

ZATOICHI

ZATOICHI: THE FESTIVAL OF FIRE

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.

The eight provinces of Kanto

The eight provinces of the Kanto plain (which contains present-day Tokyo) were originally named Aha, Kamitsu-fusa, Shimotsu-fusa, Musashi, Sagamu, Kamitsu-kenu, Shimotsu-kenu, and Hitachi.

Edo

Edo was founded in 1457 when famous poet and warrior Dokan Ota established a fort there. Edo's population swelled and it quickly became one of the world's largest cities. In 1868 the Tokugawa dynasty was overthrown and Edo became the Imperial capital of Japan. Its name was then changed to Tokyo.

The Game of Go

Zatoichi and the Dark Imperial Lord play this game upon Zatoichi's arrival for the annual celebration. Each player takes turns placing oval shaped tokens, called stones, onto a grid. The object of the game is to surround and control more territory than your opponent. To remain ahead, aggressive play is required. However, playing with too much aggression leaves weaknesses elsewhere on the board that can be exploited. Fans of Go appreciate how the game parallels the polarities found within life. Introduced to Japan around 600 A.D., the game first became popular in court circles, and later among the samurai class.

"I'll do a divination for you. Let's see if you'll become a fine yakuza."

Zat tells Umeji he will do a "divination" for him to see if he is worthy of becoming a yakuza. Traditional Japanese divination is a practice by which an element of nature acts as a sign to provide supernatural information. Zat makes a wind chime out of 100 ryo and then tells Umeji to go to sleep. In the morning he finds that Umeji was unable to sleep from the noise of the money dangling just outside the window.

The Boss of all Bosses

"Oyabun" is the traditional title of a Yakuza gang leader. The Dark Imperial Lord is called "O-Oyabun" ("the great Oyabun"). We were very tempted to subtitle this as "Godfather."

"The year was 1185; Genji, king of the land and the warships of the Heike clan were at a standoff."

Late in the Heian period several families began to amass large amounts of property, and some even supported large armies. Eventually the Heian government began to depend on these private armies more than on their own forces. As a result there was an exponential growth of the two largest warrior clans, the Taira (Heike) and the Minamoto (Genji). Disputes over a controversial appointment made by a new emperor led to civil war, headed by the Heike and Genji.

In the final battle of the war, the battle at Mikusa, the Genji bravely stormed the Heike's seaside fort on horseback, defeating them and forcing the Heike to flee to the ocean. The battle became one of the most famous moments in Japanese history.

Nasuno Yoichi

During the battle at Mikusa, just before dusk, a small boat appeared from the Heike fleet just off shore. A beautiful lady in the boat took out a fan and waved it at the Genji warriors, as if taunting them to shoot it. Nasuno Yoichi, a skilled archer, was ordered to shoot it down. Prepared to die if he failed, Yoichi took aim and fired while everyone from both armies watched. His arrow hit the fan, sending it into the water, while those around him cheered and applauded - both friend and foe.

Shu Money

Until 1871, there were several existing monetary notes in circulation in Japan, including Dajokan, Mimbusho, and Kawase-gaisha notes. The monetary units were ryo, by, and shu. During the mistress auction someone is ridiculed for raising the bet for the Shogunate retainer's wife by only 1 shu because it is the smallest amount the bid could have been raised. The 300-ryo the wife eventually sells for is roughly equal to about \$7500 today.

“She liked chrysanthemums.”

Chrysanthemums were popular among Japanese during the Edo period (1600-1868). Several varieties were developed and growing techniques were refined. Originally there were around 20 different wild varieties of chrysanthemum. More varieties were introduced to Japan from China during the 5th century for medicinal purposes. In the Meiji period (1868-1912), species of European chrysanthemums were also imported via China.

“Money-offering to the dead.”

“Kouden” is money given at a funeral. Mourners would give an offering to the deceased to reduce the financial burden on the family. The Dark Imperial Lord commands Migi the loan shark to make a money-offering after one of the bosses arrives late for Kuroko's honorary ceremony. The boss is then escorted from the house, suggesting that he will be executed for being late.

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 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