

“Demon Spies” takes place sometime during the Tokugawa Era (approximately 1603-1868, also called Edo Period), the period named for the 15 generations of Tokugawa Shogun (Military Overlords) who ruled the nation, maintaining a relatively static society, for over 250 years. This period of military-rule was characterized by its relatively peaceful order overall, clear division of the social hierarchy, extravagance by the privileged classes, isolation from the West, and a lot of convoluted treachery, as well as many important cultural and intellectual developments.

For many centuries, Japan had a form of feudal system, in which the servants, vassals and palace guards of the Daimyo (the military Lords of independent regional domains, who maintained a castle, a home base, and several strategically-located satellite fortresses) were granted a piece of land (a fief), or in most cases, a stipend that came with a specific official post. In return, the vassals were expected to dedicate their lives to the service of their masters. The relationships between masters & vassals were based on this reciprocity of services and rewards, and were emotionally very strong.

Almost two-hundred Daimyo-ruled domains and their associated castle-towns existed in the early Tokugawa period, whose sizes varied according to the Daimyo's holdings and the agricultural production of the fiefs under their control. However, the number of Daimyo decreased quickly during this era, as the Tokugawa Shogunate practiced strict enforcement over Daimyo domains to reduce their power.

Since in most cases this maneuvering was political in nature, both the Daimyo and the Shogunate employed a large contingent of spies, and despite the code of Bushido (“The Way of the Warrior”), betrayal of a Lord by his supposedly loyal servants was a common event. To counter this the Daimyo employed vassals who acted as spies, solely to monitor other “trusted” members of his entourage to make sure that no one was plotting against him. Likewise, the oniwanban were guards attached to the Shogunate and performed similar duties.

A note about the title

Traditionally, the phrase “oniwanban” is written as “o-niwa-ban,” which loosely means “honor-garden-guard.” The new phrase, written in this film as a pun, is broken up as “oni-wa-ban,” which means “demon, ring (harmony), guard.”

Program Notes

The spies in this film are most likely based on the “oniwanban” (the garden guard) or the “oniwanban-shu” of the Shogunate. These secret-agents gathered intelligence and worked as guards for the Shogun, protecting generals or other high ranking officials of the Shogunate. They also followed a strict set of regulations which, in some cases, forbade them from socializing with the general public. Oniwanban-type characters in films and television are most often portrayed simply as ninjas. However, the demon spies here are given a more mystical (shall we say Hollywood-esque) aura as peacekeepers trained from a young age to serve the Shogun.

In Japanese mythology the Oni were fierce, human-like demons that lived in desolate mountain regions and preyed upon the souls of evil-doers. Although their image has changed over the years, they are most often perceived as horned monsters with blue or red skin and tiger striped clothing. Similarities can be found within the demon spies organization and the mythical oni, in that when a member of the demon spies loses their mask, they are no longer considered a demon. Likewise when a demon loses its horns, it is rendered powerless.

Kineji's phallic disguise during the “espionage demonstration” at the beginning of the film is a traditional tengu mask. The tengu, or mountain goblin, were mythical human-like monsters with red faces and long noses. The many powers the tengu possessed included a mastery of marital arts, shape-shifting and the ability to inhabit dreams. Tengu masks, along with the oni masks worn by the demon spies, are used today in parades and other celebrations to bring good luck.

During the same scene, Kaime wears an okame mask, which is a traditional symbol of good health and happiness. Today, referring to someone as an okame or otafuku can be considered a great insult. On a side note, the okame mask is linked to a female character from the old Japanese story “Ame no Uzume no Mikoto.”

In it, a girl lures the sun goddess out of a cave by performing a suggestive dance, thus restoring light to the world.

“Kill them using your swords and claws.” -- Demon Chief

Fukimame and Rokujizo's triple blade claw weapon is called a torashuko (tiger claw).

“There is subversive activity in Kishu. Infiltrate them now, and crush their ambitions.” -- Voice

Kishu is the old name of the Wakayama prefecture, before the Edo period.

“It's a bullet from a new model of foreign guns, of terrifying power.” -- Jubei

During the Tokugawa era, the sale of gunpowder and other explosives was prohibited by the Shogunate.

“Jimushi, Fukimame, and Rokujizo will wait for the opportune time... and go past Kawachi to the border check-point.” -- Jubei

Now in present day Osaka, Kawachi was once one of the five provinces of the old capital of Japan, Heiankyo.

Director: Tsuboshima Takashi

Takashi is best known for directing comedies, especially his “International Secret Police” films starring Tatsuya Mihashi. His 1964 film “A Keg of Powder” is one of the first films to spoof the James Bond spy flicks of the sixties.

Score: Sato Masaru (May 29, 1928-December 5, 1999)

Considered one of the most prolific composers in film history, Sato Masaru's career began at age 27 when he completed the unfinished score to Akira Kurasawa's “I Live in Fear: Record of a Living Being.” From 1956-1965, he worked with Kurasawa on such films as “Throne of Blood”, “Sanjuro” and “Red Beard”. A workhorse, Sato's credits include over 300 compositions for film and TV, including an astonishing 18 film scores in 1959. His diverse body of work includes dramas, thrillers, comedies, documentaries, animes, as well as four Godzilla films.

Story: Koike Kazuo

Born in the Akita Prefecture in 1936 to a family immersed in the Bushido tradition, Koike Kazuo has become one of the most influential and respected manga authors in the world. His first major success came with the “Lone Wolf and Cub” (“Kozure Okami”) series in 1970, which he later adapted into six successful films. Over the course of the decade, several Koike collaborations also enjoyed great success, most notably “Lady Snowblood”, “The Razor”, and “The Shadow Hunters.” In 1977, Koike opened Gekiga-Sonjuku, a school where other aspiring manga writers and artists could cultivate their styles. The school not only produced talents such as Rumiko Takahashi (“Urusei Yatsura”, “Ranma 1/2”) and Tetsu Hara (“Fist of the North Star”), but also brought the art of manga to a more respectable level. Koike found time to start a golf magazine, “Albatross View” (1987) and a samurai manga magazine, “Jin” (2004) as well begin production on yet another successful animated series, “Crying Freeman”. Also during this same time “Lone Wolf and Cub” became the first regular manga series published in the United States. Currently, when he isn't golfing or practicing kendo, Koike serves as professor and dean of the Character Figurative Arts Department at Osaka University.

Production Staff

Japanese Production Staff

Distributed by Toho Co., Ltd.
Presented by Toho Co., Ltd. and Kokusai Hoei Co., Ltd.

Producer: Oki Kameo

Planning: Umemura Yoshifumi, Yamamoto Mataichiro & Hoshino Kazuko

Original Work by: Koike Kazuo & Yamasaki Takumi
(serialized in Manga Story comic book Studio Ship)

Screenplay: Ogawa Hide & Ishikawa Takato

Cinematography: Ichihara Yasuo

Art Director: Takenaka Kazuo

Recording: Segawa Tetsuo

Lighting: Kojima Masashichi

Music: Sato Masaru

Assistant Director: Ishii Takehiko

Editor: Takeda Ume

Color Coordinator: Tanabe Hiromichi

Stills: Nakayama Akira

Production Manager: Takahashi Norimitsu

Costumes: Kyoto Ishou

Hair dressing: Kawaguchi Katsura

Props: Biken Kogyo

Film Developing: Tokyo Laboratory Co., Ltd.

Studio Recording: Aoi Studio

Studio Cooperation: Kagetsu Highland Hotel, Takayu Kogen, Fukushima City

Choreography: Yano Michiko

Swordfight choreography: Ujin Kanzo

Japanese Drums: Ushu Hachiman Taiko Hozon-kai

Directed by: Tsuboshima Takashi

US Production Staff (Subtitling)

Executive Producers: Robert J. Woodhead, Natsumi Ueki & Janice Hindle

Operations Manager: Scott Carlson

DVD Producers: Bobby Engelmann & Sara Rouse

Assistant Producer: Brian Godwin

Production Assistant: Branson Moore

Translator: David Rowe-Caplan

Voice Actors

Cast

Kondo Masaomi

Minegishi Ryunosuke

Mizutani Yutaka

Aramaki Keiko

Takamine Keiji

Kishida Shin

Oki Shoji

Moriyama Shuichiro

Fukuyama Shozo

Obori Sanae

Ishidate Kazuo

Kitagawa Yoichiro

Ayukawa Hiroshi

Uenoyama Koichi
Kimura Hiroto
Hisamoto Noboru
Kikuchi Masataka
Kirishima Yoshio
Hashimoto Jun
Suzuki Kazuo
Korai Yukie
Jinnai Machiko
Minami Kiyoshi
Gekidan Himawari
Sato Kei
Fujimaki Jun