.

Kinnosuke was married three times; his second wife, Keiko AWAJI, is his co-star in this film, and they were married in the same year it was released.

Hideo GOSHA (Director)

Hideo GOSHA was born on February 26, 1929, in Tokyo. After graduating with a business degree from Meiji University, Gosha worked for several years as a reporter for Nippon Television. By 30, he moved to Fuji TV where he became Chief Producer and Director. One popular show he produced, *Sanbiki no Samurai* (*Three Outlaw Samurai*), caught the eye of Shochiku Studios and he was soon offered a contract.

His first film, also called *Three Outlaw Samurai* (an adaptation of the television series), premiered in 1964. A brilliant debut, the film not only marks the beginning of Gosha's distinct style, but also features the first of twelve collaborations with the actor, Tetsuro TAMBA (who also appears in *The Geisha*). Its success opened the door for other television shows that eventually made the transition to the big screen, most notably the *Zatoichi* series. Throughout the decade, Gosha directed several more critical and commercially viable films, including three films, *Gohiki no shinshi* (*Cash Call Hell*), *Goyokin*, and *Tenchu!*, which marked the first of ten

collaborations with Tatsuya NAKADAI.

During the 1970s, GOSHA turned his attention to the Ninkyō (Yakuza) film genre. His first film of the decade, *Shussho Iwai* (The Wolves), was the first Ninkyō film released by Toho Studios, a significant milestone because Toei Studios had more or less a monopoly on the genre.

Although he was nominated as Best Director four times by the Japanese Academy, Gosha won only once, for the 1983 film *Yokiro* (The Geisha). He passed away on August 30, 1992, and the next year he received a posthumous Lifetime Achievement Award.

Fubo HAYASHI (Original book author)

HAYASHI was a pen-name of one Kaitarō HASEGAWA (17 January 1900 - 29 June 1935). He wrote under three different pen-names, each with a unique personality. Fubo HAYASHI was his best known pen-name, in which he created a number of semi-historical novels including *Tange Sazen*.